

Transcription of 19TM799

Luke 23:44-49

"Silence and Darkness at High Noon"

April 19, 2019

Let's open our Bibles this afternoon, if you're with us, to Luke 23:44.

On the evening that led up to Calvary, Jesus spent most of the afternoon and evening with His men, the twelve He had chosen. He sat with them at the last supper. John records every word that was spoken that we're supposed to have, beginning in chapter 13 through chapter 17. And then, after supper and after the discussion, He walked with them down the Kidron Valley, through the water that would be gathering the blood from the sacrifices up on the Temple Mount; He would have had to walk with His feet through the waters of bloody sacrifice that He would ultimately be Himself. He went over to the Garden of Gethsemane, speaking to them of the Holy Spirit that was with them, would soon be dwelling in them, teach them, lead them and empower them. For the next three hours, Jesus would agonize in the Garden alone - His disciples, most of them outside the gate, three of them fast asleep - sweating great drops of blood, coming to terms with the ultimate sacrifice, to be separated from His Father. It never had happened. But if you were to not be separated, He would have to be. Because sin does that - it separates. "Father, not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

And then came Judas with maybe a thousand people armed to the teeth to grab one Man. They couldn't have been too silent, coming across that Kidron Valley; you could hear every pin drop. But Jesus wasn't there to get away; He was there to surrender. Judas kisses Him - a welcome. The arrest is made by the soldiers that are with Him. The disciples all run and hide, and during the night, six successive illegal trials are gathered together to take care of Jesus: first He's taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then the Sanhedrin, then over to Pilate, who tries to dump Him off on Herod, who can't get anywhere with Him and sends Him back to Pilate. And you read, in the Bible, that this is the hour and the power of darkness. And they believed that now finally they had won. With Barabbas released, Jesus is beaten again. A crown of thorns is placed on His head. And He's led away to be crucified, first carrying His own cross. But the beating has caused Him great drops of blood. He stops to speak to some ladies gathered in tears, watching the procession go by of the future of Jerusalem, and then, when He hits the city gates, He just can't do it any longer, and they grab a fellow named Simon of Cyrene to commission him to carry the cross the rest of the way - up to Golgotha - an

experience that we read in the Scriptures will lead to his salvation, though he hadn't come here for that.

Jesus would pray for those that were driving the nails through His hands. And by 9:00 that first Good Friday morning, He would be hanging on a cross. And He would stay there for the next six hours - till 3:00 in the afternoon. Each Good Friday, we gather together somewhere to celebrate or to commemorate or to consider this greatest of love that God chose for man; not only that He made us but then us turning from Him, He came to redeem us. He made us, and then He bought us. The first three hours - from 9:00 to noon - saw the crowds mock, saw one of the two thieves that was crucified with Him on either side join in the mockery. However, one of them soon came to his senses and asked the Lord to forgive him, to make sure that he was with Him on that day. Jesus prayed during that first three hours, three times, "Father, forgive them," (those who are hammering nails through My hands) "for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). He assured the thief, as he turned to the Lord, that, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). He turned to John, who stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, His mother, and said to John, "Behold your mother!" and to Mary, "Behold your son!" (John 19:26-27). For the first three hours, Jesus suffered at the hands of men.

But in the final three hours, He suffered at the hands of God. And the judgment of God against the sins of the world would now be poured out upon His own dear Son. Paul would write to the Corinthians (in his second letter) that, "He who knew no sin would become sin for us so that we could be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21), or, if you want, so we could have a right standing with God. We read, here in verse 44, that "it was about the sixth hour," (or noon) "and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour." A sudden, ominous darkness that covered the earth - darkness at high noon.

As you read through the Bible, you recognize that God had always sought to speak to man. He spoke to man, first and foremost, through His world that He created. We read in Psalms of the creation and how it speaks of who He is - Psalm 19 - how it declares His power and His existence. He was a Creator. But He also spoke to us through His Word, declaring who He was and what He wanted, telling us what would come and then it did. For centuries, God spoke to man through the Old Testament.

But then there came a time when God just stopped talking altogether. There are sixty-six books in your Bible; thirty-nine of them are in the Old Testament. If you page through them, and you get to the book of Malachi (the last book of the Old Testament), and you just flip a page, there's Matthew waiting for you to read. And you say, "Well, it seems to go together so seamlessly." But, in reality, those two books are 400 years apart; and in those 400 years, God did not say one word. No prophet. No revelation. Radio silence. A moratorium in heaven.

Then one night, out of the blue, the silence is broken outside the city of Bethlehem in the Shepherds Fields, and the first message in 400 years is delivered. "Don't be afraid. Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy for all people. There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, and He's lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12) The long-awaited Messiah, Emmanuel - God with us - had been born. We aren't told much about this Child until He is ready to step onto the public stage. But as Jesus grows in obscurity, and when He comes of age and finally begins His public ministry, He would begin to speak to everyone the words of the Father. And God was speaking again. When they sent the soldiers (the Sanhedrin) to arrest Him, and they came back empty-handed, they said to them, "Where is He?" and they said, "Oh, you've never heard someone speak like Him" (John 7:46). And God's Word was again in the forefront. He would speak God's Word, He would do God's work, He would show God's power, and He would present Himself as God's solution for man's sin as being the Son of God. John was so moved by what he saw in Jesus, and the things that he learned from Him and the things that he heard from Him, that we read in 1 John that he begins his little epistle towards the back of your Bible, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us" through the Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-2). "We want you to know Him as we know Him," and he writes that 65 years after Jesus had already gone to heaven. He heard from God. God had spoken. Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, said, as he began that long book, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). And the quiet was broken. And the Lord began to speak. When the people wouldn't immediately understand what Jesus would say, many would just leave. He said, in John 6:53, "Unless you eat My body and drink My blood, you have no life," and people said, "That's gross." But Jesus

had explained the analogies that He was using. He turned to His disciples and said, "Are you leaving, too?" (John 6:67) And they said, "Lord, where are we supposed to go when you have the words of eternal life?" (John 6:68) For three and a half years, Jesus spoke the words of His Father.

But on Good Friday, God quit speaking, and darkness covered the earth and overwhelmed the people. God went offline. For 33 years earlier, it had been just the opposite. That night that He was born outside of Bethlehem, the angels sang, the light shone, and the Light of the World was born. But on that first Good Friday, the lights went out as the Light of the World hung, dying. If you read Bible scholars (not always the wisest thing to do), there are some - not believing in the resurrection or in the account of the Bible - who will seek to explain this darkness at noon as an eclipse. Fortunately, we are told in the Bible - very clearly in several places - this happened on a Passover, which just happens to be a time of a full moon which would mean that the moon was opposite, entirely, to the sun. Couldn't be an eclipse. That'd have been an even greater miracle! No, no, no. This was a work of God without comment in the Scriptures. It just happens. Not explained, this darkness, and Jesus' response. But we know from every other place that we see darkness fall upon man that God's judgment falls. It is an outward sign of God's judgment in every place that you turn, in every place that you look. When Jesus was speaking about that time when He would return to judge the world again, He said, in Matthew 24:29, "And after those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon won't give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, the powers of heaven will be shaken," and He spoke of the judgment that He would bring when He returns again. Amos, in speaking to the nation at a time when they were far from the LORD, said to them in chapter 5:18, as the LORD spoke through the prophet Amos, "Woe to you who desire this day of the LORD! Because that day will not be good for you. It will be darkness, it won't be light. It'll be great darkness, and there'll be no light. It'll be very dark. There'll be no brightness at all." Because for those who aren't ready when the Lord comes, it's judgment that awaits them. And Jesus turned to His own in John 8:12, and He said, "I am the light of the world. You follow Me, you won't walk in darkness. You'll have the light of life."

So this visible evidence of absolute darkness that covered the world's skies at noon and stayed there for three hours tells us of this being the time that Jesus was receiving from God the judgment and the sins of the world laid upon Him there at Calvary. "Behold! The Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29); this bitter cup of separation that caused Jesus to so agonize in the

Garden. The thought of separation from the Father - of being out of fellowship with Him - that's what put the pressure on Him to sweat such great drops of blood. It wasn't the pain, though it was substantial and would be overwhelming to all of us. But that wasn't the issue; the issue was what sin would do to Him, what sin has done to us. Sin separates. Isaiah 59:1 says, "The LORD's hand - it isn't that it's shortened. And it isn't that He can't save or that His ear is heavy, that He can't hear. It's our sins - they've separated between us and God. It's your sins that have hidden His face from you, that He can't and He won't hear you." So Jesus would die in our place. People say sometimes, "Why do you make such a big deal about Jesus?" He's the only One that would die in my place! You can't die in my place. You're a sinner. You die for you. He died for us. That's why it's such a Good Friday for everyone except Him; but even for Him it was a Good Friday. We read the LORD declaring, in Isaiah 53:10-11, that "it pleased the LORD to bruise His Son, so that by the knowledge of Him many would be made right." Even God was happy with this first Friday. Oh, it cost Him plenty. But it was His thrill and His joy to bring you to Himself.

For three hours, in the silence of darkness, this process continued. We have no explanation. We don't know what it involved. We don't know how that whole thing worked itself out. We know that Jesus was in tremendous agony, that there's no way that we have ever been able to realize or understand what He was going through. We taught a couple of years ago, on a Good Friday, out of Psalm 22, which is probably the greatest description that you'll have of the painful suffering of Jesus during these three hours. And we pointed out to you then, and just remind you now, Jesus, when He hung here, was alone. Even at your worst, you can always pray, "Lord, help me," and God will hear. But Jesus, "Father, where are You?" and Father wouldn't answer. He had nowhere else to go. That's it. He's out of luck. There's no place to turn. He suffers the separation that sin brings into our lives. For three hours, it was quiet. Heaven was silent, and the Son bore our sins. Matthew 27:46 tells us that towards the ninth hour, towards 3:00, He cried out, "*Eli, eli, lama sabachthani*. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Where are You?" Psalm 22 begins with those very words, "Why are You so far from helping Me? Why are You so far from the words of My groaning?" The anguish and the depths of His pain, I think unfathomable but worth it to Him as the darkness fell, and God's judgment came, and you and I are let off the hook because of Him.

You might remember that, when Israel was in bondage in Egypt, the LORD sent Moses and those ten plagues that came over a period of about nine months or so,

where the LORD's constant declaration was, "Let My people go." Three days before the first Passover, when they would be released from Egypt, God brought a darkness upon the land that Exodus tell us that you could feel it. It was so thick, people couldn't move. It fell upon Egypt. It was God's judgment upon those who wouldn't release His people. There, it was three days of darkness. Here, it is three hours of darkness accompanying Jesus' death for the sins of the world, our Passover Lamb. Attachment is pretty clear. The One without spot or blemish, tasting death for every man.

If you go to Revelation 16:10, very close to the time of the Lord's return, you will read about a fifth vial that is opened by the angel and that the kingdom of the Antichrist and of the beast will become filled with darkness. They'll be gnawing their tongues in pain. They'll be blaspheming the God of heaven....their pain and their sores. And yet they will not repent of their deeds. And this forerunner, this precursor of the Lord's return to judge, finds man still unwilling, even in the darkness and in the pain of what he is suffering to turn to God. It is merciless, and yet people are not really preparing themselves to meet the Maker.

So there's a lot to be said for verse 44, this darkness that fell.

We read, in verse 45, "Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the Temple was torn in two." The second visible evidence at the death of Jesus, and the purpose for His coming to take our punishment, was to also open the way for you and me to get to God. This veil in the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the holy place where the priest served and which contained the presence of God - this veil, 60' long, several inches thick - would now meet its end because God was speaking again. We know from Matthew's gospel that this event took place the moment that Jesus died. Luke doesn't put it in any chronological method as Matthew does because Luke is interested in the reactions at the cross. But Matthew 27:50-51 tells us, very clearly, that it was on the time of Jesus' death He cried out and said, with a loud voice, releasing His spirit, then the veil of the Temple tore in two from the top to the bottom. And the Lord provided a way in. God was sending a message to the Temple itself, "We don't need any more priests now, and we don't need any more sacrifices. This separation between God and man has now been removed in the death of My Son for the sins of the world." The door is open. Fellowship with God is available. Intimacy with God is possible and permanent. And, at the ninth hour on the Feast Day of the Passover, the priest would have been extremely busy preparing for the evening sacrifice. But those

priests had never seen the other side of that veil. In fact, the high priest was the only one that could go back there, and only one day a year - on the Day of Atonement; and then only after he'd offered lots of sacrifices for himself and for the people because you can't go into the presence of a holy God and expect to make it. So they put bells on the hem of his garment so that, as he was walking in, they'd know he'd lived and survived it. And then they would tie a rope to his ankle so if he dropped dead, they could pull him out and send in the vice president kind of guy, the next guy in line, the assistant high priest. It was pretty frightening, the presence of God. And Jesus dies, and He tears this huge veil, and this thing is put out of commission. "Just come in. Come in." God had made man to have fellowship with Him - you and me. Sin had broken the communion. When Adam and Eve were given the rules of the garden, the LORD said, "In the day you eat of this tree, you're going to die" (Genesis 2:17). And you read it, and you go, "Well, they didn't die." Oh, they did. Their fellowship with God was ended. Sin had stepped in. And from that day forward, there was that separation. You go through the Old Testament, you find all of these animal sacrifices, and they were intended to be a picture that this work of Jesus that we celebrate today has come and was coming. But the blood of those animals couldn't remove sin. You read, in Hebrews 10:4, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." But Jesus came in the form of a Man. He was our relative, so to speak. He came as we are, but without sin. And so He could stand and take away - not just pay for but remove the sin by His body broken and His blood shed.

When Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about how to get to heaven and be right with God, He reached into the Old Testament (which Nicodemus would have known really well) and reached back to Numbers 21, and He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). If you go back and read the Numbers 21 story, you know that the children of Israel, as they were wont to do, were always complaining against God. And God, one day, had had enough and sent lots of snakes into the camp from the outer edges to the inner. People started to be bit and die, and they freaked out. And all of a sudden, complaints stopped, and requests for prayer began. As Moses prayed, the LORD said, "Moses, I want you to take a brass serpent, stick it on a pole, hold it up in the midst of the people where they can see it, and whoever will look at that brass serpent, though they've been bitten, will live." It's an interesting picture because brass is a metal (in the Old Testament) of judgment. And there, on this pole, the serpent was being judged - the one who had brought the lies and the suggestions

of rebellion. But here's the salvation that God has always provided. It isn't by what you do for Him. It's simply do you believe Him? You could have been bit by a snake and went, "That's not gonna help me! Get me some antibiotics or something!" No, no. Just believe. Believe God's Word. And those who looked and believed were delivered. So today. God judges the sins of the world at the cross. Your only hope is to look there and believe, that if you trust in Jesus, He'll give you life. You don't get any credit that way; He does. But that's still the invitation. So, by His death, God provides access for all. The veil is torn from top to bottom. What a moment in the darkness, as this thick veil is torn down by God's hand, and Jesus' blood becomes the admission price for all.

We read, in verse 46, "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, *into Your hands I commit My spirit.*' Having said this, He breathed His last." Chronologically, again, in these three hours of silence, towards the end, Jesus said a couple of things that Luke does not record. John does. He said, first of all, "I'm thirsty," (John 19:28), and I think He said that only because breathing through your mouth, trying to get air as you're crucified, you die of suffocation - He wanted to be sure everyone heard the next words. And the next words were, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Man's salvation is complete. The sacrifice is done. The full payment has been paid. And on that first Easter, three days later, the firstfruits of His death will be reaped among the 120. Read John 20 or Luke 24. "It is finished!" Look, the next time someone suggests to you that believing in Jesus is not enough, show them this verse. The word "*tetelestai*" means just that - done, complete, shut the book. Now let me point out to you and I'm a big fan of the New King James, I think it effectively replaces the 'thous' and the 'thees,' which we don't use much. But I should tell you that those letters and those words in italics in verse 46, "*Into Your hands I commit My spirit,*" should not be in italics. They are in the original, at least the earliest manuscripts that we have, they are there; they are found in the regular Old King James Version. It is a direct quote from Psalm 31:5, and unfortunately the translators have decided they're going to make it out as if that wasn't part of the original. I would beg to differ. You can put that in your file, and put "Pastor Jack said so." You'll see that to be so. The first words, by the way, that Jesus speaks in the book of Luke, "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49). The last words in this book, "It is finished!" "I went to do My Father's work. Now it's done. Now it's complete." His separation was over. Death would pay the price. Jesus would leave in the spirit to go to where the Old Testament souls were kept in Abraham's bosom. He would gather them together, there in Hades - the grave. He would deliver them to heaven.

Three days later, He would return to give His own infallible proofs of His victory. "Into Your hands I commit My spirit." For the last many days and weeks, He'd been in the hands of men, especially this morning. But now He'd head back to the hands of the Father. No place better for you and me to be than in God's hands.

You might go back and read sometime 2 Samuel 24, where it talked about David numbering his army. God was angry. He wanted to be the trust in David's heart, and usually He was. But to deal with David's numbering of the people, He sent the prophet Gad to David, and the prophet said, "David, you're going to be punished because everyone should know that God doesn't approve of you trying to measure your strength by your own army. So, 'You have three choices, three things that you can decide that you want to do or that I can bring to your life, three punishments that you have to pick from. And either you can choose three months of running from your enemy, seven years of famine, or seven days of plague at My hand.' " And David, without batting an eye, says, "I'll just choose whatever God's going to bring because I'd rather suffer at His hand than be left in the hands of others." Good choice, David. "Into Your hands I commit My spirit." You see, Jesus didn't die. He was done. He left. "And then Jesus died." No. He left. It was done. It was over. "No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down. I have the power to lay it down, I have the power to pick it up." (John 10:17-18)

When the soldiers came to break His legs to hurry along His death (it usually takes two or three, maybe four days to die on a cross), they were surprised that He was already dead; so surprised, Pilate sent the boys back to be sure. They stuck Him in the side with a lance. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would come to facilitate His burial. They came out of the closet with their faith. But these last words of Jesus, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit, it's finished." John Knox, when he died, said that same thing. So did John Huss. So did Mary Queen of Scots. Whatever you say, this is the way you go as a Christian. You go home to your Father. And that's because Jesus came to get you, and He longs for your return.

In the last couple of verses just in this section we're told of a centurion standing by, glorifying God and saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" That there was a crowd who was standing together, watching this and seeing what had been done. They beat their breasts and they returned. And all of His acquaintances and the women who followed Him stood at a distance, watching these things. The centurion in charge of the execution must have been a tough guy. Imagine that's your job -

you and a hundred other guys - your job: puttin' people to death. He's done it a hundred times. But there was something different here. When Jesus dies, he declares Jesus' innocence and righteousness, "Certainly this was the Son of God!" and he glorified God and gave God honor. This'll be the second person that seems to have come around in the last few hours. First a thief, now a centurion. In a couple of days, 120 others at least.

In the large crowd, verse 48, there's a lot of despair, a lot of fear, a lot of trauma, beating their breasts, unable to look, extremely sad. But they went home disturbed but unconverted; there's no comment about them changing their ways. Now, we might look forward to Acts 2 and say, "Well, just a few days down the road there'll be three thousand people get saved. Maybe some of them will be there." I hope that's true. Five thousand would follow a bit later on. And then there're these wonderful women in verse 49 - Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, others - they're all named for you in the four gospels. But they stayed till the bitter end. They saw with their own eyes Jesus dying. With rivers of tears, they watched Him go. But they would be the first to discover that this is far from being over. They were the last at the cross; they were the first at the tomb on Easter morning. Mary Magdalene would lead the charge. And though it might have looked as if God had stopped speaking again - when Jesus died, the women cried, the apostles fled, the demons of hell rejoiced - give it a couple of days. The Lord isn't done speaking just yet. Satan's first words to the woman in the garden led to her spiritual death. The first woman to see Jesus alive after the resurrection was weeping and was asked, "Who are you looking for, and who are you seeking?" And she talked about Jesus, and the angel said, "He's alive."

So, I think you have all of the ingredients for the gospel in just five verses. God judges sin. He's shown Himself to do that constantly, through centuries of Bible reporting. He ultimately came to speak to us through His Son so that no one would be in doubt that the only way you're going to get from here to Him is through this death that Jesus would suffer, where He brought darkness upon the whole earth as He took our sin. And that, if we would believe in Him and turn to Him and trust in Him, then we'll find life. The thief found it. The centurion found it. Mary Magdalene and the other ladies found it. So did the disciples who were on the run. So did most of you. The door's open. There's no way that you can go, "Well, I don't know if the Lord wants to see me." Oh, no. The door's open. "Yeah, but you don't know what I've done." Yeah, it doesn't matter. The door's open. The report is always on God's side of things; not how rotten you are, but how good He is. The

door's open. I love when people go, "I don't know if God'll take me." Oh, yeah. He'll take you. I wouldn't take you, but He'll take you. But you don't want to know what I think; you want to know what He thinks.

The wrath of God depicted in the spiritual and supernatural darkness, the holiness of God as the Father turns His back upon His Son, the grace of God found in the open door that God sets before the soldier and the thief and the folks at the Temple - the crucifixion removes the curtain of separation. You're all invited to come in. If you don't, not His fault. If you don't, you can't blame Him. You're never going to be able to stand before God and say, "I didn't think You'd take me." Listen to me again. He'll take you. There. Now you're on the hook.

Shall we pray?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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