

THE DARKNESS

Mark 15:33-47

This morning we consider the three most important hours in human history. For it was in those three hours that the eternal destiny of millions was altered.

Mark 15:33-47 (ESV)

³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” ³⁶ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” ³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

THE DARKEST HOURS (15:33-34)

The sixth hour was twelve noon. From noon ‘til 3PM it was dark throughout Jerusalem and Judea. The darkness corresponded to what was happening on the cross; during those three hours Jesus became sin for us and suffered God’s judgment on our behalf. In those three hours Jesus died spiritually, being separated from God. In those three black hours, the sin of all mankind from the Fall to the last sinner born in the Millennial Kingdom was poured out upon Jesus.

This is what Isaiah prophetically described in Isaiah 53:3-6.

Isaiah 53:3-6 (ESV)

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But 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. ⁶ 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.

Peter explains clearly what was taking place during those three hours:

¹ Peter 2:24 (ESV)

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Paul further explains what happened in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Living Bible says it this way:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (LB)

For God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God's goodness into us!

R. Kent Hughes writes:

Wave after wave of the world's sin was poured over Christ's sinless soul. Again and again during those three hours his soul recoiled and convulsed as all the lies of civilization, the murders of a thousand "Killing Fields," the whorings of the world's armies, and the noxious brew of hatreds, jealousies, and pride were poured on his purity. Finally he became a curse:

Galatians 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—

In the darkness Jesus bore it all in silence. Not a word came from his lips. Can you see him writhing like a serpent in the gloom (see John 3:14, 15)?¹

The human mind cannot comprehend the spiritual, psychological and emotional trauma suffered by Jesus. We focus on the physical suffering which, in itself, was horrific. But into His pure, gentle, loving soul was poured all the hatred, cruelty, murder, rape, bitterness, corruption, hard heartedness, greed and jealousy of all mankind.

Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" verified that He, indeed, died in our place. When Jesus was made sin the Father separated Himself from Him. That is spiritual death – to be separated from God. Jesus had never known even a millisecond of separation from God the Father. It was during those three horrific hours that Jesus suffered spiritual death for us; He became sin and was separated from the Father.

Only Jesus could do this. He alone was/is qualified to be our substitute. He is fully human and sinless. Only an innocent can die in the place of the guilty. Only Jesus could pay the penalty for our sin.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 206–208.

It is therefore a lie that we who are guilty must “pitch in” and contribute something towards payment. Nothing is needed. Jesus paid it all. Water baptism does not help pay our debt. The seven sacraments of Catholicism do not help pay our debt. Keeping the Ten Commandments does not help pay our debt.

Hebrews 9:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

With what was our eternal redemption secured? The blood of Christ! Who of us would dare put anything we have done on the heavenly Altar to add to the blood of Jesus? May it never be!

Know and believe that in those dark hours, Jesus took into Himself your sin and paid its penalty in full, being separated from God the Father so that you can be reunited with God the Father.

ELIJAH (15:34-36)

Mark 15:34–36 (ESV)

³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” ³⁶ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”

Those who misunderstood Jesus’ cry reflect the darkened thinking that had met Jesus’ teaching throughout His ministry. An urban myth of the time held that Elijah rescued innocent victims who cried out to him. Perhaps this was also meant as another way to mock Jesus.

TEMPLE CURTAIN TORN (15:37-38)

Mark 15:37–38 (ESV)

³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

At the time Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple was torn top to bottom. This was the massive curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Behind this curtain, into the Holy of Holies the High Priest entered but once a year to offer the blood of a bull and goat to make atonement for his sins and the sins of the nation of Israel. It was only by the mediation of the High Priest that the sins of the people could be atoned. No Israelite could come directly into God’s presence in the Holy of Holies. They were completely dependent upon the High Priest to mediate for them.

But with the death of Jesus and the payment of humanity’s sin, everything changed. We now have direct access to God the Father through Jesus our High Priest. We are no longer dependent upon a human priesthood to mediate our relationship with God. Jesus, our High Priest, now mediates our relationship with God the Father. Through

Jesus we have direct access to the Father. This is the point made by the Preacher of Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:19–25 (ESV)

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

I hope that those of us from a Catholic background are walking in the confidence that Jesus is your High Priest and that you can approach God the Father directly and personally through Christ!

THE CENTURION (15:37-39)

Mark 15:37–39 (ESV)

³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Jesus' final cry and last breath were extraordinary because these again manifested that Jesus' life was not taken from Him, but He gave it. Typically, crucifixion victims lingered much longer, usually a day or two, before death. Jesus, however, was dead after six hours. The centurion commanding the death squad had observed Jesus for those six hours including His final breath. Though he probably was not referring to the deity of Jesus in the biblical sense, he certainly recognized that Jesus was no ordinary man when he declared “Truly this man was the Son of God.” Recognizing this, perhaps the centurion came to faith after the resurrection. How meaningful for Mark's audience of Roman readers that a Roman centurion would have such insight into Jesus.

THE WOMEN (15:40-41)

Mark 15:40–41 (ESV)

⁴⁰ There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

The disciples were conspicuous by their absence. But to their credit several women remained with Jesus throughout His ordeal. Mary Magdalene was from a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee named Magdala. Jesus had cast several demons out of her, and this explains her devotion to Him (Luke 8:2). Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses (aka Joseph), was married to a man named Clopas (Jn. 19:25). Not much else is known about her. Salome was the mother of James and John (Mt. 27:56) and she was the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother.

JESUS' BURIAL (15:42-47)

Mark 15:42-47 (ESV)

⁴² And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. ⁴⁵ And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, found courage to ask for Jesus' body.

Once again, Pilate was surprised by Jesus. He was surprised when Jesus did not defend Himself (15:5) and now he was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly. In both cases, Jesus showed that He was not a victim. He was fulfilling the Father's plan.

If Joseph had not intervened, Jesus' body would have been thrown into a mass, unmarked grave used for burying criminals. Isaiah 53:9 was fulfilled by Joseph's actions.

Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Faithful to the end, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus had followed Joseph to the tomb. They did this so that after the Sabbath, they could return and give him a more proper burial. In spite of Jesus' predictions, even these faithful women did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead.

They were in for a big surprise!