

The Cross Engulfed in Darkness

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Luke 23:44 “And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.”

That darkness was the speech of God at the cross. God’s voice prevailed over the land for three long hours. That speech of God was devoid of love and grace. It was God’s speech of wrath and judgment.

Often times when we consider anew the events of the cross, we contemplate the speech of mere men. Pilate and Herod “examined” the Christ. Neither of them found any fault in Him worthy of death. Annas and Caiaphas “tried” Him before the seventy elders, and found Jesus guilty of blasphemy because He claimed to be the Son of God. The Jews, upon the instigation of the Sanhedrin, cried out away with Him and crucify Him. They desired that the murderer Barabbas be released to them rather than the Prince of Life. Some slapped Jesus’ face. Others platted a crown of thorns upon His head. They mockingly robed Him in purple. Pilate and the soldiers scourged the Christ. The soldiers following Pilate’s orders drove the spikes through His hands and feet. All this we often contemplate. The deeds and words of wicked men captivate our attention.

All men it seemed scorned, ridiculed, and mocked the Christ. Contempt and hatred toward Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews reigned in the hearts of men.

But Jesus was silent. Many times, He had declared openly His identity in the temple and now there was no need to do so again. To Herod’s many questions Jesus “answered him nothing.” Before Pilate, only a few words were spoken. Jesus the Christ is “brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.”

Not one word fell from Jesus’ lips to express the horrible injustice of it all. No bitterness, no rebellion, no hatred. Only silence. The Son of God, the Lord out of heaven, was silent before His accusers, judges, and crucifiers. Would not God in heaven speak. God had spoken in the past audibly addressing men: “This is my beloved son...” But at the cross was there no speech of God Almighty?

God spoke indeed: for three long hours darkness covered the land and engulfed the cross. That darkness was the speech of God. Men had to listen in silence to this word of God concerning God’s wrath and hell.

What specifically happened? Luke tells us that from the sixth hour till the ninth hour darkness covered the land. The sixth hour according to the Jewish reckoning of time would be noon day, twelve o’clock. How unusual that darkness should cover the land, for especially in the sun scorched land of Canaan one would expect the brightness of the blazing sun shining forth out of a cloudless sky. No one expects darkness at midday. This darkness prevailed for three hours.

That was not an ordinary darkness of the night. In an ordinary night, we have the light of the moon and stars. Some nights the moon and stars give so much light, that we can speak of the brightness of the night. But the darkness at Calvary was different from anything the Jews had ever experienced. It was a thick, gloomy darkness which terrifyingly precluded movement. Maybe the darkness of the inner caverns of a cave approximate the darkness that surrounded the cross. Undoubtedly, one could not see any longer the cross and the object of his scorn. The

darkness removed their neighbors from sight. The hand raised close to the eyes was undoubtedly indistinguishable.

Nor do we doubt for a moment that this darkness had a profound affect upon the multitude gathered about the foot of the cross. The mouths of those who defiantly mocked and ridiculed and taunted the King were silenced. This darkness was so thick and oppressive that the Jews were not only silent, but they in all probability shivered in terror. The darkness of hell was upon them.

This darkness also silenced the Christ. From the third to the sixth hour, Jesus spoke the first three cross words. But during the darkness Jesus cried out only once. During the three hours of darkness, there could be heard no doubt the shuffling of feet among the multitude and also the groaning of the dying malefactors; but nothing else could be heard till the piercing cry of despair burst forth from the heart and lips of the forsaken Son: My God... Why ...me?

The significance of this darkness is two-fold. First of all, by causing this darkness to descend upon Golgotha, our God hath shown to all that the cross is His cross and not man's. It had seemed as though the cross of Christ was completely in man's control. Apparently, men ruled. Had not mere men captured the Christ, having bribed the betrayer and plotted Jesus' capture.

Men had Jesus in their power. Had they not buffeted, spat upon Him, scourged Him, and finally condemned Him and all this apparently with impunity. No one was apparently able to stop the execution of their murderous plan. Even Simon the Cyrenian was forced into the act. Men ruled. For the three hours before the darkness engulfed the cross, men with wicked sneers enjoyed the sight of their helpless victim. Jesus could save others, Himself He could not save. Jesus was in their power. His life's blood was slowly escaping from Him as men watched and jeered the suffering Nazarene. Man and the Devil had all things the way they had wanted it. Wicked apostate men held dominion over the hill of Golgotha.

So it seemed.

But the cross and all the events surrounding it were completely in God's control. Prophecy had foretold the betrayal. Jesus Himself had spoken earlier of His death on the cross and of being lifted up even as Moses had lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Death upon the cross had been accursed of God. Was not Jesus known from the beginning of His ministry as the Lamb of God? Do we not read in Revelations 13:8 that Jesus is the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world? God had willed the death of His Son in our flesh eternally. The seed of the woman must crush the head of the serpent. Had not Isaiah and King David, as prophets of God, declared what would transpire according to the counsel of our God. (Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22) The cross was God's, who delivered the Christ unto death according to His determinate counsel and foreknowledge.

Not men ruled at Golgotha; but God alone and sovereignly over and in the lives of men.

The descending darkness made that fact crystal clear even to the spiritually blind. Before the darkness, the soldiers, the Sanhedrin, the Jews, and the people that passed by, jeered and wagged their heads in scorn. Proud and wicked men deriding the Christ triumphantly cried out: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ the chosen of God." But the darkness revealed that the cross belonged to God and not men. God sovereignly ruled and by this miraculous act men were silenced and as it were set aside by the hand of God.

Secondly, the significance of the darkness is that it symbolically spoke of God's wrath. His wrath over against sin and guilt. The light of God's favor and grace was removed from Calvary.

With whom was the God of heaven angry? Undoubtedly, God's wrath was kindled

against the members of the Sanhedrin, who willingly had been the tools of Satan in this ungodly deed. To those who were impenitent the remembrance of that afternoon must ever have spoken of the wrath of God. It was for the ungodly a foretaste of hell.

But first of all and chiefly, God's wrath was not directed toward mere sinful men; but God's wrath was toward the Christ, Jesus. However, this wrath was not directed towards Christ for any sin He had committed for our High priest was holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners. But the Christ had taken upon Himself your and my sins and guilt and that of all His elect people. Therefore, as the legal Head of the Church He was the sinner guilty before our Holy God.

We must not overlook the fact that this darkness symbolically pictured the just visitation of God's wrath as it shall be poured out in hell eternally. In Matthew 8:12 we read: "But the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The impenitent Jews would be cast into hell. So also, hell and all it represents as the place of everlasting punishment of the guilty sinner is pictured to us as the blackness of darkness in Jude verse 13 and II Peter 2:17.

Christ descended into the depths of hellish agony during the three hours of darkness. During those three hours, the billows of God's just wrath swept over His soul.

For whom? For those whom the Father had inseparably joined to Him according to His eternal and sovereign purpose of election. The shepherd died for His sheep. In Him they have redemption and the right unto everlasting life.

Historically, the darkness gradually was removed. Atonement had been made and Christ was no longer engulfed in darkness. Triumphantly, Christ cried out: "It is finished!" And: "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Jesus' spirit was placed in the loving Father's hands in order that Christ Jesus, who had redeemed us by His death, may also surely save us by His life.

Repentant believer, upon you shines the sun of righteousness ... forever.

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