

# Three Declarations at Calvary

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[ 0 : 01 ] I'd like us to turn for a short time this morning before we remember the Lord's death in communion. I'd like us to turn to the Word, Luke's Gospel, chapter 23, the passage that we read that describes the death of Jesus at Calvary.

And we want to focus our attention on three statements or three declarations. We'll find them in verse 44 down to verse 47.

The first statement or declaration is twofold and it comes from God the Father. And we read in verse 44, it was now about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

While the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. That's the first declaration. Twofold. One is the darkness that covered the whole land and the curtain that was torn. That's the Father's word on the death of Christ.

[ 1 : 19 ] The second declaration comes in verse 46. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

That was Jesus' word on the cross. We know, of course, that Jesus said more than that. But that's what we're going to focus on today. Verse 47.

The third declaration comes from perhaps the last person in the world you would ever expect God to speak through. And yet, this is the instrument that God himself uses to make another third declaration.

Verse 47. Now, when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, certainly, this man was innocent.

We'll look at that word innocent and compare it with the word in the AV, righteous. In a few moments' time, you'll discover in a few moments' time that there's actually no difference between the two words. We'll explain that in a few moments' time. Three declarations then.

[ 2 : 29 ] First of all, the first declaration, which I said is twofold. And you might always think of the darkness and the curtain as being two separate events. And, of course, they were two separate events.

But I want us to think of them today as being intimately related. So I'm going to put them together and I'm going to call them one declaration that God made as Jesus died on the cross.

The first part of that, the first element, was the darkness that covered the whole land. Now, I don't know if you've ever been in an eclipse of the sun or have you ever seen an eclipse of the sun.

It can be predicted. And everyone knows exactly the moment that an eclipse is going to happen. This was no eclipse of the sun. I remember the last time I ever experienced one was a few years ago in Aberdeen.

And you could tell, you could see how the sun became eclipsed and you could feel the difference in the atmosphere. But in no sense could you describe it as being darkness.

[ 3 : 30 ] You could still see what was in front of you. This was totally different. This was the kind of darkness in which you could see absolutely nothing. It was a darkness that was so eerie and mysterious that it had to be, it had to have come from the God in whose hand there is the control between light and darkness.

You go back to the very beginning of the Bible and you discover that God said, let there be light. That was in God's sovereign control to create something that was never there before in the universe.

And so darkness and light belong to God, exclusively to God. The Bible also tells us that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Once again, the whole idea of light belongs to God. It belongs exclusively to God. God created the light. So there's absolutely no doubt in my mind that when we read about this kind of darkness that covered the whole land, that this was a darkness that was created, if you like, by God withdrawing his light from the world.

You know, it's amazing really. It's a testimony to the patience and the grace of God that we still have light in the universe. God could have withdrawn his light. He could have put the whole creation process into reverse and withdrawn his light from the universe when man sinned.

[ 4 : 58 ] But he didn't. He kept his light in the universe so that we enjoy and benefit from that light. But it's a light that should lead us to the Lord. But when this light is taken away at the cross, there is no question at all, this can only be an act of God.

And I don't think it takes any guesswork at all to deduce that for God and when God takes light away, it is because he is displeased.

There can be no question at all. But what God is saying to the whole mass of people that stood around the cross at Calvary and as Jesus hung and suffered on the cross and as he uttered the words that we haven't mentioned, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That was the moment at which God withdrew his light because he was displeased. Now, you might think if I ask the question, why was God displeased? You might answer, well, he was displeased at the injustice which Jesus was suffering as an innocent man, never having broken any law and never having deserved the punishment and the awfulness and the agony which he was now suffering.

That might be your first reaction. But I want to suggest to you that that's not the reason. That's only part of the reason. God, and I want to suggest to you something that perhaps it sounds every time you say it, it sounds so incongruous.

[ 6 : 33 ] It sounds so strange. There is this incredible paradox, an incredible contrast between what you would expect and what you see happening as Jesus suffers at Calvary.

The reason that God is displeased is that Christ has become sin and he has drawn upon himself the displeasure and the judgment and the punishment of God.

And God's displeasure is being focused upon his own son. That's what we're saying. That's what the Bible teaches. His displeasure and his wrath is being focused and poured out upon none other than the person about whom he previously said, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

What is the difference between Jesus and the beginning of his ministry and Jesus on the cross? There is no difference at all.

Except for one thing, that now Jesus has become sin for us. He has become our sin bearer, our sacrifice. And as our sacrifice, he became guilty of our sin.

[ 7 : 54 ] And God was displeased with him as our representative. But it's not just a question of the displeasure of God.

It was the punishment which we deserved. And no one can understand the intensity and the immensity of that punishment that Jesus took instead of us.

A punishment that was expressed in one sense by the darkness that covered the whole land. The second element of God's declaration was the temple.

The veil of the temple or the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Now the curtain was a massive curtain. It was 30 feet high and it separated the two areas of the temple known as the holy place and the most holy place.

And it was forbidden for anyone to go into the most holy place under any circumstances whatsoever, apart from one exception. And that was one time in the year.

[ 8 : 59 ] And the only person who could ever go into that area was the high priest. And he had to carry with him the blood of the sacrifice. But when he did go into, and the reason you couldn't go in was because the glory of the Lord.

If you read how Solomon built the temple, you read that the glory of the Lord dwelt in the most holy place. Between the cherubim on the mercy seat.

That was where the glory of the Lord. And it was impossible for anyone to walk in there and enter into the presence of God. Why was it impossible? Because there was a separation between man and God.

The same thing as separates you and I from God. Our sin. Our sin is what separates. The gospel is all about the removal of sin. The gospel begins with a mankind, a humankind, which is separate

from God.

And the great sign of our separation from God was the curtain. The 30 foot thick, enormous curtain that stood between the holy place and the most holy place.

[10:04] But now, as Jesus breathes his last, and as he suffers and lays down his life on the cross, not only does darkness cover the whole land, but we read that at the same time, the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Now, I want to put these things together. And I want to say that there is an intimate relation between the darkness and the curtain. That as God becomes displeased with his son, and as God places upon him the indescribable punishment which we deserve, and as Jesus becomes sin for us and suffers the wages of our sin, the punishment for our sin, at the same time, and this is where the relation comes in, the curtain that separated us from God is removed.

And this was what God was doing in the person of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, he is punishing his own son, making him to be sin for us. Jesus is standing in our place, accepting God's punishment.

At the same time, God is setting us free and removing what stands between us and him. Paul puts it this way, He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us.

That's what happened at the cross. God made him to be sin for us. But then Paul carries on and he says, So that we could be made the righteousness of God in him.

[11:48] So that we could be reconciled to God. And so that we could be changed and be born again. And so that we could be restored to that place that we once had.

The very beginning of time. So that we could be forgiven and made right with God. So these two things are happening at exactly the same time.

And God is declaring to us that because his own son is being punished and laying down his life, we are forgiven and cleansed and brought back and restored into a right relationship with him.

Therefore, says Paul, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. There is forgiveness. There is freedom. There is liberty. There is newness of life.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, says Paul. All things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. And it's in that newness of life.

[12:52] And because we've discovered the newness of life that we can have in Jesus Christ. And that we have in him. That we can come boldly today. And that we can remember that it is on the basis of his death.

That our lives have been rescued and saved. And we've been delivered from the guilt of sin. That's the first declaration.

The second one is Jesus himself. And we find that in verse 46. Then Jesus calling out with a loud voice. He said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Now, in order for us to understand this fully, you have to go to the very beginning of the crucifixion. And try and work out the process by which Jesus suffered and laid down his life.

And it's important to see that there are three phases to this process. Now, I'm just going to try and make it as simple as possible. First of all, in which Jesus, in which there is a separation and then a restoration.

[14:01] First of all, you see this in the words that Jesus used on the cross to the Father. First of all, one of the things he said at the very beginning of the crucifixion was this.

Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Now, notice how at the beginning he addresses God as Father. But as he suffers, and as the wrath of God is poured out upon his Son, the terminology changes.

And Jesus says, My God. The next time he addresses God, he's still his Father. He says, My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? That's the second phase. And we can't imagine the darkness.

The desolation. The isolation. The dereliction. Of that moment. We accept it by faith. But we cannot imagine that moment.

[15:12] My God. My God. The moment at which Jesus becomes sin for us. You know, people try to explain that verse.

Well, you know, we don't feel comfortable with it. Of course we don't. There's nothing comfortable about that verse. We try to explain that. Ah, yes, but it means. But the Apostle Paul, people have tried to retranslate.

God made him who you know sin to be sin for us. And they've tried to retranslate it. But that's the words in the Bible. And we must never, for fear, for the sake of being safe, we must never water down what the Bible actually says.

By all means, let's explain it and let's understand it. But let's never take away the force of what is used in the Bible because that's the force with which God comes to us and he declares to us what happened on the cross.

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. And this was the moment in which Jesus became identified with us and bore the guilt of our sin and became guilty for us instead of us in our place.

[16:26] And the moment in which the entirety of the wrath of God was accepted by him as he took our place. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That's the second phase. But now, the process is now coming to an end. The darkness is now beginning to lift.

And Jesus has one more thing to say to his Father. Father, he says, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And that means two things. It means, first of all, that having suffered the awfulness and the agony of the cross and the isolation of what he had already suffered, there was one more step he absolutely had to take.

And that was death itself. You can't say that because he had suffered, even if we had any understanding at all of what he had suffered already, you can't say that that was enough.

[17:37] There was one more step that Jesus had to take, one more experience he had to go through, and that was death itself. Because it was by death that our sins, by his death, that our sins were paid for.

The wages of sin is death. And Jesus had to drink the cup in its entirety. He could not stop short. Even having suffered the awfulness of what he had already, he could not stop short. He had to go all the way into death itself in order to pay the price for our sin.

And this was him at that final, one last point. But I want you to notice something else. That even although he had to take that step, that death for Jesus was never out of his control.

You know, normally when a person died on the cross, death would overtake that person as it overtakes any one of us. It is not in our control.

[18:50] And yet, Jesus, there wasn't a moment, but that he was in control of every single step. He took even the very last step of laying down his life.

And here we have an indication. Father, he said. He knew that the moment had now come. That the fullness of God's wrath had been taken and accepted by him. It was now the last moment.

And he says this, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And he had power and authority over his own life. And he did not, the moment he died, came at just the right time.

And so that in front of everybody, as everybody could see, he had control over his life and his death. I have power, he said in John chapter 10, I have power to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again.

And he said that because one day he would indeed lay down his life, give his life. It was a giving of his life. His life was never taken from him.

[19:57] His life was given for us. For his people. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

His death was real. It was absolutely real. His body was lifeless. When they took it down from the cross and when they buried his body in the grave, in the tomb.

As lifeless as any other body had been. Who had died. Lifeless. Real death. But that moment of death came in full control.

The third statement. The third declaration came from the centurion. In verse 47. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place. He praised God.

Now right away, if you knew anything at all about the kind of life that a centurion would live, you would be surprised. You would be shocked at any centurion. Praising God.

[21:07] He was well used to watching hundreds of people dying. Dying in agony. Dying in utter despair. Dying in utter despair. This was his job. And he had got used to it.

He must have got used to it. You had to become accustomed to watching this. He was probably, he had probably put, he had probably killed hundreds of people himself. Who knows what kind of past this man.

He was a hardened Roman soldier. So for him, crucifixion was nothing. He was well used to it. It was just a question of getting on with it. You couldn't possibly stop and think about the poor man who was being put to death.

You couldn't allow yourself to become sentimental about it. Or feel sorry for this person. Well, you could say, well, that's their problem. They've been condemned. And that's, my job is to make sure that the sentence is executed.

And put into place. And that the person is put to death. But there was just something different about this Jesus of Nazareth.

[ 22 : 04 ] From the very beginning, there was just something not right about this man. There was something that did not sit comfortably in the mind and in the heart of the centurion.

He had seen hundreds of people convicted. The evidence was brought before them. They were convicted. They were sentenced to death. And that was it. But this man had not. And well, he knew that this man was different.

In that he had been convicted by mob rule. And that Pilate had been put under pressure. By the politics of the situation. By the scribes and the Pharisees.

He had been forced into condemning an innocent man. Now, whenever that happens, you all have to feel a twinge of guilt. There's something terribly wrong.

With someone who's an innocent man. But it wasn't just that he was innocent of any crime. This man had done nothing but good. And had worked towards the well-being of people. Not only so.

[ 22 : 59 ] His reputation had gone before him. He was a healer. He was a teacher that had attracted his words. His teaching had amazed crowds of people. No man spoke like this man ever did.

No one. And yet he was put to death because the tide of public opinion had turned against him. And his death was an unjust one. But it didn't just stop there.

He watched Jesus. And he couldn't help taking notice of the total contrast there was between the way that Jesus spoke as he died.

And the way that others would have cried out in hatred and in agony and despair. You can well imagine the way that others would make their last moments of earth.

They would try to make the most of them, I suppose. They would cry for mercy. They would try anything that they could to be let away.

[ 23 : 57 ] But this man was different. Not only this man didn't hate his enemies at all. Those who were putting to death. He actually prayed. He prayed for the people.

The very people who were nailing him to the cross. Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing. But he didn't even just stop there. The way he spoke to his companion.

To his dying companion on the cross. I tell you truly. I say to you truly. I say to you today. You will be with me.

In paradise. The centurion had never heard anybody speaking like this before. Well, I suppose the man could have been deluded. He could have been deranged. The pain could have got to him. But no. No, it wasn't like that at all.

This man was in full control of his senses. And yet, suffering at the same time. But what I believe really got to this man. Was the way that Jesus spoke to his father.

[ 24 : 55 ] To God. As father. He spoke to God as someone who was one with God. As someone who was united to God.

And who loved God with all his heart. And what's more. When he came to the actual point of death. Was ready to go into eternity.

And ready to face God. Boldly and confidently. With peace. With God. Now he had never seen that before.

Never ever in his life. Had he seen anyone. He had seen plenty of people. Screaming their way into. Into eternity. Calling out in despair.

And hopelessness. And utter. Desolation. But this man was totally different. He was ready. To go and meet with the God.

[ 25 : 56 ] Who had sent him into the world. God. And so putting everything together. And trying to. To weigh up everything that he had seen. Here was. His conclusion.

He praised God. And he said. Certainly. This man. Was innocent. Now some of you who will be reading. Other versions of the Bible. Notably the authorized version.

Will see that. This man was righteous. And you might say. Well that's a. That's a tamer version of righteous. Surely it's far. Far more accurate. To say that he was righteous. Than that he was innocent.

Hold on a minute. When we think of innocence. We think of innocence. Before a human judge. So that the judge comes to the conclusion. At the end of the court case. The person is guilty. Or not guilty. And we think of innocence. As a person who's not guilty. You say. Well. Jesus was far more. Than not guilty. Ah. But remember. That what the centurion saw.

[ 26 : 51 ] Was what Jesus was. Before God. He praised God. And he said. This man is innocent. And by innocent. He meant he was innocent. Before God. That means exactly the same thing.

As righteous. Righteous and innocent. Both the same thing. When it comes to God. Both mean exactly the same thing. This man was sinless. This man was ready.

To go into eternity. The only person. He had ever come across. In his whole life. That was actually ready to die. And he knew in himself. That he wasn't ready to die. That if he had been the man on the cross.

He knew that he would. He would be terrified. Here was a man. Who could go into death.

What was his secret? The secret was. There was no secret at all. That he.

[ 27 : 51 ] Was God in the flesh. And what the centurion said here. I don't think he knew. He knew the profundity of what he said. And I believe.

That it came from God himself. This was a declaration. That God himself made. In the instrument. Of this centurion. Certainly this man.

Was innocent. Never has a truer word. Been spoken. In all the world. The fact is. He was the only. Innocent man.

Ever to walk the face of the earth. Death. He wasn't just. The best human being. That there has ever been. He was the only. Good man.

Perfectly good. And that's. Why we. Should focus. Our attention. Upon him. Because his goodness. Can be ours.

[ 28 : 52 ] That's what God does. In the gospel. When a person comes to trust in Jesus. His goodness. Becomes ours. God declares. His people.

To be righteous. With the goodness. Of Jesus Christ himself. And that's the only way. I can face death today. Because I have. The righteousness.

Of Jesus Christ. And I would love to think. That the centurion. In seeing. What happened on the cross. Went on.

To believe himself. And went on. To die. Himself. With the same confidence. Knowing that he was trusting. In Jesus Christ.

Well may God bless his word. To us. We're going to. Sing together. We're going to sing together.