

Introduction

The crucifixion of Jesus is the climactic event leading up to his resurrection. The core message of the gospel is Christ crucified. Last week we considered the human hostility directed at Christ on the cross. This morning we turn to examine God's side of the excruciating experience.

[Read Text and Pray]

In this part of Matthew's account of the crucifixion of Jesus, attention turns away from the human hostility being poured out on him and on to Jesus's own experience while hanging there. His experience reveals that divine judgment was in the air. It was falling full force upon Christ himself. Christ endured the wrath of God. A central idea emerges from the text. It is this. The crucifixion of Jesus satisfied the demands of God's holy justice. The cross and its accomplishment puts on glorious display breathtaking aspects of the character of God. We certainly see his love. God so loved that he gave. We also see his holiness. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. But we especially see his justice. God's intent in his work of providing salvation was to justify sinners without compromising justice. And that is what he has done by bringing judgment on Jesus. Four aspects of the judgment of Jesus emerge.

I. The Color of the Judgment of Jesus (45)

A. Jesus was put on the cross at the third hour. It was about 9 in the morning. Three hours later a dramatic event took place. The time was noon; it was the middle of the day, but suddenly the land became permeated with darkness. The light of the sun was concealed. Matthew's wording here can be taken to mean either that the region was darkened or even that the entire earth was darkened. We cannot know for sure. But certainly if God wanted to darken the entire earth for a period of time, he is able to do so. How he brought the darkness is not clear either. Suggestions of an eclipse have been rejected because of the location of the sun and moon at that time. But again it matters not so much how wide spread was the darkness or how God performed the miracle. What seems more important is why he did it. And again it is something Matthew does not tell us. And yet there are strong indicators from our own sense of what was going on as well as from the pages of the Old Testament.

Darkness is a foreboding sign of doom. And the day of Christ's crucifixion, for sure, was a day of doom and judgment and the righteous wrath of God. The ninth and next to last of the plagues by which God brought judgment upon the Egyptians was darkness. Moses' wording in Exodus is similar to Matthew's. Exodus 10:21 says, "there was a darkness over the land." Isaiah spoke of judgment to come upon Judah for its wickedness. He indicated that there would be darkness and distress and the light would be darkened by the clouds (Isaiah 5:30). Several months back in our study of the prophet Joel we observed him describe the day of the Lord in similar fashion. Of that day, Joel declared it to be "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!" Isaiah says of the day of the Lord that it comes "cruel, with wrath and fierce anger." And in that day "the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light" (Isaiah 13:9-10). The prophet Amos asks, "Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:20). Finally, there is Zephaniah who speaks of the day of the Lord as "a day of wrath," "a day of distress and anguish, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zephaniah 1:14-15).

The Day of the Lord is an instance in which God breaks into the flow of time in an epic way, in spectacular fashion, and shows himself demonstrably. It is a time, an instance, in which God demonstrates with utmost profundity that He is Holy God. There is violence toward sin and mercy toward his saints. It is a time of judgment for God's enemies and of blessing for God's people.

The darkness that descended while Jesus was on the cross came at noon, the time when the sun would have been at its brightest. Powerfully it seems God is saying the occasion of Christ's crucifixion is a day of the Lord. It is a time when God's wrath is being poured out; sin is being judged. But in this case the wrath is descending not upon wicked sinners but upon the spotless lamb of God. Jesus is drinking the cup of the Father's wrath. He who knew no sin has become sin in our behalf in order that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Those who are justified are saved by Christ from the wrath of God.

"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5–6).

The color of judgment is darkness. And the judgment was meted out on Jesus so those who trust in him are spared the condemnation we deserve.

II. The Cry of the Judgment of Jesus (46-49)

So, from the 6th hour to the 9th hour (noon to 3 pm) the darkness that descended remained. And then at 3 pm, Jesus made a staggering cry. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This statement is straight out of the first verse of Psalm 22. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from my groaning?" It is a cry that expresses the anguish of abandonment. Certainly, being exposed to God's wrath would make one say that. Jesus is being exposed to God's hatred for sin. Moses wrote in Psalm 90, "For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed." This is the cup over which Jesus sweat drops of blood. A particular aspect of this cry of dereliction is truly striking. Jesus does not call God his Father. It is the only instance in which it took place. Clearly something unusual was going on here. Habakkuk helps us out. He describes God's holiness in terms of eyes that are too pure to see evil and he cannot look at wrong. And here is the Son becoming sin. The Father must turn his face away. The joyous and blessed face of the Father is turned away and the Son is left on his own to bear up under the ignominy of sin. And Jesus feels the estrangement; he feels the separation. This is perhaps the most painful aspect of the suffering of Jesus. But it is necessary for justice to be satisfied.

Isaiah 53 declares, "By oppression and judgment he was taken away" (v. 8); and "it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief" (v. 10). And Jesus endured the judgment, the crushing blow of God, and the estrangement so that his sheep would not have to. No, as he told his disciples in John 14, "I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also." Likewise, in the great high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am" (John 17:24). Jesus endured the Father's abandonment so that we who trust in him will not be abandoned to the outer darkness because by doing so he took our judgment on himself.

All the business about Elijah is thought to be more mockery because if these were Jews, they would have been familiar with Psalm 22 as they were with the name Elijah. While Jesus is uttering a cry

which should bring them to their knees in awe and gratitude, these folk are continuing to mock and make fun.

III. The Finality of the Judgment of Jesus (50)

At last Jesus cried out with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. John records that Jesus declared, "It is finished." Then Luke adds that Jesus cried, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." These expressions indicate that it is over. The suffering of separation and propitiation are complete. The price of redemption was paid in full. The judgment of God has been meted out before the cross's punishment was exhausted. In other words, people could last significantly longer in the anguish of crucifixion than only 6 hours. Furthermore, the strength of Jesus' cry indicates he was not yet fully exhausted. He cried with a LOUD voice not a weakened one. And then he willingly yielded up his spirit. He did not kill himself, but he did sovereignly relinquish his life to the process. He was still in control and willingly surrendered his life. His life was not taken from him against his will but he laid it down. He died. And it was indeed finished. Judgment was complete. And the benefits of his death accrue to his people.

Romans 5:10 - we were RECONCILED to God by the death of his Son

Colossians 1:21-22 – And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before [God],

Hebrews 2:14 – through death he . . . destroy[ed] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Hebrews 9:14 – Christ . . . offered himself without blemish to God [to] purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews 9:15 – a death has occurred that redeems...from ... transgressions

1 Peter 3:18 – Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh

Romans 5:9 – we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved from the wrath of God

Romans 8:34 – Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died

1 Cor 15:3 – Christ died for our sins

2 Cor 5:15 – he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died

1 Thess 5:10 – who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him

Colossians 2:13-14 – God [has] forgiven us all our transgressions by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

All this is true but at the center of Christ was doing on the cross was making propitiation. God put Christ forward on the cross as a propitiation by his blood, that is by his death (Romans 3:25). It is on account of Christ's propitiation that sinners are justified by grace. We need to think on this word propitiation. It refers to a satisfaction of justice. It refers to an appeasement of God's just wrath. God's own provision of his son as a propitiation is God's provision for sinners to satisfy his own righteous and holy demand. It is a payment of a debt.

The only way you or I could satisfy God's justice and wrath is to spend eternity under that wrath in hell. This is what we deserve and it is the condemnation to which every sinner is headed. But when Jesus suffered and died on the cross, he fully satisfied and appeased the demands of God's justice. That is what propitiation is. And now because of his propitiation, he is an advocate before the Father, a great high priest who ever lives to plead our case before God. The case he pleads is this:

justice has been satisfied. For whom does he plead like this? For those who draw near to God through him! For those who receive God's gift of justification by faith, by believing on Christ, by trusting in his propitiation. For them, the debt is paid and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because Jesus paid it all. Jesus could have suffered longer, but his work was done so he said, "It is finished." And he yielded up his spirit.

People believe the lie of Satan that they can do enough good or be good enough that God should somehow be able to accept them because of who they are and what they have done. Many, many think they are okay with God because they are not that bad. But the law of God reveals that we are all sinners. We all have lied. We have all stolen. We have all killed and committed adultery at least in our minds and attitudes and words. We covet. And certainly we have worshiped false ideas of God. We have served other gods than him. And the Bible declares that if you even break the law at one point, you have become accountable for all of it. A lawbreaker by breaking the law at one point will forever be a lawbreaker. The only appeasement for divine wrath is to suffer the punishment of holy wrath. But there on the cross by the loving plan and provision of God Jesus paid it all. And he paid it for lawbreakers. God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners the perfect law-keeper, Christ, died for us. So who can be justified? Those who trust in him. So, come every soul by sin oppressed. There is mercy with the Lord. And he will surely give you rest by trusting in his word.

IV. The Fruit of the Judgment of Jesus (51-56)

Now that Jesus paid in full the debt due to God's justice, dramatic effects take place exhibiting the wonderful and powerful working of God.

A. First, Matthew tells us that the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Oh this is glorious! The curtain in the temple was draped between the holy place and the holy of holies. It was this curtain that kept the holy of holies sacred and set apart from everything else. But once a year on the day of atonement did the high priest pass through the veil to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. It represented the dividing wall of separation between sinners and holy God. But when Jesus paid the debt in full, the veil was torn in two. The way into the presence of holy God was opened up. And notice the nature of the tear. It was from the top down. God tore the veil not man. It came down from the top. God is declaring that no longer is the sacrificial system in order. The consummate sacrifice has been made. The earthly holy of holies, being itself a mere copy of the true heavenly one, has served its purpose. No longer must sinners draw near to God through the temple and its corresponding sacrifices. The crucified savior has entered heaven itself to now appear in the presence of God on our behalf. He was offered up once and for all time. And now believers have direct access to him and to the Father through him. Through him we have obtained access. Believers in Christ, ourselves, are a royal priesthood. The writer of Hebrews urges believers, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace."

B. In addition to the rending of the veil there were natural phenomena. The earth shook and rocks were split. It takes our minds back to the shaking when God appeared at Sinai at the inauguration of the mosaic covenant. The whole mountain trembled greatly. The splitting of the rocks takes our minds back to the prophet Elijah. When the Lord appeared to him, a strong wind broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord." Now the natural phenomena of the law and the prophets add exclamation to the message of God being proclaimed at the death of Jesus.

C. Matthew also reports something that none of the other gospel writers mention—opened graves. And not just opened graves but many resurrections of past saints. It seems a significant number,

but not all, of those who had believed God prior to Christ's crucifixion were raised directly in its aftermath. They put on their glorified and resurrection bodies. And then after Christ's resurrection these entered Jerusalem and appeared to many just as Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

One of the wonderful fruits of Christ's resurrection is the assurance for his people that we too will be raised from the dead. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. The perishable body will put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. Death will be swallowed up in victory! And it is our Lord Jesus Christ through whom God gives us this victory. Listen, death is not the end. Those who die in Christ go immediately into his presence, but they too, in the great day of resurrection, like these who were raised at Christ's crucifixion, will be raised in bodies fit for God's eternal kingdom in the new heavens and new earth. So be steadfast and immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

D. Yet another fruit of Christ's crucifixion is a massive conversion. Look at verse 54. "When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe." The wording is that they were struck with amazement. It is the same wording as described Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration of Jesus. Likely these soldiers had joined in the mockery earlier in the day. They had heard the Jews seek to persuade Pilate on the basis that he made himself out to be the Son of God. Now by this time, they had been witness to the manner and the meekness of Christ; they had some sense of the charges against him; they were engulfed with the three hour darkness that came on the land. They have heard Jesus cry and demonstrate his sovereignty over the whole scene. And now the earthquake. The centurion and the soldiers under him detect the presence and activity of God. And they said, "TRULY this WAS the SON of GOD!" The centurion may have spoken out loud, but he spoke for the group. Luke adds that the centurion praised God and confessed that Jesus was innocent. While we cannot be absolutely certain, the transformation and the exclamation of the soldiers suggests that the Holy Spirit had opened their eyes and convinced their hearts. Even then some of those who were involved in the crucifixion became the answer to Jesus's prayer, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Fundamental to saving faith is the inward conviction that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. The Son of God died to satisfy the wrath of God so sinners who turn to him and trust in him will be justified, redeemed, and forgiven.

Today if you have come to that faith, please know that it is by God's grace and mercy and give him praise and thanks that he opened up your darkened understanding and removed your alienation from him that you, hearing about him, might believe upon him. Today if you have not repented of sin and turned to Christ, you may do so right now. Up to this moment the soldiers were darkened, but at this point they saw Christ for who he is and gave God glory. At his very moment, you can do the same. Bringing salvation to the lost is why Jesus died to satisfy God's justice.

Conclusion

Finally we notice at the scene of the judgment of Christ a number of faithful followers. These were women. Matthew says there were many. They were from Galilee and had been ministering to Jesus. Now they were looking on from a distance. It was certainly not out of shame or fear. They were not timid about their association with Jesus. These women had been closer to the cross at one time and probably had moved away simply because it was so hard to watch a loved one experience such

humiliation and pain and anguish. They did not realize the full beauty and richness of what had just happened, yet they had not left. John is the only one of the disciples who had come to the cross. All the others appear to have cowered away in fear. But not these women. The work Christ had done in them created a love and loyalty that could not be extinguished. The courage and devotion which they exhibited is a model for all believers in Jesus. It was an hour when they did not fully understand what God was doing, but they remained with him.

On this side of the resurrection we possess a much clearer understanding of what Christ was doing on the cross. We study the Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament explanations of the apostles, and we stand amazed and in awe. The work of propitiation is the satisfaction of divine justice. And out of this great work of Christ are granted justification and redemption and reconciliation and access to God.

How is it that we run in fear? How is it that we buckle under the weight of the lightest of unanswered questions? How is it we cave easily to the fear of man? These women are a great example and encouragement to remain faithful and loyal and never leave him who will never leave us but will hold his people fast to the day he returns.

Prayer

Benediction

Now may the God of peace, who satisfied justice through the death of his dear Son, grant peace and joy and hope and strength and perseverance to his sheep. And may he work in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Christ Jesus, to whom be glory forever and ever. A-men.