

He Must Go To Jerusalem

*²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.
(Matthew 16:21. ESV)*

The Death Of Jesus

Good Friday

April 18th, 2014

Matthew 27:45-56

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles please to Matthew 27:45-56. This is Matthew's account of the death of our Lord. We'll read it and by God's grace, divide it as we go. Hear now the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God:

Reading And Understanding The Text:

Matthew 27:45-56 (ESV)

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

There Was Darkness Over All The Land...

All three of the synoptic Gospels¹ mention this darkness and all three agree that it took place between the sixth hour and the ninth; that is between noon and 3 p.m. The word that is translated in the ESV as "land" can also mean "world", "country" or "ground" but most commentators understand it here in the sense of "country" meaning that this was some sort of localized darkening of the sun. We know that it could not have been a normal solar eclipse because Passover happens at full moon; therefore, whatever the immediate cause, it was unusual and remarkable. Early Christian apologists refer to the fact that Roman historians noted the strange occurrence in their records but we do not have any of those original records and so it is difficult

¹ "Synoptic" means "to see together". The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark and Luke because they are so similar to each other and are best studied or "seen" together. John adopts a very different approach.

to say for certain what caused it or how widely it was observed. One Egyptian writer makes reference to a strange darkness over Palestine saying: “Either the God of nature is suffering, or the machine of the world is tumbling into ruin”² – but again he says nothing about the immediate cause or the breadth of observation.

It is clear to us from the text that Matthew means for us to interpret this symbol of darkness through the lens of the words of Christ that he records in the very next verse:

⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Jesus says the first two words in Hebrew – “Eli, Eli” and quotes the rest in Aramaic – this is prayer in the language of Scripture. He is adopting lines from Psalm 22 to pour out his heart to God. The Gospels record Jesus as quoting several lines of that Psalm throughout the events of the crucifixion so it is worth taking a look at. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 22. I’ll read it to you and highlight for you the verses that are either quoted by Jesus or alluded to by the Gospel writers:

Psalm 22:1-31 (ESV)

¹ **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, **scorned by mankind and despised by the people.**

⁷ **All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;**

⁸ **“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”**

⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts.

¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

¹² Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴ **I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;**

¹⁵ **my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.**

¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; **they have pierced my hands and feet—**

² Dionysius of Heliopolis as quoted in Matthew Henry, *Matthew To John*, Matthew Henry’s Commentary. New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1935; 428.

- ¹⁷ I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ **they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.**
¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!
²² I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and **he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.**
²⁵ **From you comes my praise in the great congregation;** my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!
²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and **all the families of the nations shall worship before you.**
²⁸ For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.
²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive.
³⁰ Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
³¹ **they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.**

There is a ton we could say here – you could easily preach an entire Good Friday sermon on the significance of Psalm 22 to our theology of the cross but let me just point out a few things. First of all notice that Jesus interprets his experiences through the lens of Holy Scripture. Jesus is having a profound experience! He is not just imagining that significant things are going on – the WHOLE UNIVERSE is testifying to him that his experience has COSMIC SIGNIFICANCE and yet; he does not wander off into astrological contemplation, rather, he roots himself in Holy Scripture. He understands this experience as the one prophesied of Messiah by the Spirit through David. The Scriptures said that Messiah would suffer, be scorned, be pierced and abused and mocked and worst of all, experience a rupture in his fellowship with Almighty God – this is where we most need help in our understanding.

What does it mean that Jesus experienced disruption in his fellowship with the Father? Liberal theologians have often suggested that on the cross Jesus felt disillusioned; that he had expected to be rescued or delivered and when it became clear to him that he would die he felt horrible disorientation and despair. Of course this says a great deal about the Biblical ignorance of liberal theologians and very little about what Jesus was thinking in Matthew 27. We remember that Jesus had known full well that he would not be delivered from crucifixion – he told the disciples that very thing way back in chapter 20:

Matthew 20:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death

¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be **mocked and flogged and crucified**, and he will be raised on the third day.”

Jesus was not unclear about what awaited him in Jerusalem – he is not expressing disillusionment on the cross. Look carefully at the first 5 verses of Psalm 22:

¹ **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

³ **Yet you are holy**, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were rescued; **in you they trusted and were not put to shame**.

Jesus is saying, through the words of Psalm 22, that he was experiencing the feeling of severed fellowship but he is not saying that he has lost faith; he is not saying that God is other than he thought; and he is not saying that he no longer trusts in his vindication and deliverance. We have to be very careful here lest we accidentally say something heretical. When Jesus was on the cross, when darkness covered the land, the New Testament suggests that something mysterious and terrible was happening that obscured or eclipsed the brightness of fellowship that had characterized the earthly life of Christ. As difficult as it is to imagine, Jesus was “becoming sin”, that is he was bearing the sins of the world and drinking the cup of God’s fury against iniquity:

Isaiah 53:5-6 (ESV)

... upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, ... the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

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.

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”—

On the cross Jesus was saturated and immersed in the sin of the world. Like being drowned in a flood of effluent, Jesus became identified with all that God hates and in that moment and under that flood there was an eclipse of God’s favour and it fell upon the face of Jesus like a cloud. In that moment, as never before, the smile of God was hidden from the face of the Son. The Bible says of God:

Habakkuk 1:13 (HCSB)

¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and You cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

That is why the song says: “The Father turned his face away” – it is not that there was a disruption in the communion of the Trinity – such a thing cannot even be contemplated – it is that Jesus in his human nature, having lived a perfect life and having enjoyed for every second of that life the perfect sweetness of Divine fellowship, now suddenly finds his adoration of the face of God interrupted by the effluent of human sins poured out upon him to the dregs. And in that moment as he bears the sum of our iniquity and filth; the Father looks away. You can hold on to someone and yet look away and that is what Jesus experienced on the cross as the chief and most piercing of his agonies.

My friend you should know that a difference exists for all people – not only for the Lord – between the reality of union and the experience of fellowship with respect to God the Father. If you are a true Christian; if you are truly born again and saved by grace through faith, then you can never be truly separated from God – the Bible says that explicitly:

Romans 8:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And yet the Bible also says:

Psalms 66:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

And again,

Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Christian people – SAVED, SEALED and REDEEMED people can grieve the Holy Spirit by cherishing sin in their hearts and as a result of that they will experience a rupture in their fellowship with Almighty God. You can call out to him all you want, he will not hear. Our

grandparents knew about that. They wrote about it in our first confession. They said, speaking about the experience of saved people:

And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the **neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins**, and for a time continue therein, **whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit**, come to have their graces and **comforts impaired**, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, **yet shall they renew** their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.³

Our grandparents said that it is possible for real Christians, by neglect of the means of preservation, to fall into sin and to incur God's displeasure and to grieve his Holy Spirit and to have their comfort horribly impaired and YET NOT ultimately to be cut off, not ultimately to fall, but to be renewed. PRAISE GOD for the last clause in that sentence! That sentence is hope for the wayward and salve to the soul of many broken hearted parents in this room. But, if you've ever stood in this place as a believer – as someone who has been born again and who has loved the face of God with all your heart only to then, through your own stupidity and neglect, to find yourself under shadow and the palpable disfavor of God then you know, you have just the slightest, partial insight into what Jesus experienced on the cross that day and you know that it was horrible. Have you ever felt the clouds pass between you and the face of God because of sin? I have and it almost destroyed my soul. I bear the scar and the burden of that season with me still and sometimes I almost can't get out of bed in the morning from the sheer memory of its weight. And yet what is that compared to this? What heights of fellowship had Christ known that I had never? And what depths of depravity did he swallow that I can't even conceive of, even in my own pathetic state? We can only imagine and even that falls infinitely short.

In those hours of darkness, Jesus drank the cup of human sin and he drank it to the DREGS! He never lost hold of God by faith – he still prayed “MY God, MY God” and he never for a second doubted his vindication; he said: “in you they trusted and were not put to shame” but in those hours of darkness he lost the warmth and the comfort and the joy of fellowship and it nearly broke his heart. If you can't imagine the agony then you have never known the joy. In that moment Christ suffered not the loss of real union, but the eclipse of intimate fellowship.

Matthew continues:

³ The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689, Chapter 17, Paragraph 3.

⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah."

⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.

⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

Jesus Cried Out Again And Yielded Up His Spirit...

When the cup had been drunk and when the work had been finished, Jesus yielded up his spirit.

It was not taken from him; he laid it down willingly.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,

⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

And Behold!

Here Matthew lays out some of the signs that accompanied the death of Christ and by so doing points us in the direction of its effect. Three things are emphasized:

- i. The curtain of the temple was torn in two

The symbolism here is hard to miss and indeed it is picked up on later in the New Testament.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says:

Hebrews 10:19-22 (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.

The tearing of the temple curtain was a sign that the way to God now lay WIDE OPEN because of the life and death of Jesus Christ! We who were once far off can now draw near. We who were once enemies and strangers to God now may crawl up into the lap of God with all the confidence and boldness of children with their Fathers, expecting welcome, safety and embrace.

Secondly, Matthew says:

ii. The earth shook and the rocks split

From this we infer that the death of Christ had significance for all of creation, not only the souls of men and women. Romans 8 says:

Romans 8:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope

²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Creation itself has an interest in the effect of the cross. The hope for this planet is not Al Gore or recycling or carbon tax or cap and trade – the hope for our planet is the cross of Jesus Christ. Creation itself looks forward to the plan of redemption being completed, the children of God revealed and the Lord of Creation returning to renew all things and to rule over all things to the glory of God the Father.

Thirdly, Matthew says:

iii. The tombs were opened and many of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised

This of course is a promise and a foretaste of the resurrection. Our God is a God who strengthens faith by means of foretaste and first fruit. We are to see in this the promise of our own hope and we are to find in this our courage for sacrifice and service.

Matthew concludes his account saying:

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

⁵⁵ There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him,

⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

The Centurion And Also Many Women...

Gentiles and women saw what none of Jesus' brothers stayed to see. The invitation here; it seems to me; is to draw near and to consider. I mentioned last Sunday that the Gospels are laid out rather like a High School essay; there is a thesis statement at the beginning, followed by evidence and argument, climaxing in conclusion. In John's Gospel it is Doubting Thomas who declares at the end: "My Lord and my God!" Here it is a Roman centurion supported by a witness of women. They saw and they believed – church history records that this Roman soldier went on to become a faithful disciple – whether that is true or not I can't confirm – but clearly, Matthew intends us to view the cross as a thing to be considered. Who is this who hangs upon the tree? What has happened here? What does it mean? What should we do?

What Shall We Do?

I leave you with the answer given by Peter, who preached on the cross to his fellow Jews who like him had missed what this Roman and these women saw. Peter said:

Acts 2:36-40 (ESV)

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

Repent and be baptized. Repent. Realize that you can never work your way back to peace with God. See and understand that Jesus has paid for your sins in his body on the cross – that's why it was dark, that's why he EXPERIENCED the pain of separation, that's how he satisfied the wrath of God – what can you add to that? Nothing! Let go your works and effort and cling to the cross of Christ. Renounce your sin, turn your back upon it and trust in Jesus. Repent. And be baptized. There are no private Christians. We believe therefore we speak. We repent, therefore we profess. On Easter Sunday we have 7 people preparing for baptism and there is water enough for more. Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the promise is for you and your children, for all who are far off; everyone whom the Lord our God calls unto himself. This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.