

Miracles of Calvary: Darkness¹
Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45a
ABC 2/14/16

(Mt 27) The highpoint of redemptive history is the atoning death of our Lord Jesus upon the cross of Calvary & His resurrection 3 days later. His sacrificial death was planned by God in eternity past (Titus 1:2; 1 Pt 1:18-21) & will be celebrated in heaven throughout all eternity (Rev 5:6-12). It was there at Calvary that the long-awaited & sinless Lamb of God gave His life to satisfy divine righteousness by paying for our sin's penalty in full. Surrounding Jesus' death on the cross, was a chain of miraculous events that gave testimony to the uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God & the fact that redemption only comes by faith in Him. Any one of these miracles alone would be astounding, but linked together they form an unbreakable chain of evidence that authenticates & declares Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. We're taking a break from Romans & we'll be looking at these miracles as we head into Easter. **Mt 27:33-53** PRAY (S)

1. Background The 1st miracle that occurred during hours 4, 5, & 6 that Jesus was on the cross was a miraculous darkness. Think back to Jesus' birth. (S) What happened in the night sky outside of Bethlehem? It was filled with supernatural light as **the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds** (Lk 2:9). John spoke of Jesus as **the light of men & the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man** (Jn 1:4, 9). Jesus spoke of Himself as **the light of the world** (Jn 8:12). But the 1st miraculous sign that accompanied Jesus' death wasn't glorious light but dreadful darkness. Ernest Shackleton, explorer of Antarctica, (S) once stated,

In all the world there is no desolation more complete than the polar night ... no warmth, no life, no movement Few men unaccustomed to it can fight off its effects altogether & it has driven some men mad.²

While that may be true of normal darkness, I believe the darkness of Calvary was even worse. All 4 gospel writers tell us the critical events of Jesus' death happened in the dark. The betrayal & trial before the Sanhedrin happened at night & now at the actual moment of Jesus' crucifixion, though it's daytime, darkness descends. This darkness from noon until 3 is often passed over with little comment, but it's rich in meaning not only because of the significance of the cross but

¹ Idea for series from William R. Nicholson's *The Six Miracles of Calvary*, 1927

² Alfred Lansing, *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*, p 47

because darkness itself is an important concept throughout Scripture (Gen 1:2 – Rev 16:10). Jesus' trials were now over (3 Jewish & 3 Roman). He'd been illegally condemned & turned over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified between the 2 thieves. Jesus was nailed to the cross at the 3rd hour, 9 a.m. This was a time of contrasts with lots going on. There was the gross iniquity & injustice of His enemies who were parting His garments, casting lots for His seamless robe, watching, mocking, shaking their heads, & hurling abusive language at Him as He hung on the cross for their, & our, sins. These were also busy hours for Jesus; hours of activity which stood out in striking contrast to those of His enemies. Though suffering horribly at the hands of men, His focus was on others rather than Himself. It was in these 1st 3 hours that He uttered His 1st 3 of 7 sayings from the cross. 1st, Jesus interceded on behalf of those crucifying Him, saying over & over again, as the Greek suggests, (S) **Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing** (Lk 23:34). This in itself is a wonder of the cross which showed our Lord's uniqueness. For the Jews it was an eye-for-an-eye. For the Romans revenge ruled. Together they'd nailed Him to the cross. They'd spit on & slapped Him, brought false accusers against Him, mocked Him, & beat Him mercilessly. But Jesus said, **Father, forgive them**. He didn't pray, *Father forgive Me*, because He was without sin, spotless & holy. He'd committed no sin nor was any deceit found in His mouth (1 Pt 2:22). He prayed to **forgive them**. Jesus knew His mission & purpose. He came to die for their sin so they (as well as you & I) might be forgiven. This was actually a request to lay their sin upon Him so He might be punished for it. Jesus was there to assume their debt & ours. He was there to die in our place (Is 53:4-6). It wasn't just the Romans & the Jews who put Him on the cross, but the sin of the world, including yours & mine. 2nd, one of the 2 crucified thieves who'd been mocking Jesus, undoubtedly hearing Jesus' words about forgiveness, became convicted & sought the forgiveness Jesus offered. Jesus heard the cry of the dying thief & answered Him with the assurance of salvation, the salvation He was about to purchase. To the thief He said, **today you shall be with Me in paradise** (Lk 23:43). 3rd, Jesus recognized the presence of His mother & His disciple John & gave Mary to his care (Jn 19:25-27). In this He was executing His last will & testament, yet He was also thinking of you & me. He called Mary not

mother, but simply **woman**. He was destroying any basis for viewing her as another mediator or the Queen of Heaven. She was the mother of His humanity, but as she stood before Him while on the cross, she was a woman who, as with anyone else, had to believe in Him for salvation. The 1st 3 hours were hours of hate, rejection, mockery, & cruelty on one hand, but on the other they were hours of love, intercession, & mercy. (S)

2. The Darkness & Silence It's now noon, the sun is high in the sky & suddenly darkness falls. **Mt 27:45**

This darkness is accompanied by a somber silence. Why do I say that? Because even the narrative goes silent here. **45-46**

The hours between noon & 3 p.m. are a blank page in the story & we need to feel the solemn silence of the event. The evil, cruel taunts, the sarcastic comments, the noise of the crowd are all hushed as darkness descends. We're told at the brightest time of day **darkness fell**. **Fell** means to happen, to come to be, & suggests the suddenness of this. It was just like someone turned out the lights. **Upon all the land**. Whether the darkness was over the entire world, we don't know. It's not possible from the text to tell how widespread it was. God was equally able to make the darkness universal or local. Can you imagine the scene? There was no more mocking. Now there's only horror, amazement, shock, fear, suspense, & dread. Imagine it: Thick, inky-black darkness fell like a shroud over the land. Blackness that curdled the blood & froze the tongue. No one moved. No one spoke. For once even the profane soldiers stopped swearing. Silence descended with the darkness. Something eerie was going on. It was as if something evil was happening & was somehow breathing out the darkness. You want to scream but nothing comes out. Perhaps 1 Sam 2:9 explains what happened: (S) **He keeps the feet of His godly ones, But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness**. Can you imagine the effect of this sudden, supernatural darkness in the midst of all the spiritual darkness that day?

Where did the darkness come from? What caused it? It wasn't an eclipse. This was Passover which is tied to the full moon. Because of this, an eclipse was impossible. Besides that, a total eclipse never occurs suddenly, gives complete darkness, nor lasts for 3 hours. Did a natural

catastrophe cause it? Could it be a darkness from a volcanic eruption & ash obscuring the sun? Nope. What about a dust storm which suddenly rolled in? If that were the case, why didn't the authors simply say so? This leaves us with an act of God. This was a miraculous sign. God the Creator who placed the sun, moon, stars, & planets in their place caused darkness to fall. As a miracle, we don't understand it, we only have the evidence that it happened. Is this supernatural darkness credible? Can we believe it? For those who believe the Bible, of course we believe it. The Bible is God's perfect Word given to us. Matthew, Mark, & Luke record this event, & Luke tells us that he **investigated everything carefully** (1:3) when he wrote his gospel. Luke & Matthew were nearby & probably Mark as well. They were living & present when this took place. They saw the darkness & talked to others who saw it as well. But if that isn't enough for you, there are reports in historical literature that suggest this darkness was worldwide. The early church father Origen reported a statement by a Roman historian who mentioned such a darkness.³ Another church father, Tertullian, wrote to some pagan acquaintances about an unusual darkness on that day. (S) *At the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals, and is preserved in your archives to this day.*⁴ There was also a supposed report from Pilate to Emperor Tiberius that assumed the emperor's knowledge of this darkness, even mentioning that it was from noon to 3 in the afternoon.⁵ This was no normal action of nature. Jesus, the Son of God, the God-Man was dying for man's sin & God was, with great drama, declaring this to the world. (S) Jesus hung between heaven & earth, the bridge from one to the other, & suddenly darkness covers the land. This miracle was an act of God both to authenticate & interpret the death of His Son to the world. God took center stage for Jesus' final 3 hours on the cross. It's only when God arrived that Calvary became the saving event that it was. God's wrath, poured out on His Son as He bore sin, is in fact the major reality of Calvary. That happened in the hours of darkness. This darkness wasn't caused by God's absence but by His presence in full judgment. Infinite wrath moved by

³ *Against Celsus*, 2.33

⁴ Cited in Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ*, p 203

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. *Matthew* (Mt 27:45), p 268

infinite righteousness released infinite punishment on Jesus. Because He is infinite God in human flesh in just 3 hours was able to absorb all the punishment that we couldn't absorb in all of eternity. He bore in His own body our sins (1 Pt 2:24), & He who knew no sin, was made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). He was wounded for our transgressions & crushed for our iniquities (Is 53:5). He was made a curse for us (Gal 3:13). This was the dreadful cup of divine judgment that He anticipated while sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:36; Lk 22:44). (S)

3. What's the Purpose & Meaning? That isn't explained in the gospels or elsewhere in Scripture, but according to the *Babylonian Talmud* many rabbis had taught the darkening of the sun was a judgment of God on the world for an unusually atrocious sin. If that was God's intention at this time, He gave a gigantic object lesson to the world regarding the greatest sin ever committed by fallen mankind. Some have suggested the darkness was a means of God's casting a veil over the sufferings of Jesus, & others say it was an act of fatherly sympathy given to cover the nakedness & dishonoring of His Son. But in light of many biblical teachings & events, it seems the darkness was a sign of God's divine judgment. This darkness represented God's holy, terrifying presence. The Father descended in judgment on Golgotha in thick gloom as the divine Executioner to unleash His fury not against sinners but against the sin Bearer (1 Pt 2:24). The full weight of God's wrath was poured out on Jesus, His only begotten Son (Is 53:5). The spotless Lamb of God was sacrificed for sin so that sinners might be justified through Him (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:28). Moved by His perfect justice, God's infinite wrath released an eternity of punishment on the incarnate Son who, as an infinite & eternal person, absorbed the tortures of hell in 3 hours.

Jesus had told the crowds He'd come to save them from their sin & they were offended. When He said, **I Am the Son of God** (Mt 27:53), they took up stones to stone Him. Another time they said, **show us a sign from heaven** (Mt 16:1). Now they had a sign, sudden & miraculous darkness. & other signs would soon follow confirming the eternal importance of this historic event. The Roman centurion standing close by got the picture. At the close of this event he exclaimed, **truly, this was the Son of God** (Mt 27:54), & proclaimed, **Certainly this man was innocent** (Lk 23:47). Jesus was without sin which qualified Him to bear our sins & deliver us from our own spiritual

darkness. Ps 107:10 says, (S) **There were those who dwelt in darkness & in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery & chains.** That's all of us in our natural state. Vs 14 adds, (S) **He brought them out of darkness & the shadow of death & broke their bands apart.** But for God to do that, He had to face the dark wrath & judgment of God upon sin. As Isaiah declared, Jesus was smitten of God (53:4). The holy God turned His face away from His Son & had poured out His wrath of divine justice on Jesus who was there bearing our penalty, taking our place. This was the point in time when Christ bore our sin & when God the Father & the Holy Spirit had to turn their backs on the suffering Savior. For 3 hours the darkness spoke of Jesus separated from God by the sin of the world & smitten for us as He bore our sin. Think about your sins: pride, gossip, greed, hate, lying, lust, racism, indifference, unfaithfulness, selfishness, rebellion, etc. It was in this dark hour that God put our sin upon His own Son. It was the time He bore the iniquity of us all. Man could only hear the great cry, (S) **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** (Mt 27:46). Was this the exact moment when our sin was placed upon Jesus? Or was this cry because He could endure no longer the spiritual separation from God & He cried out for deliverance? We don't know. But we do know that He was bearing our iniquity in those hours of darkness & the cry affirmed His abiding trust in the Father's deliverance, reflected in the words, **My God, My God**, which, although this is the only time He doesn't call Him **Father**, is still the language of intimacy. To call Muriel, *My Muriel* is affectionate. Biblically, *my God* is relational. It was the way God said someone could address Him if they had a personal relationship with Him. **You shall be My people, & I shall be your God** (Jer 30:22). The longer the relationship, the deeper the love, & thus the greater the torment of its loss. This forsakenness, this loss, was between the Father & the Son, who had loved each other from all eternity. This love was infinitely long, absolutely perfect, & Jesus was losing it. Why? He was experiencing our eternal day. This wasn't a rhetorical question. Why did the Father forsake His Son here? For you, for me, for us. Jesus was forsaken by God so that we would never have to be. The judgment that should have fallen on us, instead fell on Him. With intense agony, the Son of God experienced that which He'd never known before, the abandonment of His Father. How can it be? How can God be forsaken by God? How can the

Father forsake His own Son? This separation wasn't one of nature or essence; Jesus didn't cease to be the 2nd member of the Trinity. Rather, it was a separation of the loving communion He'd eternally known with the Father (Jn 17:21-24). He cried out, **My God, My God,** & expressed His profound affection & longing for the Father, mingled with the agony & pain of His separation from Him. The Father visited Calvary in massive judgment against sin. The Father turned away in anger over all the sin of the world that sent His Son to the cross. He turned away in sorrow & deepest pain when He saw what sin had done. He turned away in complete revulsion at the ugliness of sin. There's an old song called, *Ten Thousand Angels*.⁶ It speaks of the fact that Jesus could have called 10,000 angels to rescue Him from the cross. He didn't do that & the chorus ends with these words, *But He died alone, for you and me.* It's true. When Jesus bore the sins of the world, He bore them all alone. Jesus was abandoned, the Trinity disjointed, the Godhead broken. The fact that I don't know what that means doesn't stop it from being true. Jesus was truly forsaken by God. We read that in Scripture. The sinless One was **made sin** for us (2 Cor 5:21). When God looked down that day, He saw, not His sinless Son, but sin itself. Gal 3:13 tells us, **(S) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.** Think of it. When Jesus was baptized, God said, **(S) This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased** (Mt 3:17). At this time, God couldn't say that. At the cross, in the darkness, the beloved Son became **a curse for us.** Isaiah tells us, **(S) All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him** (53:6). Try to imagine this. All the sin, all the evil, all the crime, all the hatred, all the perversion, all the pride, & all the selfishness was **laid on Him.** Jesus made complete identification with sinners as our sins were laid on Him. He became a curse for us. He died in our place. It was for that reason, & only for that reason, that God the Father forsook His beloved Son. The cross was a place of divine judgment, where the sins of the world were poured out vicariously on the sinless, perfect Son. It was therefore appropriate that great supernatural darkness express God's reaction to sin in that act of judgment. While the darkness portrayed the

⁶ Ray Overholt

sin & darkness of man & the wrath of God upon sin, it also dramatically demonstrated the love of God acting sovereignly to deliver us from the darkness of Satan's kingdom & from sin & death. Thus, just as suddenly as it had come, the darkness was dispelled by the light of day & Jesus was then heard to speak again as He shouted, (S) **It is finished!** (Jn 19:30) He was able to say this because during those hours of darkness man's redemption had been accomplished once & for all. The words **it is finished** represent one Greek word which means the job is done or the mission accomplished! Then, crying out one last time, Jesus said, (S) **Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit** (Lk 23:46). He voluntarily, by the power of His own will, bowed His head, yielded up His Spirit, & died (Mt 27:50). Jesus demonstrated that He was still mentally alert & physically strong when He **uttered a loud cry** (Mk 15:38). His life didn't gradually slip away due to exhaustion; instead, He willingly laid it down (Jn 10:17-18). The work of redemption had been accomplished & His suffering was complete.

John tells us, (S) **In Him was life, & the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, & the darkness did not comprehend it** (1:4-5). He goes on to quote Jesus, (S) **I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness** (12:46). In the Damascus road experience when Saul was converted, Jesus told him, regarding the world of lost men, that He had come... (S)

to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light & from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins & an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me (Acts 26:18).

In Ephesians we read, (S) **Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light** (Eph 5:7-8). & as we'll see, Rom 13:12 tells us, (S) **The night is almost gone, & the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness & put on the armor of light.** Our Savior has conquered the darkness, & as His people, we ought to live as the children of Light as we walk in the power of His life with His character & purposes as our own.

We should take from this at least these 2 great implications. It reveals to us 2 things we must never minimize: (S)

1. We must never minimize the horror of our sin. Sometimes we laugh at sin & say, *The devil made me do it*. Sometimes we think, *It's already paid for & I'll be forgiven. I'll just go ahead & sin*, as if sin was something to be laughed at or taken lightly. But it was our sin that Jesus bore in the darkness that day. It was our cesspool of sin that was poured out upon Him. He became a curse & we were part of the reason. Sin is never a joke or laughing matter. (S)

2. We must never minimize the awful cost of our salvation. Is it possible that some of us don't like hearing about the horror of the cross? Would we rather hear about other things? Without the awful terror of the cross, there would be nothing happy to talk about. Without the cross there'd be no forgiveness. Without the cross there would be no salvation. Without the cross we'd be lost forever. Without the cross our sins would still be upon us. It cost Jesus everything to redeem us. Let us never make light of what cost Him so dearly.

Are you prepared for your death? If you're not going to heaven, it's in spite of what Jesus did for you. He's already paid the penalty for your sins. He took the blow. He took the pain. He endured the suffering. He took the weight of all your sins. He was forsaken by His Father on your behalf. So if you go to hell, don't blame Jesus. He died your death & took your punishment so that guilty sinners like you and I could be eternally forgiven. Have you received the gift of Jesus? Have you placed your faith in Him? (S) Have you been forgiven because He was forsaken? If not, why not?