

Hope in Darkness

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[0 : 00] Welcome to St Paul's. My name's Steve, lead pastor here, and I want to particularly add that welcome of ashes this morning! on this special day for Christians right around the world.

! He was popular at the end of the 19th century, basically through to the mid-20th century. A number of his works have been put into movies, starring Tom Cruise and others. But he started life, quite interesting, you see this in his work.

He started life hopeful about life, but ended life quite despondent about life. He, in fact, started life sympathetic to God and ended life as a despondent atheist.

And you see this in his writing. So in his short history of the world, he wrote this. Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realise our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, and that our children will live in a world and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever-widening circle of achievement.

[1 : 39] He wrote those words in 1937. 1937. Nine years later, in almost his final piece of writing, and after the carnage of World War II, he wrote this.

The cold-blooded massacres of the defenceless, the return of deliberate and organised torture, mental torment, and a fear to a world from which such things had seemed well-nigh banished, has come near to breaking my spirit altogether.

Homo sapiens, as has been pleased to call himself, is played out. What Wells picks up there, and what we would pick up, having, for those of us, just read the history of the 20th century, and the carnage of the 20th century, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that there is fundamentally something wrong with this world.

And you just turn on the news, even this morning, and you will see multitudes, options, varieties of what is fundamentally wrong with this world.

And every culture, and every society, and every time, every religion, and philosophy of life, must give account to its people what is fundamentally wrong with this world, and therefore, how do you resolve it.

[3 : 20] And Good Friday is Christianity's account of what is fundamentally wrong with this world, and how to fix it.

And in these verses here that Merle just read out for us, this fundamentally wrong with the world is, if you like, represented with the image of darkness.

Darkness. In verses 52, 53, Jesus, as the soldiers come with the religious elite, draws attention to the fact that they are acting under the cloak of darkness rather than in the daylight.

You had options. You saw me in the temple courts in the daylight. And then he adds this in verse 53. This is your hour when darkness reigns.

Now, Jesus was saying in that moment, hey guys, you know, it's late at night, we need a little bit more, you know, turn the lights up, we need a bit more light here. He's saying here that the physical darkness, by the physical darkness in which all these events took place, are pointing to something that is so much deeper.

[4 : 49] A deeper darkness. A deeper spiritual darkness. And it's a darkness, a spiritual darkness that controls every human heart, mind, and soul.

And what he's saying is, this is the hour where that darkness is clearly on display, but it's also the hour where Jesus will decisively solve that deep darkness.

And so, controlled by this spiritual blindness, they come to arrest Jesus and condemn Jesus. But this is the hour when the reign of these dark spiritual powers will end.

And so, that's the text, get it open, we've got four points that we're going to quickly move through in this text to unpack what that looks like. the first of it being the mocking of darkness.

Now, what we notice is you read through not just this section but really into the next section as well as Jesus is crucified right after the crucifixion. He's mocked quite a lot.

[6 : 11] He's mocked for claiming to be a king, he's mocked for claiming to be God, he's mocked to be a saviour, and notice as well that everyone is involved in the mocking.

It's the Romans, it's the Jews, it's the elites, it's the crowds, it's the commoner, everyone gets involved in the mocking.

You can't pin the death of Jesus on the Jews. Everyone's involved. And you can't pin it on the Jews with any shred of historical credibility.

Everyone's in on it. And here in verse right at the end of the passage we see that the soldiers are mocking Jesus for claiming to be a prophet.

Verse 64, they blindfolded him and demanded, prophesy, who hit you? And they said many other insulting things to him. The irony of their mocking is that as they attack him and mock his prophetic powers, they're actually proving his prophetic powers.

[7 : 34] Several chapters earlier in Luke 18, we have he recorded the words of Jesus as he's on his way to Jerusalem telling his disciples what will happen to him.

Everything that is written by the prophets about the son of man will be fulfilled. He'll be delivered over to the Gentiles and they will mock him and insult him and spit on him and they will flog him and kill him.

That's the irony of their mocking. But the question is why are they mocking him? That's the issue. Why are they mocking him?

Is it just like a mob thing? Opportunistic? It's because Jesus didn't display what they would expect of a prophet.

He didn't display the power that they would expect of a prophet. In their world God did not work through weakness and vulnerability.

[8 : 45] Prophets were powerful figures. In fact even in the Old Testament the last time a bunch of soldiers turned up in order to arrest one of God's prophets, fire came down from heaven.

Three times. Jesus, where's your power? Where's your power? power? They looked at his suffering, they looked at his weakness, his vulnerability and they mocked him because he didn't fit into their categories.

They were blinded to who he really was. blinded to us. And part of this deep spiritual blindness, this deep darkness of spiritual blindness, humanity looks out into our world of suffering and of injustice and evil and we conclude there clearly cannot be a God.

God. You can't have a God and suffering or at the very least you can't have a good God and suffering because none of those categories fit ours.

They don't fit our category the way the world works because we think if there is a God, he would exhort his power, boom, and wipe out all evil. And so when we experience a dark world, when the dark clouds come around our life, we mock too, don't we?

[10 : 30] Don't we join in the mocking? Clearly God doesn't exist, otherwise he would stop this. Or clearly God is not a good God.

God is wrong. But what if our categories are wrong? What if our categories are all wrong? I remember one day, actually it's happened a few occasions, but one particular day, taking off in an aeroplane.

And this day was a stormy day. It was one of those really wet stormy, where the clouds were dark, and it felt like the sun doesn't exist.

It was like turn the lights off, back on again. And it was the middle of the day, and as we took off, it was dark, and as we went into the clouds, the cabin of the aircraft just got darker and darker.

It was eerie. And we bumped our way through the clouds, and then gradually the darkness within the cabin, you could see just lifting a little bit, and then there was this, you know, a moment of a sunlight just sort of beamed through the window, and then within moments after that, pop, pop, pop, bang, and we were up through the clouds, and you look out the window, and the sun's shining, and the skies are blue, and the only clouds, the clouds that were down there, that blocked my vision of the sun, momentarily.

[12 : 17] The sun was there the whole time. The light was there the whole time, but the clouds meant I couldn't see it. No matter how deep the darkness is, it doesn't impact the existence of the sun one bit.

Not one bit. No matter how bad things get in life, it doesn't nullify the loving, saving purposes of God.

And when we mock, when we question, our categories are wrong.

It is a spiritual darkness that caused us not to see God or to trust God in the darkness. And this is the problem that we all have. And it's the kiss of Judas that actually points to the depths of this problem.

The kiss of Judas is very, very significant. It's the kiss of darkness. Verse 47, the man who was called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.

[13 : 35] That is, the soldiers and religious elite. And he approached Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus asked him, Judas, are you betraying the son of man with a kiss?

Now, in Jesus' time and culture, disciples were never permitted to greet their teacher first. Because in greeting the teacher, it implies equality with the teacher. And so a disciple in this moment would greet the other disciples first and then they would greet the teacher to show deference.

And so Judas' kiss here in the darkness was not simply a signal to the mob that this is Jesus. This is the one you're looking for.

I'll point him out to you. But it is in fact an act of rejection. It's an act of independence. He was saying to Jesus in this moment, you are no longer my rabbi, I am your equal.

[14 : 56] And I don't need you. His kiss was the rejection of a personal relationship.

A personal intimate relationship. He had spent three years with Jesus. It was not the kiss of rejection of an enemy. It is shocking what he did in this moment and what it meant for Jesus in this moment.

You know, someone walks into here, I don't know you, never met you, and they come up to me straight out of the service and says, Steve, I'm never coming back.

Don't like a thing you did, never coming back. And I go, oh, wow, that hurt for a while. One of you, it's different though, that if one of you who's been here and with me for the last 17 years says, Steve, I'm done with this and I'm done with you, I'm out of here, I'm never coming back.

And it's all because of you. That will take a while for me to get over it, if ever, maybe. You know, I'll get there but it'll hurt deeper.

[16 : 34] If Nat comes up to me after the service and says the same thing, oh boy, that's crushing. That's an entirely different category altogether. And so this kiss was a kiss of rejection and independence.

And it's a vivid picture in this kiss, it's a vivid picture of what the Bible calls sin. And it is the source of the deep spiritual darkness of humanity.

It is sin is living as if God does not exist. It is rejection of him over my life and in relation with my life.

You see, what the Bible says, Christian faith in terms of our worldview is God created humanity to enjoy a relationship with him and to have that relationship with God at the center of our lives.

And sin so much therefore is not so much in the Bible the rejection or the breaking of a bunch of rules. That's not fundamentally what sin is.

[17 : 47] At the deepest level, sin is breaking God's heart. That's what sin is. It is a trampling all over God's heart and all sin, every act of sin is a betrayal of the intimacy with God for which we were created.

It is the kiss of Judas every time we do it. You see, because the God of Christianity is not a force. He's not a power. He is deeply relational. He's a deeply personal God. Isaiah 49, 15, God has the audacity to take the image of the intimacy of a new mother with a newborn child and says that the kind of overwhelming love that that mother has for that child is nothing compared to his love for humanity.

And so the kiss of Judas is a betrayal of relationship with God. See, Christianity does not divide the world between the bad people who break the rules and the good people who keep the rules or most of the rules.

That's not how the world's divided. And we get a glimpse of this in Luke 22. Jesus is eating with his disciples just before the Garden of Gethsemane celebrating the Passover meal.

[19 : 37] And what he says to them towards the end of that meal, he says, one of you is going to betray me. And then it says this in verse 23, there be a question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Jesus. In other words, they're sitting around the table with Jesus, all the core crew, and Jesus says, one of you is going to betray me, and they go, well, who?

Which one? See the point? It's not obvious that Jesus is talking about Judas at all. They don't go in that moment, you know, looking at Jesus, then everyone looks to Judas.

What's obvious he's talking about Judas, isn't he, guys? Remember when we went out two by two preaching? Judas didn't have so many converts, did he? And when we were healing sick, I mean, who ever got healed by Judas?

Judas isn't tithing as much. He's not as good. as humble as the rest of us are. It was not obvious to them that Judas was the one who was going to betray.

[20 : 56] He was no different from the rest. He was no different to you and me. Judas, like the others, were using God rather than centering his life on God.

And even on the walk to the Garden of Gethsemane, the debate was not who amongst us would possibly fail Jesus.

The debate was who amongst us is the greatest. Such was their pride. God. You see, in this moment, the favour of the religious elite and that 30 pieces of silver were more important to Judas. You see, our spiritual blindness is we are blind to the reality that we are trampling all over God's heart as we choose to live ourselves.

unable to trust God when things are hard and we trample all over his heart when things are good and we ignore him. We practise the kiss of Judas all the time.

[22 : 10] And Jesus came into the darkness, suffered in the darkness to rescue us from this deep spiritual darkness that lives lives independent of God.

So let's now look back at the beginning of this text and the suffering of Jesus, the suffering of darkness. Verse 39, Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives and his disciples followed him and on reaching the place he said to them, pray that you will not fall into temptation and he withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, Father, if you're willing, take this cup from me, but yet not my will, but yours be done.

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

This is the only place in the Bible where this word anguish is used. Other other gospels say that he was appalled and profoundly troubled.

His affliction was so great, is the image, his affliction was so great that he was sinking under the weight of it and an angel needed to come and steady him.

[23 : 39] He was in such agony, there was blood in his sweat. Now that's actually possible. It's a rare medical condition where capillary blood vessels which surround sweat glands actually rupture and it's usually triggered by extreme physical or emotional shock, stress.

Now Jesus isn't under, he hasn't run a marathon and if he had he'd be doing it with the disciples and they'd all be going but only Jesus is here.

He's under extreme emotional shock. He's staggering and the angel needs to come and steady him.

What caused it? It's there in verse 42. Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done.

His anguish is connected to the cup. And for the first time, he began to experience, get a glimpse of the cup and he prays that that cup would be taken away because the anguish of it was so great.

[25 : 22] The cup in Old Testament language means the cup of God's judgment. It's God pouring out his judgment against sin in the Old Testament.

And this is the critical moment in Jesus' life. When he first gets a whiff, a glimpse of exactly what the cup means for him.

What it will mean for him to obey the Father in this moment. You see, he was determined to bear God's judgment for sin.

He knew that was his mission. When he said his face towards Jerusalem earlier in Luke's gospel, he told them, I'm going to go there, I'm going to suffer and I'm going to die and I'm going to do it for the sin of the world.

And he did it with such amazing resolve that those who were around him were just Jesus you can't do that and he says do not get in my way that is my mission.

[26 : 35] Even his demeanour after his arrest right through to his crucifixion is resolute calmness. He's not in anguish because of fear of death.

He's not even in anguish because of the weight of human sin. He's not in anguish because of the suffering.

There is something else he saw in the cup he got a glimpse of that caused him to stagger and it's the first time he saw it.

You see the consequence of humanity turning its back on God ultimately is for God to turn his back on humanity for eternity.

And Jesus got a glimpse that his hell was going to be deeper than anyone else's. He got a glimpse for the first time of what carrying the weight of human sin would mean for him.

[28 : 01] The father turning his face away. You see the best relationship in the history of humanity is like a drop of sweat in all the oceans of the world compared to the love of Jesus and the father.

If you think the kiss of Judas was big in rejection Jesus got a glimpse here of something more profound.

His relationship with his father has been a perfect relationship of mutual love and commitment and service and his anguish was that he got a glimpse of here in the cup his anguish was the horror of one who had lived wholly for the father for all of eternity getting a glimpse of a crack of a breach of alienation from God on the cross.

Even momentarily even for three days in a tomb was enough and the horror he gets at that glimpse is the horror that we hear him cry out on the cross the cry of dereliction my God my God why have you affected me there is no greater horror than separation from God you see the garden of Gethsemane had always been a refuge for Jesus and his disciples he came to talk to his father knowing the darkness of his betrayal arrest and rejection on this particular night he knew his execution was just moments away and he had always come here to talk to his father and he did it on this night and instead of experiencing heaven being opened up to him he got hell instead he got hell he got a glimpse of the horror of separation from

God and yet as one who is completely obedient to his father he said not my will but yours be done he the dark clouds are closing in and yet he still sees the brightness of the love of the father he trusts in his plan despite knowing what it will cost him you see in the very first pages of the Bible God creates humanity and makes them in his image and he puts them in this perfect paradise called the garden of Eden and Adam and Eve his first people were told there in the garden it's all yours enjoy it but there's one thing that you must do there's one thing that you must obey me on and you must not take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not determine for yourselves how to live you must live under my rule and what is they believed the lie they believed the lie that

[31 : 41] God was holding out for them that he's not good live life your way and you will flourish they ignored God's command and instead of flourishing it led to them being cursed it led to pain and suffering and death they were separated from the presence of God as he kicked them out of the garden and in this garden Jesus is told to embrace the tree get nailed to the tree die on the tree and Jesus knows obeying the command he obeys it knowing that he'll receive the curse he'll receive separation from God Adam and Eve were in a perfect garden in perfect relationship with

God and God said if you obey me about this tree you will live and you will flourish and you will enjoy my presence forever and they chose instead to do things their way and Jesus millennia!

later is in the darkness of a different garden and his father said to him if you obey me about this tree you will be cursed and you will be crushed and you will be separated from me and he trusted the father and was plunged into unimaginable darkness and this deep spiritual darkness that Jesus was plunged into was physically represented in a world plunged into darkness darkness at the point of his death it was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon for the sun had stopped shining Jesus drank the cup of God's judgment and he died in the darkness why to get back for

God the one thing that God did not have and that was humanity alienated from him to get you and me back in relationship with him into a perfect relationship with him and so Jesus entered this world of darkness was plunged into the depths of darkness a depth to the depths that no one else will ever experience in this world or even in hell and he did it to rescue humanity who caused it all and so how do we take up this how do we move from darkness to light there's one other disciple who gets a pretty bad rap in these verses and that's Peter he doesn't come out glowing at all really

Judas

Judas rejects Jesus and Peter denies Jesus but it's what they do next that really matters Judas went into the darkness and he stayed in the darkness not mentioned again in Luke Peter followed Jesus at a distance he followed Jesus maybe he was curious he was weak but he was curious maybe he was hoping that Jesus would eventually say actually Peter now's the time to get your sword and let's get the revolution going let's finally get the power on here but it's when Peter denies Jesus for the third time that the rooster crowed just as Jesus predicted it would that's that's when his heart broke it's in that moment verse 61 says the

[36 : 19] Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and when Peter's blindness started to move he started to see light and what he saw caused him to weep bitterly and what he saw was not the darkness of these events what he saw was not Judas's betrayal what he saw was the darkness in his heart and he wept bitterly his tears were not tears of remorse they were tears of deep sorrow over the darkness in his heart and he turned away from it

Peter moved from arrogance to brokenness and what caused him to see the darkness in his heart was the word of the Lord and the look from the Lord that's what broke him he realized that Jesus' assessment of him as a betrayer was correct that he had darkness in his heart that he was not good and he saw that he was weak that he was flawed and that he too had abandoned God but it was also the look you see the look was not a look of disgust it was not a look of judgment it was a look that told him that Jesus was not done with him yet it was not a look of rejection but a look of compassion of forgiveness and it was a look that bid him to come not a look that caused him to run into the darkness you see

Judas was filled with regret and remorse but it didn't take him back to Jesus it led him to despair and death by his own hand but Peter's darkness led him to weep bitterly to repentance over his sin and back to Jesus as the source of hope and salvation and so the Christian does not repent of sin hoping to gain God's favour and attention they repent of sin because they have God's favour and attention in the person of Jesus and so look to Jesus he is the solution to your darkness and this world's darkness look to Jesus because he's fixed his gaze on you already on the cross and in the cross look to Jesus who is willing to be plunged into the darkness of sin and rejection and death and hell to give us freely the gift of forgiveness and acceptance and life life that will never be extinguished in heaven you see the

Christian hope in a world of darkness and disappointment and pain and suffering and injustice the Christian hope is that this is not the way it will always be at the very end of the Bible what Jesus has achieved for us is not just light and acceptance now but for all of eternity the end of the Bible Revelation 22 verse 5 says that in heaven in God's presence at the end of it all in God's remade perfect world there will be no more night no more darkness no more pain no more suffering we don't need a lamp or the sun because the Lord God will be its light that is the Christian hope right now and so whatever pain and suffering and darkness that you're experiencing in the depths of your soul

Jesus is the solution for you now for your own darkness and sin and he is the hope that he gives you for all of eternity in existence!

[41 : 21] of perfection and light and so we come and we celebrate what Jesus did just before the darkness of Gethsemane the Lord's Supper that he gave his disciples I'm going to begin by reading the very words of Peter this Peter who in this moment denied Jesus went on to be restored and wrote some of the New Testament this is how he describes those who come and put their trust in Jesus you are a chosen people God's special possession that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light once you were not a people but now you are the people of God once you had not received!

mercy! but now you have received mercy! And so the first thing I'd want to say is that if you're someone who does not know Jesus hear the words of Peter here calling you out of darkness into light calling you out from under the condemnation of sin the darkness of that into the light of mercy receive the mercy of Christ make that decision today on this good Friday that you might have the hope of light and life and acceptance for eternity come out of the darkness you do not need to end life like H.G.

Wells despondent about the darkness and hear the words of Jesus calling you out of the darkness come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest how does he do that God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have

eternal life and hear the words of the apostle John if anyone sins we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous one he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins I'm going to invite my helpers to come they're going to distribute the elements of communion to you I would say to you that if you're someone this is particularly for those who are already in

Christ those who have accepted Jesus this is a reminder of what we have in Jesus if you're someone who you're not sure about that or you definitely know that I can't I'm not a Christian then don't take these elements it is dangerous for you if you do dangerous for you because you are mocking Christ don't take them but if you do take it for your joy no judgment either way you see at the heart of the Christian life is an active trust in the Lord Jesus and his sacrificial death for us that's what Good Friday is all about and what we are doing now in this symbolic meal that Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper we are participating in Christ's work for us we're doing it together and what we're doing in participating in is we're expressing!

and we're strengthening our trust and our hope in him the Lord's Supper is an outward invisible sign of the grace that's shown to us in the sacrificial and atoning death of Jesus on the cross and so as we share in these elements the wafer and the juice we are invited really to spiritually feed on Christ in our hearts to be thankful to him for what he has achieved!

[45 : 33] for us and I think as we hold them we are captivated by the symbols of them of God's love for us who are unworthy we are strengthened by faith in Jesus who lived the perfect life that we haven't lived represented in the wafer the bread whatever it is because he is the bread of life and we are also strengthened by faith in the one whose blood flowed for our redemption and so what we're doing here is it basically reminds us of the core of the Christian faith the gospel the good news it humbles us because which is what the gospel does what good friday does for us it humbles us because we are more wicked and dark and evil and sinful than any of us dare to imagine Judas and

Peter didn't even see it but at the same time in Jesus we are more loved and affirmed than we ever dreamed that's who we are and so knowing the grace and the mercy and the tenderness of God knowing that we live life our way let's confess our sin it is the only appropriate way forward on the screen let's do this together heavenly Father you have loved us with an love but we have gone our own way and rejected your will for our lives we are sorry for our sins and turn away from them for the sake of your son who died for us forgive us cleanse us and change us by your Holy Spirit enable us to live for you and to please you in every way for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ amen I think the beauty and the wonder of

Christianity is really summed up in these words of scripture God is slow to anger and he is full of compassion he forgives all who humbly repent and turn to his son Jesus Christ to whom there is no condemnation and so I would invite you to say the words in the bowl lift up your hearts let us give thanks to the Lord our God and so we praise and we thank you heavenly father for every spiritual blessing in Jesus our Lord in whom we have the forgiveness of sins the gift of your spirit and the certain hope of being with you in your presence sharing in your glory and the light of life and acceptance where we are redeemed where there's no more pain no more death no more evil no more uncertainty no more darkness a day when you will tenderly wipe away every tear thank you thank you father thank you

Jesus thank you holy spirit amen and so on the night before Jesus died he took bread he gave it thanks and he gave his disciples take and eat this is my body given for you you live the perfect life that we did not live let's take and remember our darkness and his perfection and you're taking up the clock let's remember that his perfection his grace his mercy led him to the cross the shed sin for our darkness his light his light was extinguished that we might have light and life and hope let's drink together and to go to the other to the to the to the