

Death

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Well, let's all take our Bibles and let's go to Mark 15. Mark 15. We're looking at a series entitled "God's Unrelenting Love for His Children." We're focusing on the last, I guess, 3-4 days of our Lord's earthly life, that is, before his death. He was on the earth after his resurrection. Last week we looked at the section that I called the crucifixion and we noted from the text that it just doesn't give much of a description of what was happening to Jesus as he hung on the cross but the text narrative does give quite a description of those who were present, and we learned from the different types of people there, the different types of unbelievers that were present, but today I want us to move forward to what I call his death.

Now perhaps I should extend that out to say his darkness and death because I'm convinced all that I'm gonna talk about today happened in those three hours when God turned darkness on the earth at 12 noon until 3, at which point Jesus cries out with a loud voice and gives up his life in the will of the Father. One thing we know for certain, this was God's work. This wasn't an accident, it wasn't something that just happened and God made the best of it, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit foreordained these things from before the foundation of the world. God was at work. For example, in Acts 2:23, Peter is preaching and he says, "this Man," that's Jesus of course, "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." Man is fully responsible for his evil deed of crucifying Christ but Peter says, "But God ordained every bit of this. This was His work." Isaiah 53:10, the first part, "But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering." It was God's work. I preached a sermon some years ago and actually some people not in our church family but outside who heard it, were, were upset with me because I entitled the sermon "Why God Killed His Son." Well, if God wasn't behind it, then who was behind it? You mean Jesus was just bushwhacked from mortal humans and couldn't get out of it? No, God was doing something.

Now let's look at our text together. Mark 16:33-39.

33 When the sixth hour came [that's noon], darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour [that's 3 PM or our 3 PM]. 34 At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA

SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN [or abandoned] ME?" 35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." 36 Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." 37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. 38 And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Let's just give a running overview of the text and then I'm going to focus in on the great spiritual truths of what God was accomplishing in those three hours of his darkness and his death.

First of all, in verse 33 we see this darkness. I believe it was a, a solar eclipse for three hours. Amos 8:9 prophesied of this, "'It will come about in that day,' declares the Lord GOD, 'That I shall make the sun go down at noon And make the earth dark in broad daylight.'" I believe it was an intense and unforgettable darkness and it came at the least expected time, at 12 noon.

Hendrickson in his commentary says, "The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God for our sins. His wrath, as it were, burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus so that He as our substitute, suffered most intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation, and forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead."

Verse 34. The ninth hour comes, 3 PM, and Jesus cries out with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The Psalmist prophesied this in Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Far from my deliverance are the words of My groaning." We can't really enter into the intersanctum of God the Father and God the Son in this holy work of redemption as literally the Father, in a sense, abandons the Son as he becomes the sin-bearer.

And then verses 35 and 36, again we see what some of the bystanders do at this point. "When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, 'Behold, He is calling for Elijah.'" This was just sort of a, a coarse joke coming from the lips of perverse unbelievers. Ah, the Jews, ah, believe that Elijah, of course, would lead and accompany the Messiah and so it was just a coarse gesture.

And then they said, "Let us, ah," and then they said they gave him wine and put it on a reed and gave him a drink. This was a cheap wine used by soldiers to quench their thirst, perhaps it was a genuine act of sympathy. We know Jesus in John 19:28 said, "I thirst," and that's one of the amazing things to me that Jesus is God of very God in human form, yet without sin, but he was thirsty at times, but he was hungry at times, but he was weary at times. Ah, he was heartbroken or, or at least showed emotion. He wept. So we can't comprehend all that deity becoming humanity means but some of that's gonna come to

play in what I want to preach to you this morning, how can one thing be true if the other is too, and I think sometimes theologians perhaps try to make everything fit very nicely into little categories and it just doesn't always fit as nicely as we would like.

Then verse 37, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry." I think it's important to note that he didn't just allow his life to ebb away, he cries loudly and he died voluntarily. He gave his life. He poured it out. He laid it down. As John said in John 19:30, he literally cries, "It is finished." And I believe the great work of God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, God the Son, happened in those three hours of darkness and in his death.

The Bible says in verse 38 the inner veil that separates the holy place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two. The veil was a symbol of God's inapproachability, that no man, no sinner can go into the presence of God but now in Jesus' death it's been ripped apart and now we can move toward God and know God through the new veil which is Jesus Christ.

In John 14:5-6 Thomas asks Jesus, "how do we know the way?" And Jesus didn't say, "I'm gonna show you the way," he said, "I am the way. I'm not going to point you to some new philosophy or some new checkoff list or some, some new rule book or some new book of laws. I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me." Hebrews 10:19-20 says, "Therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus," listen to this, "by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh."

Then we come to verse 39 and I believe this man was converted, "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"

What was God doing in the three hours of darkness and death as Jesus hangs on the cross redeeming his children? I organize it this way. Well, let me say this first of all, because you're dealing with the whole body of soteriology in some ways here, the whole aspect of the doctrine of salvation. So there's so much, I could preach the rest of my life on all the spiritual truths but for us today, I want to mention three things.

I. First of all, he was contaminated with our sin. Contaminated with our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Now the scholars tell us the two words "to be" is not in the original text, so literally it could read, "He made Him who knew no sin, sin." Now most of the men that you'll consult will say at that point what God is saying is he viewed Jesus as if he were a sinner. I'm not against that, it's just that the text doesn't really spell that out. It's kinda like how can he be God and thirsty? How can he be God and literally become the contamination of sin? I don't know but at the very least he becomes our sin-bearer in our place.

I use the word "contamination" because I want to, I want to emphasize the vileness, the loathsomeness, the defilement that came upon Christ as he takes our place on the cross.

There's a good illustration in the Old Testament and that is the disease of leprosy. Leprosy was the scourge of the ancient world. Nothing evoked more fear, more dread, or more revulsion than this disease. The leprosy were called the walking dead. Vile sores would cover the body. A horrid odor of rotten flesh would be present. Fingers would rot off. Toes would fall off. It would even spread outside the body to clothing and furniture. Sometimes in the nighttime you would often smell a leper before you saw them. But Levitical law taught that this was a spiritual uncleanness and I believe that's because there's a picture of sin here. It, it's an illustration of our sin need. We are the walking dead. We're dead in our trespasses and sins. The leprosy went beyond the skin, it went deep into the body and our sin problem is not just a surface behavior thing, we have a heart and a nature of sin. It's defiling. It's revulsive in the presence of a holy God. It's a vivid picture of our condition spiritually before a holy God.

So the Levitical priest when he found someone in the tribe of Israel who had leprosy would determine him to be unclean and he would, ah, declare that he had to spend his life now outside the camp, and that's where we are, outside the fellowship of God. But brothers and sisters, the great plague is not the coronavirus and the great plague is not leprosy, the great plague is sin. Sin is the great plague of mankind. It's the plague of all plagues. All of us have it, we are all born with it, and we all manifest it. Among others, the Old Testament defines and, and views sin as a defilement, an impurity, an uncleanness, thus all the extensive, exhaustive purification and cleansing rites that God gave Israel. What was that for? It was to make them aware that you have a stain that needs washing away. Of course, their rites and rituals could never do that, it was a picture that they needed one to wash their sins away.

Then you come over to the New Testament and again among other terms the New Testament speaks of sin as a defilement, as a stain, as something that is vile, foul rather or lewd, a blemish. Then I'm reminded of Isaiah 53 where we have that powerful picture of the suffering servant, the picture of Jesus suffering for our sins, and just listen to these phrases from Isaiah 53. Our iniquity was laid on him, Isaiah 53:6. 53:11, he will bear their iniquity; 53:12, he will bear the sins of many. And then over to the New Testament, Hebrews 9:28, "So Christ also having been offered once to bear the sins of many." On the cross Jesus became the contaminated one, defiled, the unclean one. If he didn't literally become that before the Father, at least he stood before the Father and, and the Father viewed him as the defiled one, unclean, impure, blemished, and all the defilement of all of our sin, the Bible says, was laid on him.

It's interesting, if you were to ask someone today, "Who's the most defiled sinner?" Well, someone may say Satan, or maybe Hitler, or someone like that. That's not true. When Jesus went to the cross, he was the most defiled sinner that ever lived though he himself did not sin. He was not a sinner in the sense that we are, but he became that defilement greater than any human had ever known for he was taking on the defilement of the sins of the world. If you and I could grasp his inherent nature of unapproachable holiness, it's really impossible to imagine the Son of God becoming sin. It's easier to imagine the sun ceasing to shine or water ceasing to be moist or birds ceasing to fly, but Jesus the sinless

one, the one who never committed sin becomes sin for us, becomes defiled in the eyes of his Father and in doing so he frees us from the defilement of sin.

Romans 3:9 reminds us that all Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Galatians 3:22 reminds us that we are shut up in sin. It says all men are shut up under sin. We're in this hopeless irreversible condition, we're locked up under sins, we're in the, the bonds and the stocks of sin, we're enclosed in the thick steel prison cell of sin with a door with steel rivets enclosed on us and then sealed by the, the chains and the, the, the padlocks of sin and that's where we are. But Jesus since he died for us, became the corrupted one, the contaminated one, the defiled one in our place. The Father looks upon him and lets us go free. All of our sin, all of our plague, all of our defilement, all of our uncleanness was laid on him.

1 Peter 2:24 reminds us, "He bore our sin in His body on the cross." Scholars tells us that word "bore" means he carried and held it up. It's as if he just came to all of his children and he collected all the defilement and all the uncleanness and he puts it on his own shoulders and he carries it up to the Father and says, "This is the children's wickedness and defilement and uncleanness and, Father, I will take care of it. I'll take it on Myself. I'll bear it up before You."

In those three hours of darkness and death, Jesus was contaminated by our sin. Also, he was, II., cursed, cursed for our sin. It's another aspect of what God was accomplishing through our redemption in his darkness and death on the cross. Galatians 3:13 tells us, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" Now the concept of being cursed in biblical times literally meant set apart by God to be an object of great loathsomeness and worthy of divine vengeance. It's, it's as if there's nothing that can be done with you. You're just set apart and only destined for loathsomeness and vengeance by God.

That's what a curse is and the Bible says Jesus became a curse. In Old Testament times, criminals of various countries might be executed in various ways but it was quite common when a, the most vile of criminals were executed they would take them out and hang them on a pole because they were a cursed thing. It was a public spectacle signifying that they are the objects of divine justice and disapproval.

This reminds me of the incident over in the Old Testament when the children of Israel were rebelling against God, they were grumbling. Matter of fact, let's read it together, Numbers 21:5-9. "The people spoke against God and Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.'" It might remind you of a Christian today who says, "I'm serving Jesus and things got harder. Why is it like this?" Verse 6, "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died." So Moses came, "So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people." Now this is unusual, look what happened. Verse 8, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a

standard," a pole, "and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, then he would look to the bronze serpent and he lived."

You know, from the very beginning, the serpent has been the object of loathing and, and, and just rejection, if you will. In the garden, in the garden of Eden it was the serpent who comes to Eve and deceives her, then she deceives Adam, and then in his judgment, God calls the serpent forward and he says, "You're gonna eat dust all the days of your life. You're gonna crawl on your belly and I'll put enmity between the woman's seed and between you." And now we have Moses and the people rebelling and God sent fiery poisonous serpents among them and God said, "Moses, here's what you're to do." These things mean something, folks. This isn't just a story. Moses put a snake on a pole and if anyone would look to the snake, they'll be healed of the disease. Friends, that snake represents Jesus and a cursed thing, because when he hung on a cross, the curse fell on him instead of falling on us. He became a snake because he was saving a bunch of snakes. One who was an accursed one, the Father looked upon him with the loathsomeness and accursedness that should have been pointed toward us.

You see, just as the holiness of God is infinitely beyond our comprehension – now listen – so the demand of God for justice against sin is infinitely beyond our comprehension. God is absolutely just and man is absolutely depraved and thoroughly soiled by sin. We're the accursed ones. We're dead in trespasses and sins and there's no greater antithesis, there's no greater opposite than the holy God and accursed men.

When God's punitive righteousness was thrust upon the Son of God, it must have been a gruesome scene. I think that's part of the reason why it's dark. It's more gruesome than any of human history, I believe. Anything we could conceive can't compare to it. Perhaps Jesus' body twisted and strained and convulsed under the spiritual weight and the agony far beyond the physical pain as he endured the wrath and punishment. On that day, he endured the force of omnipotence in wrath and the horror of eternal hell at the same time. Because why? He was becoming an accursed thing, serpent, as our sin fell on him.

III. Contaminated for our sin, because of our sin, cursed for our sin, and now cast away because of our sin. A cast away. This really comes out vividly in the narrative, does it not? Jesus is hanging on the cross and says, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? God, why? Why cast Me away? Why the separation?" I don't know all that's going on there.

In Luke 12:5, Luke warns that we ought to fear the God who can destroy the body, and then after he's destroyed the body cast it into hell. This body speaks of those cast out of the kingdom of God in the final judgment. One of the things we need to remind ourselves, that the horror of being cast into hell is not so much what you're cast into, that's awful, but who you're cast away from. You'll never know God's love and God's peace and God's joy and all the beauties and glories of being in God's presence, you'll only know God's wrath and God's retribution for eternity. God is holy and must cast us

from his presence. Again, in the coming judgment the Bible tells us in the Gospels that he will cast those away from himself into eternal fire.

Now as we talked about the leper earlier, the leper was required to be taken out and cast out from the rest of the people. Well, so Leviticus 16:20-22, we see another powerful commentary, another powerful picture, if you will, of all that is being accomplished for us on the cross, that is, that Jesus became the scapegoat, the scapegoat, carrying our sin away that we might carry it no longer. Leviticus 16:20-21, "When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness." The scapegoat was the picture of the sins falling on another, a substitute, the goat, and then taken away, being a cast away and that's what Jesus became for us as he hung on the cross and he cries, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me."

Of course, I think Christ understood why but it's in the moment of the experience that I think that he cries out in this anguish. "I'm being cast away from You." That's a powerful thing to think about. It's the most incredible of paradoxes. For the first time, the only time and the last time, God the Father was separated from God the Son. From eternity past they enjoyed perfect union and perfect unity, a oneness beyond any in the human economy, but when Jesus became sin, there erupted a giant chasm between himself and the heavenly Father. The Father turned his back on the Son despising our sin. The great gulf fixed between heaven and hell was experienced between the Father and the Son. The separation we feel as unforgiven sinners toward God was transferred to Jesus. There in the darkness on the cross, he felt the tearing, piercing, or rather the tearing, piercing agony of separation. He was separated from the love and the joy and the beauty of his glorious heavenly Father. He felt for all people of all ages the pain of being eternal, eternally forsaken of God so that now we might draw near to God because he took our place. He was contaminated by our sin. He became an accursed thing. He was cursed for our sin and then cast away from God because of our sin. All that is involved in being a sinner and all that is required by a holy God to justly punish, bring retribution against a sinner was accomplished by Jesus when he hung on the cross.

And again, there's so many dimensions on this. On and on and on we could go. Another component I want to mention in concluding this morning, one other work, you might say that we need to add as he's hanging there. There's one last segment, it's what happened after he gave the loud cry. In effect he's saying, "I've been contaminated with sin. I am accursed with this sin. I'm cast away because of sin though I never sinned, I'm not a sinner." And now one last thing to do, he must walk through the door of death and when he walks through the door of death, he will endure the full blow of death's sting for us. Death is a consequence of sin and it is his desire to die for us and to die in our place.

John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." it required his death. His death is not symbolic, his death is not just an illustration of sacrifice, literally he tasted death and did it for us.

John 10:17-18, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." He gave up his life freely that we might live as victors over death, free from the fear of death.

Hebrews 2:9, "we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God," by this unmerited favor toward us we don't deserve, that's the grace of God, "He might taste death for everyone."

So for the child of God death is really not a problem and that is on this side to some degree, is it not? But in reality it's not a problem. It's actually a promotion. It's not a, a really a fearful thing for the child of God. It's actually a fortunate thing, absent from the body is presence with the Lord. As I've said many times, death is now a kind messenger that takes us to a better home.

Verse 37 and 38, the Bible talks about Jesus hanging there on the cross, at the end of three hours of darkness he cries out with a loud voice. John says part of that cry was, "It is finished." It is finished. When Jesus cried out with that loud voice, that thunderous cry, it must've shook the glory bells of heaven because heaven understood more fully all that redemption meant, and as the bells of heaven rang, the unseen hand of God reaches down through the outer court, through the holy place and into the Holy of Holies and rips open the way into the Holy of Holies providing us access to God.

One final thought. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf," and we've been talking about that a lot, haven't we? Now look at the rest of that, "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Because he willingly became contaminated with our sin, became a cursed one standing in our place because of our sin, cast away from God because of our sin, he did this for two main reasons: first of all, to pay redemption's cost – now listen – secondly, to bestow redemption's crown. He said, "I took all of this on Me so that a great exchange could take place. I've taken all of your contamination, your curse, and your being cast away on Me, now I've got something for you. Here, take the crown of righteousness. You get My crown of righteousness."

Brothers and sisters, you don't get to heaven on your righteousness, you get his righteousness. He lays that crown on your head. No wonder the songwriter said, "Hallelujah, what a Savior!" 2 Timothy 4:8 is where Paul talks about how there's a crown of righteousness awaiting. He didn't mean just him, he said all who look forward to his appearing.

I found this some time ago in the, in one of the Chinese dialects, you know, they use symbols in their language, there's the character or the symbol for righteousness and it has a, has a unique story behind it. The story goes that a boy who was a shepherd had a little lamb and he loved that lamb so dearly but the lamb's mother died, so the little lamb had no mother from which to nurse and he knew it was gonna die. So he went and found another mother lamb with a, a sheep with a baby lamb, and he killed that baby lamb and took its wool off of it and he went and put it on the orphan lamb and now that, that, that wool was on the orphan lamb, now that new mother would receive the orphan as her own and let him nurse.

And that's exactly what Jesus has done for us. He clothed himself in our contamination, our curse, and our being cast away so he can clothe on us his righteousness. He purchased our redemption and he purchased our crown, the crown of righteousness. That and much much much more God accomplished for us in those three hours of darkness and death on the cross.