

24 Hours - Darkness

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Bible Text: Mark 15:33-37

Preached on: Sunday, March 11, 2012

Today we find ourselves with three hours of time. From noon until three o'clock in the afternoon the Bible records that the sun was darkened over the entire place. And it is into these three hours that Jesus will make the fourth of the seven statements from the cross. We are going to read a statement that causes so many people to struggle so much when Jesus will say:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”¹

So if you will, turn with me to Mark chapter 15, this most intriguing time period in the life and the ministry of Jesus, beginning in verse 33 of Mark 15.

It says: “And when the sixth hour...”²

By the way, this is Jewish time. So the sixth hour to them would be noon to us.

And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink, saying, let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take Him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.³

It is a very simple passage of Scripture as far as quantity is concerned, but it takes us three hours of time, from what we would know as noon until three, and at the conclusion of this darkness Jesus makes this statement that, as we will see in a moment, is somewhat problematic.

And really in today's message there are two pillars, there are two things that we are going to focus on: somewhat of a problematic statement or phrase and we are also going to discuss a very peculiar prophecy, the statement that Jesus makes about: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”⁴

¹ Mark 15:34.

² Mark 15:33.

³ Mark 15:33-37.

⁴ Mark 15:34.

And the fact that it was dark for three hours.

And so we will begin with that “problematic” phrase. And when I say that it is problematic I have put it in quotations to say that I do not believe, as you will see in just a moment, that there really is any problem at all. But initially when we hear Jesus say: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”⁵

We struggle with that. We question why He would say it in such a manner.

Now if Jesus had said, “My Father, my Father, why have you forsaken me?”, can I confess we would have real problems, because it was earlier in the day, in our 24 hour period where Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed: “...not my will, but thine, be done.”⁶

Where He prayed: “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”⁷ Where He prayed in the garden, “Father, my only purpose is to glorify you.”

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, when they came and said, “Jesus, how do we pray?” He said, “When you pray, pray Our Father which art in heaven.”

Here in this statement Jesus does not say, “My Father, my Father,” he says: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”⁸

And I think it is quotations that are a problem, because we think it is as problematic as it looks on the surface. The way that we can break this down is first to realize this is a very purposeful statement.

In the gospel of John 21 it makes a very simple statement that if everything Jesus were to say and do were written down, all the books of the world could not contain it.

Now, historically speaking when that statement was made, the library in Alexandria, Egypt, had in excess of a million volumes. Today we have what we know as the Library of Congress and other such access to knowledge, information and books. But I think the Bible has given us something very clear, that when we have what we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, there is a purpose behind it.

For example, Jesus tells thirty-three parables that are recorded in the gospels. Are you honestly to believe that maybe occasionally He didn’t omit an extra one? Now I know what you are thinking.

You are saying, “Jeff, that is almost like borderline blasphemy. You mean we don’t have everything that Jesus said?”

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Luke 22:42.

⁷ John 17:4.

⁸ Mark 15:34.

Let me ask you a question. What happened between ages twelve and thirty? It is not there. It is not that He was in a vacuum. They didn't have Him in a cell somewhere, locked up until when He turned thirty then they would let Him go. Do you honestly believe that the only sermons He gave were the one on the mount and the one on the plain? My point in that is that if we had everything Jesus said and everything Jesus... Do we honestly believe He only healed three guys? If we had it all written down, can you imagine how.... you couldn't carry the Bible anywhere. It would be massive.

But here is the great news. In 2 Timothy 2 it says all Scripture is given by God, it is inspired by God; it is breathed by God. Listen to what it says: It says for correction and for rebuke and for encouragement.

Do you realize that God has given us what we need, not what we think we want. So when He gives us those thirty three parables, what He is simply saying is, "This is all you need. You are covered with this." When He gives us the three guys who were healed of their blindness He says, "That is all you need in this particular situation."

We have everything we need. Now this is why it is important. Jesus is only recorded as saying seven statements from the cross. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say He only said seven things. It is recorded seven statements. He could have said an eighth. He could have said a ninth. We don't know. What we do know is that in God's infinite wisdom, He only gave us seven. And yet God gave us one that we struggle with. I mean, do we have any problem with: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."⁹ We like that one. But how about: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"¹⁰ We say why that one? And this is what I mean by the purpose.

At the end of the gospel of John chapter 20 when summing up the life of Jesus it says, "All these things were written so that you might believe."

Everything given to us about the life of Jesus is so that we might believe upon Him, we might receive his grace, and we might receive his forgiveness. So when it says: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"¹¹

You do understand that God could have placed any of the statements on there. He gave us that one with this purpose. So that by hearing Jesus say that, you would not be confused, you would not be deceived, you would not be bothered, but you would hear Jesus make these words and say, "Because of that I believe that He is the Son of God."

That is the purpose of this statement. It is not there to confuse us. It is not there to bother us. It is not there so that we go, "What is that?" It is there so that we might believe. It has a very distinct, particular purpose. But it also has a very particular placement.

⁹ Luke 23:34.

¹⁰ Mark 15:34.

¹¹ Ibid.

As I mentioned, there are seven statements that Jesus makes from the cross that are recorded. Traditionally they are placed in this order:

Jesus is placed upon the cross roughly about nine or 10 o'clock in the morning. The first thing that traditionally comes out of His mouth is: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹²

At some point between there and noon there are two other statements made. Those statements include Him turning to John, by the way, the only one of the men who was at the cross. It was John and four women. And He says: "Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!"¹³ The third statement is the one that we studied previously where He says to the thief: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."¹⁴ Then there are three hours of darkness and the statement: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"¹⁵ is spoken. And then immediately after that there are three other statements. The statement: "I thirst."¹⁶ "It is finished."¹⁷ "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."¹⁸

Now the reason I say that there is a particular order or it is real particular is because of this. The first three statements are made in a very short amount of time. The last three statements are made in a very short amount of time. We get from the Bible that those three sets of statements are made in somewhat of a calm voice. It says here that He cried out: "My God, my God..."¹⁹ You don't get the idea that He said, "I thirst."²⁰

You get the idea: "I thirst."²¹ "It is finished."²² "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."²³

And so even in the way in which these words are spoken before the darkness there is an attitude of calmness and serenity. After the darkness there is an attitude of calmness and serenity, but here is this one statement. It says: "Jesus cried with a loud voice..."²⁴

After all, as we have discussed in weeks past the crucifixion experience would have been unbelievably physically discomfoting and here with every lifting of the legs there was the need to put breath in one's body to exclaim it. He not only uses an amount of words, but an amount of energy to cry out these words.

¹² Luke 23:34.

¹³ John 19:26-27.

¹⁴ Luke 23:43.

¹⁵ Mark 15:34.

¹⁶ John 19:28.

¹⁷ John 19:30.

¹⁸ Luke 23:46.

¹⁹ Mark 15:34.

²⁰ John 19:28.

²¹ Ibid.

²² John 19:30.

²³ Luke 23:46.

²⁴ Mark 15:34.

And so not only is there a time frame, the first three happened quickly, the last three happened quickly, but this one is delayed after three hours of darkness, but it is said with such veracity or such volume that it receives much of our attention. He cried it out.

But there is one other thing that makes it very particular. It is in the middle. You say, “Well, why is that significant?”

Well, if you have ever been on a seesaw, whatever is in the middle is important, isn't it? Because it determines how you are going to go. When you place something in the middle what it does is determine how everything on the side is going to go.

One of the things that I really do appreciate today is about how the game of football is being commented on. They are giving somebody on the football field the credit they deserved long ago, the center. For those of you who don't know much about football, he is the guy that takes the ball and he gives it to the quarterback. And in days past it is just some big lumpy guy who just sits there and gives the quarterback the ball and he gets out of the way.

Do you know what we have discovered? That the guy who is in the middle starts calling plays. Why? Because he can see what is one side. He can see... Whatever happens in the middle is very critical, whether it is a seesaw, whether it is an item of engineering, whatever it is. What we know is whatever is in the middle is in a crux position.

So what we see is there are three statements leading up to this. There are three statements coming behind. There are three hours of darkness that precede it. And it is said in such a distinct manner. It is cried out. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”²⁵

It is somewhat problematic, but I think it helps us when we look in light of Mark 15 that it comes on the heels of a very peculiar prophecy. The Bible says very simply in verse 33: “And...there was darkness over the whole land.”²⁶

When I say it is a peculiar prophecy and when you discuss with different folks and get different opinions, you will get different numbers, but in essence, there are roughly around forty eight specific prophecies related to the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Now don't panic. If you read research where there is a little more or a little less, don't panic on that. It is okay. It just depends on whom you are studying and how they categorized it.

Now in these prophecies that are foretold of Jesus years, literally centuries before he was born of a virgin. One of those is mentioned in the book of Amos 8:8-9 where it says that at this event there would be darkness over the land. Now this is a very peculiar prophecy because we understand that his hands and his feet would be pierced. Why? Because he is going to be crucified. But why darkness?

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mark 15:33.

Now there are really two kinds of explanations on this issue of darkness and it really is an issue that we need to deal with. The first explanation is that this is a natural phenomenon. Now, understand, natural phenomena can have supernatural or divine orientation or initiation. Natural phenomena. There are those who say that this was a solar eclipse and there are those who say this was a lunar eclipse.

Let me share with you kind of the struggle I have with the natural phenomena. Those who say that this was a solar eclipse believe that at 12 o'clock, the noon, the sixth hour on the Jewish calendar, when Jesus is hanging on the cross having made three statements, that at this point there was what we know as a solar eclipse and darkness came over the earth. There are several problems with this. First and foremost the Bible gives the idea that it got instantly dark and then it got instantly light. I have witnessed a few solar eclipses in my life and the last time I checked they come in very slowly. They leave very slowly. And when you get to that total darkness aspect of the solar eclipse they don't last that long. Often times thirty to forty five minutes in length. If you can get one that lasts over an hour it is a really strange, odd event. And to add further fuel to my fire, if you go and you look at the scientists and the astronomers there is no record of a solar eclipse in Jerusalem or the Middle East either 5 to ten years before or after the time of Jesus.

Now one of the things that I am convinced is that scientists are catching up with the Bible, the Bible isn't catching up with science. That being said, when it says there was darkness over all the land, I struggle with the fact that this happened to be some kind of solar eclipse that everybody else in the world has just missed.

The other option on the natural phenomena is that it was a lunar eclipse, not near as dark, but as significant. Once again, you have the problem is it phases in, it phases out. The other problem you have with saying that there is a lunar eclipse is the data behind it. According to the research there was actually a lunar eclipse in April of 33 AD in Jerusalem.

Some of you say, "Wow, that solves the whole problem, right?"

No, it really doesn't, because Jesus was thirty-three and a half years old physically when He died on the cross. King Herod—do you remember King Herod? He was the man who so despised Jesus when the wise men came he said, "Kill every baby under the age of two"? Do you know what year King Herod died? 2 BC. If King Herod died in 2 BC I hate to mess up some of your timelines, but Jesus was here before 2 BC.

Do you realize we don't have Jesus messed up, we have the calendar messed up? You do know that, right? So if Jesus was here before 2 BC because King Herod died in 2 BC, then in 33 AD that would be thirty five years. That doesn't work, does it?

See, one of the biggest problems we have is not reading the Bible. It is believing the Bible. And we read this passage and we say, "Well, of course, there was darkness over all the earth. It had to be a solar eclipse. It had to be a lunar eclipse. I mean, after all, that is what the books say. That is what the..." That is ... it had to be.

You know, how often in the Bible did God use supernatural endeavors that man mistook as natural phenomena? I am reminded in the Exodus experience what we know as the 10 plagues, the water turned to blood, the lice ran rampant, the boils extended, the hail fell. And in the ninth plague. Does anybody remember what happened? There was darkness over all of the land.

See, the other option with this issue of darkness isn't that it was a natural phenomenon, but it was a supernatural endeavor. And what that means is this, that the darkness that it speaks of wasn't because one of the celestial bodies got in the way of another celestial body, but something supernatural was occurring.

Now in Exodus in the ninth plague, the darkness comes over the land, why? Because God is trying to get Pharaoh's attention. He says, "You must repent. You must turn over your ways. Let my people go."

Now the fascinating thing about Jesus on the cross is He has been trying to get people's attention for three and a half years. And so I will just be honest with you. I am not as inclined to believe that God "turned out" the lights for three hours, as much as I am inclined on other supernatural phenomena.

And I want you to work with me for just a moment. The Bible says in 1 John 1:5 that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. The Bible says in John 8 that Jesus is the light of the world. The Bible teaches us in Matthew 5, what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, that we are the light of the world. What is Satan called? The prince of darkness.

Now if we just find that the differences here... and I know you know there are differences between God and Satan. Please understand these things. Satan cannot be everywhere at one time. He is not omnipresent. That is why Ephesians 6 talks about when we fight the wiles of the devil, we fight against principalities, we fight against powers, and we fight against rulers of darkness. He has minions. He has been ordered. The Bible says that there have been angels that have fallen. There are things such as demons. Yes, Baptists, they are real. They exist. The Bible speaks that they are there. They are at his beck and call. He has an army of supernatural soldiers that are fearful of him and at his beck and call.

Let me ask you a question. Where do you think on planet earth Satan was going to be when Jesus was hanging on the cross? Do you think he was just hanging out up in Rome somewhere. No big deal.

You do realize that the last place Satan ever wanted Jesus to go was the cross. That was the last place.

Some of you think, but didn't he... wouldn't he love to have Him killed? Yeah, but the problem is He is sinless. And the problem is that three days later He is going come back

from the grave and the issue that we have got here is that the last thing that Satan wanted was Jesus to go to that cross.

So let me propose a theory here. Could it be when it says that there was darkness over all the earth, that the sun was darkened, that at this moment in history, at this moment in time, this was Satan's last stand. He has got one last shot at it. He went to the wilderness 40 days. It didn't work, did it? According to Hebrews 4 Jesus was tempted as we are in every point for three and a half years of ministry at least, though not necessarily recorded in Scripture, Jesus was tempted to bypass what? The cross. And here we have got one last shot. How many hours does Jesus have left? Just a few. This is it. This is the final opportunity.

Let me tell you what I would do if I were Satan. I would unleash and unload everything I have. I would take the entire arsenal of hell out and begin to fire. Why? This is it. If He goes and He dies and He rises and if I am Satan, I am defeated. This is my last shot.

Can you imagine what this earth would look like if every demon of hell were unleashed? Can you imagine what it would look like if every angel who rejected the goodness of God were in Jerusalem? Can you imagine literally if the presence of Satan himself were there at that Mount Calvary?

Let me tell you what it would be. Unbelievably dark. There would be a thickness. There would be a spiritual oppression like we have never seen. And so when we look at the issue of darkness, when we look at the issue of this peculiar prophecy, we can talk about natural phenomenon, but what I think is happening is no less than a supernatural final battle. This is it.

Satan has got one shot which leads to this, the items, "that are at stake." There are two things that Satan would have had to have. There are two things that he would have been very concerned about. The first one is this. His own future. After all, if Jesus rises from the dead he is in a mess. If Jesus' tomb is empty after three days, he is defeated.

And, by the way, if you don't know, Satan is the most narcissistic entity on the planet. He is all about himself. He is called the God of this world. He is called the king of the children of pride. He never does anything that does not bring Him, "glory."

So when he tempts us to sin it is not so that we will have a good time. It is so that it gives Him attention. Here he is. What is at stake here? His own eternity. If Jesus dies on the cross, he is in a "royal mess." Maybe one last temptation. But there is another thing at stake. Do you know what is at stake? You. What would happen if Jesus did call the ten thousand angels down? What would happen if Jesus had said, "You know what, devil? You are right. They are not worth it"?

Can you imagine what was spoken on Mount Calvary that day? Can you even fathom what this would have been like and Satan the devil to the minions is surrounding Jesus. Imagine the language of Satan. Can you look down there? There are only five where

there used to be ten thousand. I think there were. Can you imagine looking down and saying, “Jesus, look at who is down there.” One of them was demon possessed. I had her with seven demons.

That is not who you want in the kingdom of God. That is not who you want as your child. That is not who you want to give your life....

Or can you imagine the verbiage when Satan said, “Look at yourself. Look at Your body. Look at Your arms. Look at Your legs. What kind of mess have you gotten yourself into? All you have to do is step off.”

By the way, you say, “Well, that is an unusual temptation.”

No, it wasn't. Last week when we studied the two thieves, remember the unrepentant thief? What did he say? “Why don't you come down? Save yourself and us as well.”

For three hours pitch darkness, for three hours there is silence from the cross. And then after three hours there is this statement made, there is a shout that is given when Jesus says: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”²⁷

I want to take those two pillars, this unique phrase, this interesting prophecy and I want to pull it together in conclusion. And if you have Psalm chapter 22 open, I want you to turn there, because I want to conclude today with a possibility. Is it possible that when we hear those words: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

That we often have seen it from the wrong perspective? We have seen it from the wrong angle? If I am correct that the three hours is a dark supernatural temptation, if I am right that Satan has tempted Him for the last time, if I am right that all of hell has been emptied out to surround Mount Calvary, then Jesus would do as Jesus always did when tempted.

Forty days, forty nights Satan comes and tempts Him in the wilderness. How does Jesus respond? It is written... Every time Satan tempts Jesus in the Bible, He responds with a quotation of Scripture. I want you to look at Psalms 22 verse one. How does it begin? “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”²⁸

Do you find it interesting that if Satan is tempting Him, if it is his last stand, just like he did in the wilderness, just like he did at the end of forty days and forty nights, Jesus used the exact same tactic. He said, “Allow me to tell you what is written.” “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”²⁹

Not only is it the first verse in this psalm, but this psalm contains eight specific prophecies of Jesus' being on the cross. If you will just look, verse 12, says: “Many bulls

²⁷ Mark 15:34.

²⁸ Psalm 22:1.

²⁹ Ibid.

have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.”³⁰ Verse 13. “They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.”³¹

Verse 14. “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.”³²

He keeps talking about that He will be thirsty. It says, “They pierced my hands. They pierced my feet.”

And here is where it all comes to a dramatic conclusion. See, Psalm 22 begins: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”³³

It has been dark for three hours. Jesus cries with a loud voice. Things are not looking good. Tens of thousands welcomed Him on what we know as Palm Sunday. There are five that are left. They have taken what we know as a cat of nine tails and they have beaten Him in a ravage situation. They have put a crown on his head. They have taken his clothes and they have gambled for them. One thief has repented and one has not. It looks a lot like verse one, doesn't it? It doesn't look real good.

But I want you to join me by reading in Psalm 22:27.

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that are fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.³⁴

Psalm 22 does not end in defeat. Psalm 22 ends in victory. Psalm 22 does not end in death. It ends in life. Psalm 22 does not end on a cross. It ends on a throne. And so when Jesus after three hours of pitch darkness, after three hours of listening to the lies of the enemy, is it possible, folks that what He was saying is in our vernacular, when He says:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”³⁵

Is it possible that what He is really saying is, “I will not quit. I will not stop. I will not give up. I know they are not worth it, but I am doing it anyway. I know they are dirty, but

³⁰ Psalm 22:12.

³¹ Psalm 22:13.

³² Psalm 22:14.

³³ Psalm 22:1.

³⁴ Psalm 22:27-31.

³⁵ Mark 15:34.

I am going to clean them up. I know their life is wreck, but I am here to straighten it up. I will not quit.”

Why do you think He screamed? Why do you think He yelled? I will tell you why He did. I am going to use my language. He said, “Devil, get back. I am going forward.”

So when Jesus says: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”³⁶ This isn’t a cry of despair. This isn’t a cry of death. I think what Jesus is actually saying is, “Victory is won. There is victory in Jesus, my Savior forever. He sought me. He bought me with his redeeming blood.”

And so when it goes dark He cries, I want you to notice. It doesn’t stay dark. The light returns. Calmness returns. And the next thing He says is:

“I thirst.”³⁷

“It is finished.”³⁸

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”³⁹

You say, “Why calmness? Why such serenity?”

Because the battle had been won. It was over at that point. Satan’s last stand had been removed. His eternity was determined. Listen to me. Yours is still in question. At the point in which Jesus rose from the dead, at the point that we celebrate that the tomb was empty, his defeat was immediate. Your opportunity is still here. Notice what it says in Psalm 22 that all of the nations, that all of the people shall worship Him.

And I know I tease you all the time. You all know what the Greek word all means. It means all. That means whoever you are, wherever you are, wherever you are from, what ever you have been a part of, you have the opportunity to repent. You have the opportunity to turn. You have the opportunity to be forgiven. There is none of us whom He will turn away who seek Him with their heart. There is none of us. It says in the Bible those who call upon the name of the Lord He shall save them.

Satan’s defeat occurred in this passage in Mark 15. Yours need not to. Satan’s demise was guaranteed. Yours doesn’t have to.

The question is this. What decisions have you rendered?

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John 19:28.

³⁸ John 19:30.

³⁹ Luke 23:46.