

Jesus in the Darkness

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[0 : 00] Good evening, our final reading tonight is from Luke chapter 23 verses 44 through 49. Luke 23 verses 44 through 49.

Now it was about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour when the sunlight failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And having said this, he breathed his last.

Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, Certainly this man was innocent. And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home, beating their breasts.

And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance, watching these things. Please pray with me.

[1 : 09] Lord, we ask tonight, as we consider for a few minutes, Lord, this account of the end of your life, of your death.

Lord, help us now to stop. To put aside the distractions of our homes, our living rooms, our heads, our phones.

Lord, help us to put aside those things so that we might sit for a few minutes before you and before your word. Lord, help us to meditate on these passages for a few minutes.

And by your spirit, will you help us. Help us to comprehend just a little bit more the great sobriety and the awesome wonder of what Good Friday is about.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, think of the scriptures that we've been reading this evening.

[2 : 26] We've come to the final movement of the symphony of Jesus' life. This is where he's been heading to his whole life. We call it today, Good Friday.

But it would not have felt good to those on that day. Think about what Jesus had walked through, even in the week before.

He had been opposed, betrayed, arrested, disowned, scorned, and beaten. He was hung on the humiliating and shameful cross between two common criminals.

We come to this final section, starting in verse 44. And we see that darkness has descended on the world. Now, darkness in biblical imagery, the minds of a first century Jew and a biblical scholar would say, darkness is not a good thing.

Usually, when God shows up, darkness flees. Or when darkness comes, it is a sign of God coming in his wrath. Sometimes, darkness is used as a symbol for spiritual blindness or moral corruption.

[3 : 56] Darkness is not a good thing. And on this day, darkness had fallen on the world. The world itself had become unnaturally dark. From noon, which is what the sixth hour is.

Sixth hour after sunrise. Sunrise. So, noon until about three o'clock, the world turned dark. And we might think this is an eclipse. And yet, it's a Passover weekend.

And Passover always happens at a full moon. So, whether it was another natural phenomenon. Or whether it was simply God supernaturally bringing darkness.

Either way, God brought darkness physically to the land of Palestine as Jesus hung on the cross. It would have been striking to all in Jerusalem. Probably frightening. They would have remembered that when God descended on Mount Sinai to give the law to Moses.

[5 : 02] He descended with clouds and with darkness and thunder and lightning. Or perhaps they would remember the words from the prophet Amos.

As he speaks of a day of judgment that is to come. And on that day, declares the Lord God. I will make the sun go down at noon. And darken the earth in broad daylight.

Darkness has fallen on the world. And we wonder, what has warranted this? Why would darkness come? And yet, Luke has prepared us for this. The story of the gospel of Luke has prepared us to see this for three times in the last five chapters.

Verse 19, 47. Chapter 19, verse 47. Chapter 20, verse 19. Chapter 22, verse 2. We see that the chief priests and the rulers of the land were seeking to kill Jesus.

[6 : 06] To destroy him. In fact, Jesus himself said, This is now the dark hour when he was arrested. In chapter 2, verses 53. It said, This is your hour and the power of darkness.

We've seen the worst of humanity coming out in this story. Judas betrays him. Peter denies him. Mocked by soldiers. Scorned by Herod.

Unjustly given over. To the mob's will. By a weak-kneed pilot. Beaten, crucified, and taunted. The darkness of humanity is on full display in this story.

My friends, we must not sit back and think in judgment that those people were terrible people who have done wrong.

Or proudly think that we would have done better if we were in the same place. For in our own hearts, we find that there's darkness welling up in us as well.

[7 : 20] Stressful times can bring out the best in us. Sometimes stressful times and crisis bring out generosity and kindness. Even heroism. But often as well, stressful times bring out the worst in us as well.

The dark impulses of our hearts that we manage mostly in normal times come out so strongly. I read this week in the New York Times of an 86-year-old woman with dementia who was in an emergency room in New York City.

Because she was separated from her family and alone, she became disoriented. She started wandering around the emergency room looking for help. She invaded the six-foot safety bubble of another patient who in anger, in a flash, in selfishness, pushed the woman out of her six-foot bubble.

The woman stumbled, fell back, hit her head, and died within three hours of the incident. It's a tragedy.

But would we recognize and acknowledge that in our own fear, in the emergency room, maybe we would do the same thing?

[8 : 45] What have you seen in your own hearts in these last days? I went to the grocery store this week. I don't ever want to go to the grocery store again after this trip.

My experience was terrible. The grocery store had clearly lined out how we ought to go. There were arrows on the floor. Go this way.

Don't go that way. Go through so that we can all social distance and protect one another and take care of one another. I found myself increasingly frustrated and angry in my heart.

As I found myself again and again being crisscrossed by people not following the directions. I found myself judgmental against those who weren't wearing face masks.

Not acknowledging that I myself wouldn't have had one if a friend hadn't made one the day before for me. I find myself self-righteous about how I was following the rules and why weren't they?

[9 : 51] Till I found myself in the produce department going the wrong way down to one of the aisles. And I realized how easily the darkness wells up in my own heart.

Anger, frustration, judgment, self-righteousness, pride. Friends, how often are we jealous of others whose success we covet?

How often in a moment of fear do we fail our ideals and our deepest values? How often do we in a moment of selfishness hurt or abandon those that we love?

How often do we grab control so that our plans will succeed? Regardless of how that tramples over others in our lives.

Friends, the darkness is not just outside. It is inside. The darkness that descended on Good Friday is merely a picture of the darkness of our world.

[11 : 04] So on Good Friday, Jesus descended because Jesus was there. Having walked his road of suffering. Having walked his own path of darkness up to this point.

And it really leaves us with a question then. What did Jesus do? Look with me if you have a Bible open.

I'll read it again. Verse 46. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And having said this, he breathed his last. What did Jesus do when the darkness descended? What did Jesus do as he hung helpless on the cross? What did Jesus do when he saw the darkness seemingly overcoming all?

He entrusted himself to his Father. And in doing so, he was quoting. He was quoting from Psalm 31, verse 5. A psalm of David.

[12:09] A psalm of trust in dark times. A psalm where the psalmist talks about being unjustly attacked and fearing for his life. Who states again and again and again.

But I will trust in your unfailing love, my God. And interestingly, the one word that he changed, Jesus did, from the psalm of the Old Testament, was he added the word Father.

David called out, God, into your hands I entrust my spirit. But Jesus says, Father. He calls upon that unique word that Jesus introduced into our vocabulary.

To see God not merely as a sovereign creator. Not even as a ruling king. Not only as those things, but as a Father.

And Jesus, as a son, recalling the intimacy and closeness and love of their relationship. Recalling how he knows the Father's power and the Father's love.

[13:25] Takes his life and says, Father, this is in your hands. Jesus knows that when the darkness descends, that he can trust his Father.

And so he quotes this verse for himself. And friends, we need to remember that Jesus was not a victim in this. Jesus was not helpless.

When we see this verse, it says that having said this, he breathed his last. And we remember what the Apostle John wrote. That Jesus said that he will lay down his life. And that he will take it up again.

Jesus was the one who said, now is the time. Now I will surrender. Now I will die. He was not a victim. Not a powerless pawn.

But one who had submitted himself to the Father's plan. You see, because this was the plan from the very beginning. That Jesus would go to his death. That Jesus would give himself up.

[14:34] Put himself in the hands of his Father. To go to the worst imaginable end. And he goes with hope that he will be redeemed.

I want to quote to you from Psalm 31. The context, verses 3 through 5. So you can hear. Because I believe that this would have been what was ringing in Jesus' ears.

As he cried those words out on the cross. Psalm 31. He says, Friends, so often in the darkness. We turn from God. In our confusion. In our anger. In our sorrow. We only want God to fix the darkness.

We want to avoid the darkness altogether. We want him to make as if there was no darkness. And we end up blaming him. And we move away in darkness and fear.

[15:57] But Jesus knew that God's ways are different. And in fact that he must go through the darkness for us. So he entrusted himself to his Father.

Friends, the darkness that Jesus entered into was not because of his sin. Or because he had done anything wrong. But it was because of the sin of the world. And because of the judgment of God that that sin incurred.

God's hatred of evil is so great. His hatred of death. His hatred of the ways in which sin corrupts and destroys and distorts the world.

That God will not withhold his judgment. But in love, Jesus came to take that judgment for us. He who knew no darkness. Went into darkness for us. He stood in our place. As under the darkness of our own sin and judgment.

[17:08] He willingly said to the Father. Pour your wrath out on me. Instead of them. Because only by going through the darkness would Jesus be able to save us from it.

So every evil thought. Every selfish deed. All of the fallenness of our world. Every epidemic. Every cancer.

Every piece of selfishness. And fear. And hatred. He bore all of this. As he hung on the cross.

And God recognized that. By bringing the darkness. But he brought the darkness so that Jesus might go through it for us. So that we might be saved from it.

For remember that this Jesus has been proclaimed through the whole book of Luke. As one who's come to save. To the angels.

[18 : 12] To the shepherds. Remember it said. For unto you is born this day in the city of Bethlehem. A savior. Who is Christ the Lord. Or as he began his ministry.

He said. Quoting from Isaiah. I have come to proclaim good news to the poor. Liberty to the captives. Recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed.

And to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus said he came not for the healthy. But for the sick. Not for the righteous. But to call sinners to repentance.

That he came to seek and save the lost. So that he might bring them back to God. God. And so Luke records. That the curtain in the temple was torn.

So that now the place where there had been a dividing wall. Between humanity and God. There was now access again. And that not only Jesus could call him father.

[19 : 14] But that all who are joined by faith with Christ. Could call him father. Father. Jesus died to rescue us. And to secure a hope for us.

That gives us the power to walk. Through darkness. In this life. For we know friends.

That this is not the end of the story. It's Friday. But Sunday is coming. Jesus did not end in death and darkness.

But having been laid in a tomb. Three days later. God raised him from the dead. And the God. Into whose hands. Jesus had committed his spirit.

This God raised him to new. And an indestructible life. And now. He calls all. Of us. To repent of our darkness.

[20 : 13] And to come to him. Who went through darkness for us. So that by faith in him. We might no longer walk in darkness. But live in the light.

And the indestructible life. Of Christ. Who was raised by the dead. Raised from the dead. Friends.

This is the good news. And the hope.

So even as we walk. And face darkness. In our lives. There is great hope. Indeed. Let's pray. Jesus.

We stand amazed. At your willingness. To entrust yourself. To the father. And to walk through darkness.

Of death. And judgment. For us. So that we might not bear those. Ourselves. So that we might not be overcome.

[21 : 14] And swallowed up in darkness. But so that we might be saved from it. God I pray that this hope. Would take hold in our hearts today. Help us Lord.

Help us to believe. And to know. The glorious truth. Jesus Christ. Died to save sinners. Like us. Jesus name we pray. Amen.