

From about 9 o'clock until noon on Good Friday, the hill that we call Calvary was a very busy place. The soldiers had performed violent tasks. The passersby had blasphemed. The chief priests had scoffed. The robbers had reviled Christ. One of the thieves had repented. Jesus had spoken a few short and famous sentences. Each of these events and all of the busy activity is well documented in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Then, God's Word reports to us that at twelve o'clock noon on Good Friday, the scene at Calvary and the surrounding area changed dramatically. Precisely at noon, and instantly, something incredible happened. The whole land became dark. This mid-day darkness was not just a fast-moving weather front resulting in a thick cloud covering. No. Cloudy is not the correct word, and cloudy is not a sufficient word. It was dark. Fully dark. Everywhere. Matthew 27, verse 45 of the Word of God reports, "*there was darkness over all the land.*" This darkness came about when least expected – at high noon. This instant and full darkness was intense and unforgettable. This darkness lasted for three hours.

Why is there complete darkness at noon? Why is there a man on a cross dying? How are we to understand Good Friday?

To understand what happened during those 3 hours, we go back to Jeremiah.

I am going to spend the main part of this sermon in Jeremiah 25, and only at the very end of the sermon will we come back to the scene of darkness at high noon on Good Friday, to explain what happened during the 3 hours of darkness. **Every nation must drink the cup of God's wrath and be destroyed in God's judgment, yet Jesus drank the cup for His select people from every one of those same nations.**

1. Reading the roll call for the cup of the Lord's wrath. (v.15-28)

Verse 15, the cup which the LORD serves up, dominates our passage.

16, What happens when people drink the cup from God? They stagger, and become crazed. In verse 17, God makes every nation drink the cup.

Verse 18, we have the roll call of nations to drink the cup. Who is first in the list of judgment? First in the roll call for wrath? Would you expect Egypt or Moab? Verse 18 has the answer – the very first word – Jerusalem! God's judgment is first

visited on His own people, because they are the most privileged, and the least excused. Amos 3:2, where God said to Israel, *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”*

Verses 19-25, the list serves as a table of contents. More detailed pronouncements of judgment on each of these nations are coming in chapters 46-51. The list of cities runs over the entire map of the ancient world, obviously making the timeless point that all nations will be judged by God.

In verse 26, the last name in the list is Babylon. It is ironic that after God used Babylon to bring God’s people into exile, God would then punish Babylon! Again, the same point is hammered home – God will judge every single nation.

In verse 27, God told each nation to drink the cup of wrath, to come under the influence of the contents of that cup, and to, as the King James Version writes it, to spue! Then to fall down and never rise again. The cup of wine is the cup of wrath, and it is symbolic of the sword, the military attack that God is literally sending in real time.

In verse 28, no one can refuse the cup of wrath. Every nation is on the roll call. Remember that judgment begins with God’s people. Peter is the one who later understood this fully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and then wrote these words of Holy Scripture in 1 Peter 4:17, *“For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

None can refuse to drink the cup that God gives. Even Christ the Son of God was obedient to God the Father’s will in drinking the cup.

2. Insisting on a mandatory, devastating end to all nations. (v.29-33)

In verse 29, what is the city called by God’s name? Jerusalem! The God who calls Jerusalem to account for their sins is not blind to the wickedness of other cities and other nations. If God’s people don’t get a pass, no one gets a pass.

But notice something in verse 29. Against whom will the sword of God be sent? *“... ‘against all the inhabitants of the earth,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”* 30, God shouts like a lion against all the people of the earth. This is affirmed in

verse 31, “*to the ends of the earth....against the nations....with all flesh,*” Here God explains that He has the legal right to punish the guilty. And in verse 32, “*from nation to nation...*” and “*from the farthest parts of the earth.*” And verse 33, “*...from one end of the earth to the other...*”

All the greatest and most powerful of kings and prime ministers and all leaders of all centuries of human history in every part of the globe will all face the same Judge. They will be as powerless and shattered as the people that they have so badly governed.

3. Wailing of shepherds in the day of slaughter. (v.34-38)

Verse 34, God is like a lion. Continuing from verse 30, about God’s mighty roaring. Usually and previously, the lion was the enemy nation. But here, the lion is the LORD God Himself, who is about to ravage the wailing shepherds of verse 34, the shepherds and lords of the flock in verse 35, and the crying shepherds of verse 36. It is the LORD God who is the lion that is about to lay waste the pasture in verse 36, and God is the lion who is about to devastate the peaceful folds of sheep in verse 37. One characteristic has been consistent regarding this lion – His anger. The anger of the lion is clearly a picture of the Wrath of God. All of this roaring turns into action in our last verse, verse 38, where we shudder as we read that the lion has actually “*left His lair.*” We are overwhelmed by this picture of the personal passion and energy of the Lord for destruction.

But the cup of God’s wrath is poison, a powerful poison that causes people to lose their sobriety, to lose their lunch, lose their ability to stand, and lose their ability to live anymore.

The cup of God’s wrath is the Sword. It is the lion. It is the enemy from the North, summoned by God. It is the attack by Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar. It is the exile.

On the last day, when the cup of God’s wrath comes to the nations, we need not fear. Our cup will already have been drunk by Jesus. Matthew 26:39, “*...Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will*”

On Good Friday, the word “cup” reminds us of the poignant cup of Gethsemane, where our innocent Lord accepted the cup from the Father, in order to drink that cup in our place. However, because Jesus bore our sins, drinking the cup would cause him bitter suffering and death. Luke 22:41-42, [*Jesus*] “...*knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”* We are reminded tonight of the difference between what God said to Jeremiah here in verse 15, and what God said to Jesus. Jeremiah was to make all the nations drink the cup. Jesus was to drink the cup Himself. In John 18:11, after Peter pulled out a sword and struck someone, apparently ready for a physical and violent fight to protect Jesus, did not realize the true source of danger to Jesus, “*So Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into its sheath.; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given Me?’*” How many Peters with how many swords could protect Jesus from the cup of the wrath of His Father in heaven against our sins? Peter had no idea that he understood it backwards, it was not that Peter needed to protect Jesus from danger, but Jesus needed to protect Peter from danger.

Concluding application:

This is the conclusion of the sermon, so let’s go back to high noon at the cross on Good Friday. The sky is dark, remember?

How does the cup of God’s wrath relate to the darkness of the sky? Both show us the wrath of God against our sins, poured out on Jesus.

We are warranted from the prophecies of Jeremiah and other places in Scripture to conclude that this extraordinary darkness on Good Friday announced the displeasure of a Holy God against our sin. This does not surprise us, because alternately, an extraordinary light announced God’s pleasure at the birth of the Savior. In Matthew 27, the special darkness announced the death of Christ, just as the special light had previously announced the birth of Christ. Matthew 2:1-2, “*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*”

Those standing near the cross that day experienced a most unusual phenomenon. In the dark, they experienced a miracle of darkness. An early Christian author, a man named Tertullian, referred to this 3 hours of darkness when he reminded the non-Christian readers that the “wonder is related in your own [records] and is preserved in your archives to this day.” So apparently, even the non-Christian authors alive at the time, wrote with amazement about this time of darkness. In contrast, notice how reserved Matthew wrote. Notice the restraint of Matthew. Matthew did not embellish his story. In a manner that enhanced his credibility as a historian, Matthew simply reported the words we read in Matthew 27, verse 45, “*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.*”

These are utterly silent hours in terms of reporting. No one wrote about what happened during those 3 hours. Not Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, not Paul, not any non-Christian authors. No one has data for us on that time. These hours represent a gap in the narrative of Matthew. During these three hours, we know absolutely nothing about what else may have happened. Much happened just prior to the moment that the darkness descended. Jesus had prayed for the soldiers who were crucifying Him. Jesus had given words of promise for the believing criminal who was beside Him on another cross. Jesus commended His mother to the care of the beloved disciple. The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders taunted Jesus.

But with the descent of the darkness, all of Matthew’s narrative abruptly halts. It is as if, by the darkness, God Himself pulled a veil over the unspeakable suffering of His own Son. Matthew wrote nothing more about it than the words darkness over all the land.

We have learned from the prophecy of Jeremiah what happened.

Jesus Christ drank the cup of God’s wrath.

Afterward the three hours, the narration picks up with the very next verse, Matthew 27, verse 46, “*And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?’*” We then have a return to Matthew’s busy narration of events: what others said, the running to fetch a sponge, the offering to Jesus a drink, and the comments of others. In verse 50, Jesus cried out again, and in verse 50 Jesus yielded up His spirit. In verse 51 the curtain of the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, rocks were split. In verse 52, tombs were opened, and the bodies of

many saints who had died were raised to life. In verse 53, the resurrected people came out of the tombs, and in verse 54, the centurion saw the earthquake and what else took place, and was filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’ Verse 55 tells us many women were there looking on from a distance, women who had followed Jesus from Galilee.

Tons of things are narrated before the darkness fell.

Tons of things are narrated by Matthew after the darkness lifted, beginning with the ninth hour when Jesus cried out.

Why? Why was the light of the sun withheld from Christ? Because God the Father made Christ to be sin for us, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God! 1 Peter 2:24, “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*”

Drinking a cup can be an image of a blessing OR, an image of a curse. It depends on what? It depends on what is in the cup!

Psalm 23:5, “*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*” The cup of blessing! The cup is filled with health and goodness and mercy that shall follow us all the days of our life.

Poet George Herbert wrote, “love that is liquor sweet and most divine, which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.”

We enjoy the cup of the Lord’s Supper, for it is the cup of victory over death. It is the cup that represents Jesus’ own blood, the precious blood He spilled when he drank the cup of God’s wrath. It is the cup that pours out forgiveness.

We could not have the cup of blessing in the Lord’s supper, unless Christ had been willing to drink the cup of suffering. God’s wrath has been swallowed by Christ in the darkness., so that you can receive the sweet cup of God’s love.

Enjoy the cup of blessing, because the cup of wrath for you is all gone.

The judgment is appalling and inescapable!

Romans 11:21-22, “*if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those*

who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off."

Before we get to Resurrection morning, we need to face Good Friday.

Before we can appreciate the kindness of God, we need to consider again the severity of God.

God's judgment engulfs the earth. In the Book of Revelation, chapter 7, we read a roll call of names. It is a list of the names of the tribes of God's people. Destruction of the nations of the earth was halted until the exact number from each of the tribes was brought to safety. Consider Revelation 7:9, "*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,...*"

The King entered on a donkey riding over palm branches. The King drank the cup for us. The King rose again. The King is coming again. The King is commanding you to serve Him. The King extends His kindness to you, and the severity of God was fully satisfied when the King swallowed the cup of wrath.