

The Darkness

Last 24 Hours of Christ

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Mark 15. As you're turning to Mark 15, for those of you that are studious note-takers and particularly like to see respective passages with your own eyes, there are two Old Testament passages that I am going to refer to today somewhat frequently. For the sake of time, we're not going to actually turn and read them but those two passages are Psalm 22 right in the middle of your Bible, also in the minor prophets, a little book by the name of Amos 8:8 and 9. So Psalm 22, Amos 8, but the overwhelming majority of our time today is going to be in Mark 15 and for those of you that are guests and visitors, we continue a journey through the last 24 hours of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We began at what we know as the Last Supper. We've been in the garden of Gethsemane, we've seen the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter. We've seen the trial and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, and last week we dealt with the two thieves, one that was repentant and one not so much.

Today, we come to a passage of scripture that is very brief in nature but as we're going to see, very profound in meaning. In fact, as we turn to chapter 15 of Mark, verse 33, it is actually the only time period within these last 24 hours that we're actually given a very specific chronology of when it took place, but more importantly today is not only what happened but what Jesus said responding to what happened. Verse 33 of Mark 15 it says,

33 And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? 35 And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. 36 And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. 37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

As we read that very brief passage, the last verse actually takes us a couple weeks down the road where we will have that final seventh statement made from the cross, but today that statement made in his "native tongue" of Aramaic is the fourth of seven statements and probably the most discussed and debated words out of the mouth of Jesus in the

entirety of the gospel collections. And so today as we've done other days, I want to just kind of walk through this passage answering some very basic questions that are necessary for us to grasp what does this passage mean for our lives today, how is it applied to us not just with the permanence of the blood of Jesus being shed for our sins but walking each and every day in light thereof.

So let's begin with the "when." This one is pretty easy this week because from the sixth to the ninth hour, the only thing is what we know as the Jewish clock is a little different than the Gentile one, in our vernacular this would have been from 12 noon to 3 o'clock in the afternoon. As I mentioned earlier, it's the only time period we have in the last 24 hours of Jesus' life in ministry that's very specific to us as far as when it began and when it ended.

Now the next question is the "who." Obviously we're dealing with Jesus Christ. Last week, we had the thieves, we've had Simon of Cyrene and a host of others that have played a part in the story, but today it's only Jesus. He is the one who will experience the darkness. We are not told how others responded, we're not even told how those that were watching commented on what was happening. But there is one thing I want to address and that's the fact that everyone experienced it. Notice it says there in that first verse we read that darkness was over the entirety of the land. Back in Amos 8:8-9, hundreds of years before this event took place, the Lord declared that one day at noon, and by the way, even the Jewish clock requires 6 o'clock to be the noontime, that the sun would go dark over the entirety of the earth.

Today, we could spend an exhaustive amount of time debating whether the darkness was localized to what we know as the Middle East but over the entirety of the earth, and just for the sake of discussion, I want you to know that I side with the entirety of the earth based on Amos 8, but that's not important for today's question. What I want you to hear is this, that every single person that's been a part of the story so far was in darkness. Every one of them. There is not a person from Pontius Pilate to Herod to Caiaphas to Cyrene to "the thieves on either side of him." Everybody who's been a part of the story was in darkness. The Jewish leaders who desired his death, the Roman centurion and leaders who ensured his death, even John and the four women at the foot of the cross, and those who we studied a couple of weeks ago that literally sat down and watched the entirety, everyone was experiencing darkness for three hours. What's interesting is the Bible doesn't give us any commentary on what anybody said about the darkness. Years later, a Roman historian by the name of Pliny would concur that at the death of Jesus Christ of Nazareth there was darkness over the land.

And probably the most important question that we have to deal with today is the "where." Now I know what most of you are thinking, "Well, it happened on Golgotha, Mount Calvary." No, no, the question is where did the darkness come from? This is the question that is necessary to address if we're going to understand what's happening during these three hours. We only have two choices: we have what we call the natural explanation and then we have what we call the supernatural. Here's how the natural explanation goes, that at the exact perfect time God orchestrated throughout the creation that according to Hebrews 1:3 is upheld by his words, he orchestrated some type of celestial eclipse or

some type of celestial event that this item got in front of that item and thus darkness went over the land. Here's the problem with the natural event, is any type of eclipse that you and I have ever been a part of does not present total darkness for three straight hours. Secondly, the historians and those who study these things for a living cannot find any dramatic celestial event that happened on either side of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for several years. And so by biblical default, it necessitates the "where" of the darkness, that this was a supernatural darkness that came over the land.

Now we've seen darkness in days past, in fact, it was in Egypt, was it not? The Lord had delivered his people or was in the process thereof by what we know as the famous plagues, and the ninth plague was darkness. Here's the difference between the book of Exodus and Mark 15: in Exodus those who were faithful to the Lord particularly in the land of Goshen did not experience the darkness, those that were true to the Lord, those who were preparing the Passover feast, those who were prepared to trust God to take them through the Red Sea, they didn't experience darkness. In this story, everybody does. In fact, if this story was just like the book of Exodus, then John and the four women at the foot of the cross would have had a spotlight upon them because that was their own little Goshen, so to speak. There are men like Simon of Cyrene and others such as Joseph of Arimathea who would place his lifeless body in his own tomb, that were there in the vicinity. The Bible doesn't say that it was a hodgepodge of darkness and light, it says it was darkness over the entirety of the land.

I'm going to ask somewhat of a rhetorical question this morning and allow me to guide you therein. Do you really believe that Satan wanted Jesus to die upon the cross? I mean, do you really believe that? Because it would be this event that if you'll allow the pun or the analogy would be the final nail in his coffin. You understand that Satan so despised Jesus' mission that even when he was in the womb he tried to eliminate him. Even after his birth in those first two years, he spoke unto Herod to eliminate all of the little children. We see a record, we see a pattern whether after his birth or in the wilderness that Satan's last desire is to have Jesus Christ offer his shed blood for the sins of humanity. It's the last thing he ever wanted.

You say, "Pastor, why is that important?" Because can I tell you where I believe the "where" is? I think for three hours every principality, power and ruler of darkness from the depths of hell descended on Mount Calvary. You know, the Bible says in 1 John 1:5 God is light and in him is no darkness at all. John 8:12, Jesus Christ said, "I am the light of the world." I want you to imagine the scene that whom we know as Satan, the adversary, the antithesis to everything Jesus Christ is about to accomplish, unloading everything he's got to prevent his own defeat and our victory.

So what happened? It says a very particular event. Two things I want to reference very quickly is this, of the seven statements that Jesus Christ made upon the cross, this is the only one that is actually a quotation of scripture. That's right, Psalm 22 begins, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Now let me remind you this is strategic. Why? Two reasons but the first one is this, in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Father." The last statement he prays, "Father." He doesn't say, "My Father, my Father," he says,

"My God, my God." Why is that important? Because he's pointing us all back to Psalm 22. Psalm 22 is the richest chapter we've got in the Bible regarding the events of the crucifixion, that his hands and his feet would be pierced, that he would be surrounded by those that would gamble over his clothing, that the dogs would surround him etc.

We have an actual quotation of scripture and I want you to notice how Jesus speaks in verse 34, "the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice." In the last few weeks as we've walked through these various passages in the last 24 hours of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, we have discussed time and time again that from a physical perspective when one would hang upon a cross every breath they breathed, every statement they made they would have to exert all the energy they had to raise or lift themselves up upon that cross. Jesus Christ was beaten according to Isaiah 52, worse than any other man. According to the book of Exodus 12, as the Passover lamb he had not slept in three days. Physically exhausted, emotionally exhausted, mentally taxed, and for five hours every single breath has been laborious at best, and every next breath has been much more difficult.

Why is this important? Because it's the only statement from the cross that is a quotation of scripture and he does it with such energy and force, it's as if the criticalness of it is so important that he says it louder than any other statement. You know, this is profound. You say, "Why is it profound?" Because Jesus Christ has a pattern, anytime the devil came to him and tried to talk him out of something he was supposed to do, do you remember how Jesus replied? "It is written." Every time Jesus Christ defended his purpose and his mission, he would quote scripture. What is he doing upon the cross? He's quoting the passage that describes not only what he's doing but why he's doing it, and all the way back in the book of Genesis 3, humanity had fallen into sin, the serpent was there as well, the Lord responded to the serpent who had tempted mankind with this response, that the seed of the woman would come one day, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and even though Satan would bruise his heel, do you not notice the literal interpretation there as his feet were affixed to the cross? But what would the Messiah do? Bruise his head.

Why is this profound? Because if the darkness is truly the enemy and if the darkness is Satan's last chance to bypass his ultimate defeat, then when Jesus Christ quotes Psalm 22, what he is stating with his voice is that which he came to accomplish has been done. "Satan, you are now defeated." Notice the darkness goes away. How is it prophetic? Victory has ensued. Now it doesn't look victorious on Mount Golgotha, his appearance hasn't changed, the crowd, their demeanor hasn't changed, but the last gasp of darkness has been dismissed.

For those of you who are familiar with Psalm 22 or have it open in front of you, it begins with, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It goes through a very detailed analysis of what we know as the crucifixion experience, but it ends with a victorious declaration that because of all of this all nations shall be gathered unto him, that the peoples of the earth will come and worship him. You see, Psalm 22 appears to be a Psalm of defeat, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But it actually ends as a declaration of victory. So there on Mount Calvary, we have this spiritual, shall I say, tug-

of-war, so to speak, and by quoting Psalm 22, Jesus Christ was saying with his words and with his body that he was accomplishing, that he was concluding, he was finishing that which he came to do, and that victory was now plausible and possible, that we could come unto him and be healed, we could come unto him and be forgiven, that all the peoples of the earth would come worship and bow down before him.

Why is this passage so important? Is it just looking back at the nuances there into the timeframe and the darkness and the quotation of Psalm 22? No. The reason this passage is so important for you and I, is it not only shows Jesus Christ's love for us on Calvary but it speaks to us because I don't know about you but I have times in my life where I walk through some darkness. Have you had some times in your life where Satan's whispered in your ear? Have you had some times in your life where he has unloaded the principalities of hell on your family, your home, your job, your body, your mind, your emotions? You may not be hanging on a cross but how many of you wake up and before your feet hit the floor you feel surrounded by the enemy in every aspect? Do you know what the "why" is? It's particular for us because how many of us have tried to combat the darkness with a lot of stuff that doesn't work? You know, Ephesians 6, it says that we have the armor of God upon us and one of those, the only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. If at the words of Jesus Christ the darkness of hell itself was dismissed, then why would we change or differ or alter a methodology for our own lives? Jesus Christ used it in the wilderness, he used it upon the cross, he has given us the entirety of the only thing that can drive the darkness out of our life.

And it's profound because later in 1 John 4:4, there is this statement that you've heard quoted, you've probably seen it framed or pretty in somebody's house but rarely is it realized, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." We quote it. We frame it. But we rarely experience it. Why? Because of the particulars. The only way he's greater in you, number 1, he's got to be in you, you've got to be saved, and number 2, you've got to use the same weapon he used which was the word.

Then finally, it's prophetic. There on Mount Calvary, the darkness is dismissed, the final three statements are made, and from the world's perspective it didn't look like victory, it looked like the agony of defeat. But then came three days later. Three days later, a group of Roman soldiers in a plot between the Jews and the Romans could not keep the stone and his body inside Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. Nobody in Jerusalem could look at that body upon the cross and declare from their perspective that victory had just been declared and the same goes for our lives as well. There's a lot of things we're walking, we're carrying that we have in our lives that they don't look victorious but I've got news for you, there's coming a day, we may not see it on this side of glory, but there's coming a day where everything that has got you bound up, everything that's got you discouraged, everything that's got you frustrated, that you as a believer in Jesus Christ are going to experience victory over it either, A) when you breathe your last breath and the Bible says to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord, or for some of us when the Lord cries out and the dead in Christ and the alive in Christ are taken up to be with the Lord. The fact that Jesus makes this statement and the darkness is dismissed and his environment does not immediately change, gives us the prophetic hope that the scripture

that we quote is not in vain, the life that we live is not in vain, the faith that we exercise is not in vain. We may not see it on this side of glory but one day we will be as he was, we are going to walk out of the tomb of these bodies and we are going to be raised for all eternity to never be subjected to the darkness again. Jesus Christ pictured for us everything that humanity is desirous of. Today all we need to do in response is to believe and trust him.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that person here with us in person, maybe you're watching online, but maybe today is the day where the Spirit of God took the word of God in your life and all that victory that you've so desired, all that victory that you've held onto and wanted so desperately that you realized it was never going to happen apart from Jesus Christ, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The Bible doesn't say whoever joins a church, whoever becomes a Baptist, whoever stops this and starts that, it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. And maybe today you're that person who's never called on the Lord and you need to, there's no "series of words or statements" that you and I need to say in a certain manner, the Bible just says to cry out with your heart, but maybe today your cry to the Lord would go a little something like this. "God, today I want to confess to you what you already know about me, I have sinned, I have messed up, I have rebelled against you in every form and fashion but, God, I believe today that Jesus Christ and what he did upon the cross and through his raising from the dead, he has accomplished all that needs to be done for the forgiveness of my sin and the salvation of my soul. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that as we sang about and we heard in scripture about what Jesus did on the cross, God, I believe that he did all that to pay the price for my sin. And God, today I believe that when Jesus Christ rose from the grave three days later, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven, my soul to be saved. And God, today I don't have all the answers to what's happening in the world with all the conflict and all the issues, but I do know this one thing, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in a moment I'm going to pray over us and we're going to stand and sing and we're going to have a whole team of folks down here who would love to pray with you, pray for you, to celebrate whatever God is doing in your life. Maybe today it's that profession of faith. Maybe you're already saved and you never followed in believer's baptism. Or maybe the Lord has said today this is to be your church home. But maybe for many of us it's not about stepping out and stepping forward and maybe it's about stepping out of here in a moment with a new perspective on how to handle the darkness of our lives. May today be the day that whatever the Lord has spoken by his word and through his Spirit we would just simply respond.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, thank you that you loved us so much that you were willing to go through what you went through so that we might be declared your children. God, today as your children, may we respond to you in an

appropriate proper manner, may we trust you, may we believe you, may we have all other voices that are speaking to us canceled out and may your voice be the only one we hear. It is the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.