

illuminating Darkness

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[0 : 0 0] Well friends, let's join together in reading once again from Matthew chapter 27. Matthew 27, I'd like us to take our text today from verse 45. There's an awful lot of detail in this chapter, much could be said, there are many different things happening and what I'd like us to do just for a short time is to focus on verse 45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. No friends in life before we can truly and readily appreciate good news, it's important for us to appreciate the bad news. It's not always comfortable for us, that is true. It's not always the most uplifting thing for us to meditate upon, that also is true. But unless we come back and remind ourselves of the bad news, the good news is almost irrelevant, that's why we need a balanced gospel, that's why the preaching of the word ought never to be one sided, it ought never to speak only of heaven and never of hell, but by the same token it ought not to speak only of hellified and brimstone as it were without giving the hope of heaven itself. And so for a short time we're going to think a little bit about this darkness. I shared earlier with our young friends the words of Jesus and John 8, I am the light of the world, he said, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. And you know friends this is really what the bad news is, that if today we live our lives without Jesus as the light of our life, we are living in darkness. This is a darkness that is caused by sin blinding us. Like I said to the young folk it's as if our eyes are closed and we cannot see, of course we can see life, we can have much to offer life, we have much wisdom in this world. But when I say we cannot see, we cannot see spiritually, we might have lots of wisdom when it comes to the things of this world, but yet when it comes to the things of the world that is still to come, the fact that we're here for such a short time and we're to make provision for our never dying soul, we're blinded. We can't see it, we don't appreciate it and because of that we don't do anything about it. How can we walk in the dark then? How can we make any progress in this life if we're walking in the dark today? Many of you, if you're not Christians here today, you've achieved much in this life and you might think I'm able to walk in the darkness of this world no problem at all.

Just look at what I've achieved in my life, look at the home I have, look at the job I have, look at the family I have. I am navigating my way through this world with absolutely no problem and so you might protest at being told that you're walking in the dark, but yet God's word tells us in many different places that we are walking in the dark without Jesus. We see a vivid description of this in Job chapter 12 verse 25, a really vivid picture, we read there that they grope in the dark without light and he makes them stagger like a drunken man. That's the way we are friends without Jesus as our light. It's as if we're going through year after year, decade after decade, grasping for this, that and the next thing in this world, looking for fulfilment, purpose, meaning and all of these many different things but still we're just like a drunken man staggering from left to right with no real direction. It's a vivid picture and as I reflect even upon my own life before I was saved by the grace of God, not because I was better than anyone else,

I see that that's the way I was looking for the next thing. When I got one thing I would enjoy it for a while and experience a job, a material possession, whatever it was I would enjoy it, I would get satisfaction from it but then after a while I would need to move on to the next thing and the next thing and the next thing. That's a tragedy of a life without Christ. The reality that we are like staggering drunks in a darkened room trying to grasp onto something, anything as an anchor point yet always missing the mark. But friend it didn't even be that way. It ought not to be that way and I pray for your dear soul if you're not a Christian today that it won't be that way for much longer. Because here today God's people we gather for a reason. We're here as God's people as those who profess to having been freed from this darkness, this bondage. We are those who if you like have the lights switched on so that we can see why we have been created and who exactly our creator is. But you know with this light, this freedom, this liberty, there was a cost and that's what we

need to appreciate today that this liberty, this light that has brought us out of this darkness, it hasn't come cheap. Yes it was easy for us to come here this morning, get into our cars, join together. That didn't cost us anything really. But the reason for our gathering here today cost so, so much. And as today we return to Calvary's hill, we're going to briefly consider that this light had to be purchased. The light that is yours and mine, it had to be bought. And darkness was the price. We return to Calvary, to these three crosses. And this morning we're going to focus on the centre cross. Who do we see there? We see Jesus. There he is, dying the death of death, slowly and excruciatingly suffering, untold pain and anguish. We thought a little bit about the suffering of his soul as he peered into the cup and gets semen. But the suffering of his body was, is there no way to be downplayed. Here he is, nailed to that cross and it's a horrific scene. Because as he's nailed to that cross, he would have had a little platform fixed towards the bottom of the vertical beam. This was a platform for which his feet were to be secured upon.

A small platform. So that as he struggled to breathe, he could push himself up, raising his diaphragm so that he could gasp for breath during the agony of crucifixion. Yet the cruelty of this is by allowing a prisoner such as this to push himself up in an almost involuntary action, he couldn't help but do so. The executioners, what were they doing? They were brutally prolonging the agony until eventually he would die by asphyxiation. A horrendous, a cruel, a dark way to die. It feels as dark as this was. There was upon that center, across some Calvary's hill, another layer of darkness. A thicker layer of darkness. A layer of darkness that we see in our narrative here physically manifested itself upon the earth. What do we read in verse 45? From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land as Jesus hung on that cross as he died that slow and painful death. What happened?

All of a sudden darkness came over the land. From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, complete and utter darkness. Let's just think about this. The crucifixion had begun at the third hour, which was 9am in the morning. This was the sixth hour, which would have been about 12 midday, just round about now. We know that our skies of course can be dark with cloud, but in no way is the light shut out in a way that we cannot see anything around us, even when we go out in the darkness of a night. I did this the other night in Grava. I went outside and where the man says there's no there's not many street lamps around. I went outside and although it was a dark night, what could I see? I could see the stars in the sky, illuminating the night sky so that I could see my surroundings, not here, not on Calvary's hill.

[11 : 21] This is pure darkness, but what caused the darkness? When in AD 79, when Mount Vesuvius erupted, the whole sky became dark and black, but this was no earthquake, volcano eruption. There was no volcanoes in Israel, or we might say and as many have said that this was caused by a solar eclipse. The moon moved in to cover the sun and that's why the whole land became dark. Yet this was impossible.

Firstly because an eclipse only lasts for a few minutes. We saw that a few years ago as television crews came up to to Covenation and everyone eagerly awaited this this eclipse that that took place only for a matter of minutes. This darkness was for ours.

And secondly at this time of Passover that the sun and the moon would would have been far apart from each other. So scientifically speaking this could not take place. This was a supernatural darkness, a darkness caused by God himself. But you know friends sometimes we struggle with this.

Even as Christians we can struggle with supernatural manifestations in the word of God. And while you know a lot of what we can see in this world can be explained scientifically, God is the God of science, undoubtedly he is the author of science. There is much in scripture that cannot be explained by science. Just think about Joshua 10. What do we see there?

What do we see there? We see that God causes the sun to stand still. We read there in verse 2, in verse 12 rather, at that time Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel and said in the sight of Israel, sun stand still at Gibbon and moon in the valley of Aishalom and the sun stood still and the moon stopped. It is absolutely nothing to the God who has created the sun, who has created the moon, the stars, the land, the sea, the sky, you and me with it. It's nothing to him to do with them, with us, what he will.

[14 : 17] That still doesn't answer our question. Why the darkness? Well to answer this, and this of course returns to the bad news if you like, we need to ask what does darkness symbolize in scripture? What is a picture of what we see many different references to darkness in scripture, but if

we come to the pages of the New Testament and we think of the solemn words of Jesus in Matthew 8, 12, we read there that the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness in that place where they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's not a pleasant picture, it's not one that even a preacher likes to paint, but it's here. Darkness is a symbol of the judgment of God and sinful mankind. And so on that cross during those hours of darkness the judgment of

God was undoubtedly unleashed, unleashed in a way like never before and never since. The sinless son of God taking to himself the hell that should have been yours and should have been mine. That's what's happening here, that if you're a Christian today he took your hell for you. We're never going to understand that of it, and we praise God for that, we will never ever have to understand that, but yet Second Corinthians 5:21 sheds a little light on the matter. For our sake we read there, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

For our sake he made him to be sin. What does this mean? Does it mean that during those hours of darkness that Jesus became a sinner? Certainly not. Of course it doesn't. God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity than to look upon sin in this way. He cannot, he will not sin even in the Person of Christ. But what it does mean is this friends, that during these three hours of darkness the Father treated the Son just as if he was a sinner. That is what is known as the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. You've heard it said he came in a room and in our stead, in a room and in our place. That's what's happening here. He's there representing you and me if we're his. That is the real reason for the three hours of darkness. The one who knew no sin becoming sin for us, experiencing the full wrath of God's judgment for each and every sin. Supposing there was but one sinner who committed one sin this would still have had to have taken place.

Then we come to these glorious words in Romans 5 verse 8. We don't leave you friends with the bad news. Today is a time of rejoicing and of joy.

But for us to truly rejoice and joy we need to know why we're rejoicing and having a sense of joy. Romans 5 verse 8, but God. Wonderful words, but God, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled we shall be saved by his life. More than that we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation justified by his blood so that you and I today can be reconciled to him not only for today, not only when we feel like it, not only when we are super spiritual but at all times if we are in Christ we are reconciled to him. What love, what boundless endless love, a love that not only spared his people from the unfettered wrath of God but also as we see here a love that spared his people from seeing the full brunt of this wrath.

[19 : 55] What a blessing that there was darkness over the land for three hours. It's not ours to see what happened on that cross.

The anguish, the agony as the fullness of the wrath of God was being unleashed upon the sun, it's not ours to see what a mercy, what a grace. The dealings of God the Father with God the Son veiled from the very ones who should in fact have been experiencing that wrath, that darkness themselves you and me with you. And the only glimpse really that we get into this darkness are in the words that bring this darkness to an end in verse 46. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Eli Eli, Lama Sabachtani, that is my God, my God why have you forsaken me? What it looked like for the Son of God to be forsaken by the Father to the extent that that broken communion led him only to be able to cry out, my God, what that truly looked like.

We can pontificate all we like but we will never know. But Jesus knows, He knows the depths of the suffering of his soul as he took to himself the darkness of our hell.

So that's why we are here today, remembering his death, coming with that sense of joy and jubilation that we have been freed but freed from what?

[21 : 55] Freed from the darkness of the bondage of sin. We're freed from a death and a darkness that we will never ever by the grace of God if we are his understand or experience a death that although we don't understand is a death and a darkness that has given us life and illuminating darkness, a darkness that today gives us the light that enables us to say because he lives I can face tomorrow. Amen. Let us pray. We bless and we thank you, O Lord, that although we cannot but come and consider the darkness of the depravity of who we are by nature and the reward for those who continue in a state of unbelief. We praise your name, O Lord, that you have not left us

without the good news of the gospel. You have not left us to ourselves but rather you have given unto us through the person and the work of your Son that new and that living way. You have on offer to all of us gathered in here without exception, light and life. And so we pray that even for any gathered here today who are perhaps still blinded by the things of this world that you would bring them to that place whereby they see that a life without Christ is a life without hope. And so we pray that you will bless us and lead us as we continue at this time and all we ask in the name of Jesus for his sake. Amen. Well friends, we see today that there are some people at the Lord's table and some who are not at the Lord's table.

We might ask, well, what is different about those who are at the Lord's table? Who is the Lord's table really for? Historically perhaps we have found ourselves stating that those who come to the Lord's table are almost those who lead a perfect life. That's not true. The only one who has ever lived a perfect life is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's table are for those who put their trust in the one who has led that perfect life. Last night I read that hymn by John Newton and then I shared a response that one of his friends had written. I'd like to share with you two or three more verses from that response which reveal to us today who the Lord's table is for.

Is this you? I want a mind more firmly fixed on Christ, my everlasting head. I want to feel my soul alive and not so barren and so dead. I want more faith, a stronger faith. I want to feel its power within. I want to feel more love to God. I want to feel less love to sin. Is that you?

I want to know Christ died for me. I want to feel the zeal within. I want to know Christ's precious blood was shed to wash away my sin. That is who the Lord's table today is for. Those who have that want. Those who have that longing, that desire. And this isn't just the words of a man. We see this in scripture. Those who thirst and hunger after righteousness. What do we read in Psalm 42?

As a deer pants for flowing streams. So pants my soul for you, oh God. My soul thirsts for God.

[26 : 50] The living God. What a picture. What a vivid picture. That of a deer panting, dehydrated, coming to the water longing for a drink. A picture that so clearly today reflects the true child of God. One whose soul pants after their saviour. One whose soul thirsts after the living God.

Not one who's completely satisfied, but one who's looking for more and more and more. Is that you today? But the only thing in this world that gives you true and lasting satisfaction is Jesus.

Well if that is you today, your place is at the table of the Lord. Not because you're strong, but rather because you are just like the deer. You come weak. You come dehydrated to that very place. You know you will get refreshment for your soul. And that's what we're going to do.

We're going to come to the Lord's table. We're at the Lord's table rather and we are going to drink. Not because we're perfect. Not because we're the finished article. Because not because we are worthy.

But because He is worthy. And that this cup is only ours to drink because our saviour, he thirsted. He thirsted as he drank every last drop of God's wrath for you and for me.

[28 : 40] And so we come and we drink and we're refreshed. Precious Boner knew something of this himself. He said, I heard the voice of Jesus say, behold, I freely give the living water thirsty one stoop down and drink and live. I came to Jesus and I drank from that life giving stream. My thirst was quenched. My soul revived. And now I live in him. We come and we drink deeply today from the wells of salvation by faith feeding off the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we're going to move on to doing just that.

We're going to sing together from Psalm 118 verse of all verses 16 to 21. Psalm 118 verse 16, the right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is on high. The right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever valiantly standing to sing to the praise of God.