

# The Miracles of Calvary – The Darkness – Luke 23:44-45a

## Scripture Reading – John 3:16-21

### Introduction

Picture yourself at Calvary – the scene of the crucifixion of Jesus and a pair of unnamed thieves

It's the time of Passover so the crowd streaming into Jerusalem would be quite large

One author describes the scene this way:

*“Josephus guessed that two and a half million Jews came for Passover. This is an exaggeration but there were Jews ‘out of every nation,’ from Parthia and Babylonia to Crete and Libya. The only way to imagine this throng is to see Mecca during the haj. At Passover, every family had to sacrifice a lamb, so the city was jammed with bleating sheep – 255,600 lambs were sacrificed. There was much to do: pilgrims had to take a dip in a mikvah every time they approached the Temple as well as buy their sacrificial lambs in the Royal Portico. Not everyone could stay in the city. Thousands lodged in the surrounding villages, like Jesus, or camped around the walls. As the smell of burning meat and heady incense wafted – and the trumpet blasts, announcing prayers and sacrifices, ricocheted – across the city, everything was focused on the Temple, nervously watched by the Roman soldiers from the Antonia Fortress. ...”*

Imagine yourself as a part of that crowd and being drawn to the unfolding spectacle of a public execution

Think about what you would expect to see as the Roman soldiers went about the business of crucifying those three men

Crucifixion was the favored form of execution in the area at that time and the soldiers were quite skilled at their craft

They were able to ensure maximum suffering by prolonging the death of the condemned for hours or even days if they so wished – after all, one of the main purposes of crucifixion was to show the danger to be found in defying Rome

Or they could expedite the death by breaking both legs bringing about suffocation within minutes

As gruesome as it sounds to us today a crucifixion was a sort of macabre entertainment in Jesus' day and many were inclined to hang around and watch

After all, crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals so in the eyes of the crowd the men were only getting what they deserved

And as we read the accounts in the Gospels we get the sense that there was a kind of carnival atmosphere surrounding the crucifixion with people shouting jeers and insults at the condemned just to further torment them as they died

But this was to be no ordinary crucifixion and the day was going to unfold differently than anyone in the crowd could have possibly imagined

This morning we are beginning a series where we will be looking at the miracles surrounding Jesus' crucifixion

Unfortunately, these passages are so familiar to us that we tend to read right past the miracles that occurred and so we miss the implications of them and the lessons that they can teach us

We will be looking at the miracles in the order in which they appear in the Gospel accounts so this morning we will begin with the three hours of darkness that is related in the three synoptic Gospels

In Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; and our primary passage this morning, [Luke 23:44-45a](#) on

I encourage you to join me there so you can follow along as I read –

*It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed.*

We will begin by looking at the conditions which is Roman numeral one on the note sheets

Then we will look at the cause which is Roman numeral two

And lastly at the connotations which is Roman numeral three

# I. The Conditions

## A. The first 3 hours (9am to Noon)

Jesus and the others were crucified at 9am which we see in Mark's account in Mark 15:25 which says it was the "third hour" when they were crucified - the Jewish day runs from 6am to 6pm so the third hour would make it 9am

**Leading up to 9am** Jesus had been betrayed by Judas and arrested

He's been through multiple court proceedings— both Jewish and Roman – during the night and early morning hours

The crowd has chosen Barabbas for release and clamored for Jesus to be put to death

Pilate has given in to the demands of the crowd and turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified even though he could find no guilt in him

Jesus has been stripped, mocked, beaten, and made to carry his cross until he collapsed under its weight

And once he is nailed to his cross; the activity continued probably pretty much as any crucifixion would

The soldiers divided his garments amongst themselves and gambled to determine who would receive his seamless tunic

His tormentors hurled insults at him, the spiritual rulers complained to the authorities about calling him King of the Jews, then they turned to scoffing at him, the soldiers mocked him, and his friends mourned for him

It was also during these first three hours that Jesus asked God to forgive those who were crucifying him as we see in Luke 23:34

It's quite ironic isn't it; that Jesus was at that very moment in the midst of paying for the sins of his tormentors and torturers and was interceding for them before his Father

Jesus also heard the request of the thief who was dying alongside him to be remembered and gave him assurance of the salvation he was even then purchasing for him (Luke 23:43)

Then Jesus made provision for his mother's continued care as we see in John 19:26-27

**For the first three hours that Jesus hung on his cross the contrast is striking as on the one hand there was nothing but hate and cruelty and venom directed toward the innocent while on the other there was only love and concern and provision for others**

## B. The sudden darkness

Then at the sixth hour – which would be at noon – there was darkness over the whole land

And during the time when the sun should have been at its most intense the darkness lasted for three hours

Without going into a great amount of detail, the words used in the original Greek indicate that this darkness happened all of a sudden and was not a gradual thing

One author describes it as being as if "someone had turned out the lights"

I remember when I was a kid sharing a room with my younger brother we would try to turn off the lights and get into bed before it got dark and even though the light switch was right by the bed we never made it

There was no fading away of the light – one instant there was light and the next there was dark

That seems to be the image that is intended here – Bam! At noon it was instantly dark

And I believe the darkness wasn't a dismal, gloomy sort of darkness but rather total pitch black darkness like we see before God created light in **Genesis 1:2** where it says that "*darkness was over the face of the deep*"

Keep your place in Luke and turn with me to Exodus 10 where we will see God send darkness on another occasion – **Exodus 10:21-23**

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days...*

If you've ever experienced the phenomenon known as "total cave darkness" I think you'll agree that's darkness that you can feel, there is no way you can see the person next to you and, if you're like me, you aren't likely to go anywhere

It's an oppressive darkness that one's eyes can never adapt to

Egypt experienced that level of darkness for three days as the ninth plague and I think that is the kind of darkness the world experienced for three hours at Calvary

### **C. The resulting silence**

Imagine what it must have been like when the darkness came

For three hours the crowd had been physically and verbally abusive and then suddenly the lights went out

**The next point I want you to be sure to see is easy to miss if you're not careful but Scripture falls silent and nothing is recorded for three hours until the account is picked up again at the ninth hour**

We aren't told what took place during the hours between noon and 3pm

I believe that Scripture is reflecting the silence that fell on the crowd along with the darkness

I have to imagine their revelry and raucous mood was instantly silenced as the crowd experienced the fear and foreboding and wonder concerning what might be happening as complete darkness suddenly enveloped the scene

It had to be terrifying and I picture the people there straining and trying to will their eyes to see something, anything and how as the minutes ticked by the fear would grow deeper and deeper

## **II. The Cause**

Everyone present must have wondered about the source or **the cause** of the darkness and people have conjectured about it ever since

### **A. Not an eclipse**

Some have tried over the years to say that the area must have experienced a total solar eclipse

But there is no way possible that it was an eclipse – here's why

Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover and Passover is always at the time of the full moon and a solar eclipse can only happen during the opposite phase of the moon known as a New Moon when the moon is fully dark

And a solar eclipse comes on gradually and the light only reaches a kind of twilight state whereas Scripture records that the darkness was sudden and complete

Besides, the darkness prevailed for three hours and no solar eclipse lasts that long

The longest total solar eclipse of the last 4,000 years was on June 15, 744B.C. and it lasted 7 minutes 28 seconds

And the maximum length of time a total eclipse can possibly last is 7 minutes 30 seconds

So, it couldn't have been an eclipse that caused the darkness

### **B. Not a different natural phenomena**

Some people have theorized that it might have been caused by other natural phenomena like a dust or ash cloud caused by a volcano that blocked the sun

Again, this can't be so because of the suddenness and completeness of the darkness

Besides, the only natural phenomena to be recorded during this time period was the earthquake that followed the darkness which we will look at in a couple of weeks

Others have floated the idea of cloud cover but the same objections apply to that theory as to the others

A storm wouldn't be sudden or complete enough to match what Scripture says took place

### **C. Supernatural act of God**

The only explanation that fits is that the darkness was a supernatural act of God

In other words, God directly intervened in the natural world and darkened the Sun for three hours that afternoon

Look at how Luke described what happened in the first part of **verse 45** – *“the sun's light failed”*

Luke doesn't say the sun's light was blocked or obscured but that it “failed” which indicates it was extinguished

The phrase interpreted “the whole land” could mean an entire area; for instance all Judea, or it could mean the entire earth

And while we can't prove which is intended here, I believe Luke and the other gospel writers meant for us to understand that the darkness extended to the entire earth

This was the watershed moment of history and I believe God meant to call supreme attention to it

It would be easy for the same God who created the sun and everything else in the universe to simply extinguish the sun for three hours while his Son hung on the cross – and I think that's just what he did

This was no normal or even abnormal phenomenon of nature like an eclipse or a volcano or a storm

God darkened the earth as his Son hung on the cross and this act was done to validate and give meaning to what the death of Jesus Christ meant to the world

### **III. The Connotations**

So let's turn our attention to **the connotations** – which is to say, the meanings or intentions behind the darkness  
What is it that God wanted the world at that time and people for all time to understand about the death of his Son?

#### **A. Showed the significance of Christ's death**

First, the darkness served to show the significance of Christ's death

There can be no doubt that the ministry of Jesus caused a stir and opposition to him was a common response

Look at Simeon's prophecy concerning Jesus when he was presented in the temple as a baby in **Luke 2:34-35** –

*And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

And Jesus was opposed

When he told the people that he was the bread from heaven that would give eternal life; they were offended

And when he equated himself with God by calling God his Father and pointed to his eternal nature by saying "Before Abraham was, I am"; they picked up stones to throw at him

When he told the people who he was, what his purpose was, and how he would die; they didn't believe him

So on at least one occasion the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded a sign from heaven so they might believe

And the darkness was undeniably a sign from heaven – no other explanation for it would suffice

The three hours of total darkness served to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus was who he claimed to be

The Roman centurion on duty near Jesus certainly got the message

Look at what he says in **Luke 23:47** – *"Certainly this man was innocent!"*

Matthew and Mark include another utterance by the centurion in their accounts that show that the centurion understood the significance of the miracles as he said, *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

And so the darkness and the other miracles of Calvary were designed to show the character of Christ and to make plain the significance of his mission and his death

#### **B. Substantiated God's holiness**

The darkness also serves to give us a clear understanding of God's holiness and of his attitude toward sin

Jesus had always, from eternity past, enjoyed intimate fellowship with his Father and he lived a sinless life on this earth that did nothing to disturb or break that fellowship

But when he took on the sins of the world – your sins and my sins – God had to turn away from him because God cannot bear to even look at sin

Turn with me to **Isaiah 53** [page 614] where we will look at verses 4-6 [**Isaiah 53:4-6**]

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. 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.*

Jesus, who lived a sinless life, was bearing the sins of the entire human race as mankind's substitute while hanging on the cross and God had to turn away from him because his holy nature would not allow him to do otherwise

**Habakkuk 1:13** tells us that God is *"of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong..."*

So God the Father had to **judicially** forsake his only Son during the period of time that he bore our sins

Jesus was never utterly forsaken by the Father and their relationship was never broken or even strained

However, God had to turn his face away from the Son and I am convinced the knowledge of this turning away was what Jesus dreaded the most as he prayed in Gethsemane for the cup of the cross to be removed from him

As agonizing as the physical torture of crucifixion had to be for Jesus; I believe it was nothing compared to the agony of being clothed in our sins and separated from his Father's gaze

### **C. Shielded Christ's suffering**

The darkness that occurred at Calvary was also an act of **mercy** and **modesty**

It would have been unseemly for the onlookers to witness the Son engaged in his intense suffering as the weight of the sin of all mankind was placed on him

Sin is any violation of God's will, either in purpose or conduct and they can be sins of **omission** as well as sins of **commission**

Think about every sin you have ever committed – every time you have lied, gossiped, judged unjustly, conspired, rebelled, been unfaithful, exhibited pride, engaged in fornication or adultery or lusted after another, every time you've been complacent or indifferent, every time you were aware of some good that you failed to do...

Now, multiply that by all of the people who have ever lived or will ever live and consider the weight of those sins being placed upon a holy God who cannot even bear to look at sin

Consider that the just punishment for sin is eternal separation from God and that all the sins of all mankind were paid for during those three hours of darkness

The agony of those three hours is humanly inconceivable and it would not be fitting for man to view the suffering of the Son as the wrath of God was completely poured out on him as our substitute

And as those three hours came to a close Jesus cried out with a loud voice [**Mark 15:34**] –

*“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

And in that cry we see not only anguish but the abiding trust the Son had that God was still his Father and that he would hear him and deliver him – he had only been judicially forsaken not relationally forsaken

### **D. Symbolized the unbeliever's fate**

The darkness also served to symbolize the state of unsaved mankind and the unbeliever's ultimate fate without Christ  
Darkness is the natural state of fallen mankind

Scripture tells us plainly that we prefer darkness to light – **John 3:19**

And Scripture tells us that the ultimate fate of the unbeliever is to be cast into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) for apart from God there is no light

But the Bible also tells us that the sacrificial death of Christ is the way out of darkness

**Colossians 1:13-14** tell us – *[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

There is one undeniable fact about darkness that we have to acknowledge

Darkness cannot overcome light – light always defeats darkness as even the smallest of lights pushes darkness away

And Jesus said in **John 12:46** –

*“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”*

But to believe in Jesus Christ is more than giving intellectual agreement to the fact that he exists or that he was a good man or a wise teacher

To believe means to accept his substitutional suffering on the cross in the darkness of Calvary that atoned for your sins and to fully trust in his payment for those sins relying on nothing else to reconcile you to God and bring you out of darkness and into the light

## Conclusion

At the end of three hours of complete, supernatural darkness where the sun failed to shine; Jesus was heard to say "*It is finished*" and as suddenly as it came, the darkness was dispelled as the light of day returned

We will look more at the final words of Jesus on the cross next week but with this utterance Jesus said his mission was accomplished and salvation had been provided for any who would receive it

But, as we know all too well, most people today continue to live their lives in spiritual darkness

Redemption is available but people still must receive it and like any gift if the gift of salvation remains unaccepted it is of no benefit to the one to whom it is offered

Our job then, as children of the light who have already accepted the gift of salvation, is to spread the message of the light to all –

Look with me at [Acts 26:18](#) where the Lord revealed to Paul what his mission was to be

Likewise, we have also been given the task of spreading the message of the gospel so that peoples' eyes might be opened so they can turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ

The Easter season is one of the times when people are more open to hearing the good news of the gospel so we must be diligent to be ready to share the light and looking for opportunities to do so

Jesus proclaimed that he was the light of the world and as his followers we too should be lights in this world

No one lights a lamp and then puts a basket over it so let's commit to doing all we can to shine forth the light of salvation as we approach the Easter season

Let's pray