

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Mark 15:33 as we continue our studies in Mark? This is our third week of looking at the crucifixion of our Lord. I think we've learned much about the love that God has for each one of us and how much He was willing to pay to save us.

The Scriptures tell us that at 6:00 in the morning Pilate handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified and that the Lord carried His own cross through the streets of Jerusalem until He left the city gates, where He couldn't bear it any longer. And the Romans forced a fellow who had just gotten into town, named Simon, to help carry the cross. And we looked at what effect that had upon Simon in the years that followed and how his family not only came to know the Lord but were actively involved and instrumental in the life of the early church. We watched Jesus speak to some women along the road - about the consequence of a nation that He had come to that had refused to believe in Him, quoting out of the prophet Hosea's book in chapter 10.

And then we came to the cross, and we talked - for the last couple of weeks - about the first three hours. Jesus was on the cross from 9:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. But a couple of different things took place. In the first three hours, Jesus said three things out loud, not much. But He responded to the Roman crucifiers by praying, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34) and, as these Roman soldiers gambled for His clothing, Jesus prays for their salvation.

We looked, last week, at the crowds that stood around and the mockers that came. And they came in all sorts: the crowd, the religious leaders, even the thieves that were crucified with Him - one of whom, before noon, came to his senses and realized that Jesus was different. And he asked the Lord to remember him when He came into His kingdom, and Jesus said that second thing from the cross. He said, "Today you'll be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). And then, right before noon, Jesus looked down to John, the only apostle that stayed near the cross, and to His mother, Mary, and He said to John (John 19:26-27), "Behold your mother!" and to Mary, "Woman, behold your son!" And He provided for her even as He was providing for us.

Well this morning, we want to turn from noon to 3:00 p.m. and to the death of our Lord. I think someone rightly said the first three hours Jesus suffered at the hands of men, but the last three hours He suffered at the hands of His Father who poured out upon Him the sins of the world. Paul would write (in 2 Corinthians 5:21), "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us."

We read in verse 33, "Now when the sixth hour" (or noon) "had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Most of the three final hours Jesus spent on the cross were spent in total silence and extreme darkness. It is only as 3:00 p.m. approached (in fact verse 34 will say "and at the ninth hour"), until that 3:00 p.m. drew near, nothing was said, and there was this eerie not only silence but extreme darkness over the land. Imagine in the brightness of day, at high noon, complete darkness. It wasn't an eclipse. This was the Passover, which meant that there was a full moon or the sun would have been on the other side. By the way, this darkness is mentioned in lots of writings outside of the Bible. Origen, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, that North African scholar from Alexandria, wrote to a Roman historian about the event. Tertullian, who was a 3<sup>rd</sup> century church father from Carthage, wrote to a pagan friend of his and, sharing the Lord and Jesus' death, wrote of this death and of this darkness, "It is written in the annals and reserved in the archives." And even Pontius Pilate wrote a letter to Caesar at Tiberias and assumed that he'd heard about it or that he had experienced it. And so, amazing. The darkness falls as the Lord becomes sin for us.

When you read darkness falling in the Scriptures, there're a couple of things that immediately come to mind. Number one - it is always that indication that things happened in secret. In the Old Testament, when the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies where God's presence was, he was only allowed to go in there once a year on the Day of Atonement, on Yom Kippur. The veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the holy place outside was such that no one was to go through. There was really no light in the place. It was dark. And he would go, bearing the blood of the offering for the sins of the people, and pour it out upon the mercy seat before the LORD. It was this secret kind of transaction between heaven and earth, if you will, between man's sin and a holy God, and it was done outside of the vision of the people. It was something that God accomplished.

Darkness, in the Bible, constantly speaks of wickedness and sin. And, here, Jesus is dying for the sins of the world. And, as darkness falls you find that, in the Scriptures, darkness falling - when it's controlled by the LORD - is always a

judgment of God against sin; and so here is Jesus upon the cross, dying for the sins of the world. And the people that were alive got to experience physically, and they could see with their eyes what they couldn't see spiritually, that God was pouring out upon His Son the judgment for man's sin. And, as Jesus became sin, He took the sin and paid the price. In Isaiah, when there was an impending invasion by the Assyrians on the northern kingdom of Israel in judgment, the LORD said (through Isaiah to the people), "In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened by the clouds" (Isaiah 5:30). When Amos the prophet spoke to the nation about the coming of the LORD, he said (in chapter 5:18, 20), "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?" And so you have, at the cross, this picture - not only of God's secret, if you will, sacrifice out of our vision, out of our sight. But yet He's dealing with sin, and the people are able to experience it. You will read Matthew (the gospel writer) speaking about Jesus' return and saying that, in those days, "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light" (Matthew 24:29), that judgment that the Lord is coming to bring again at the second coming. So, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). From 12:00 to 3:00, the judgment of God against sin is found upon Jesus, and the Father turns, if you will, His back on His Son. He can't look at sin. That's what happens when sin comes into my life. It separates me from God. And here at Calvary, as the Father pours out the sins of the world upon His Son, the judgment falls on Him, and the separation takes place. The psalmist would say (Psalm 66:18), "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." Or the prophet Isaiah writing, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

So Jesus' greatest anguish was this. Remember, as we led up to this, we talked about the physical suffering and how little the Bible has to say about it. But it is this separation that caused Him to sweat great drops of blood in agony in the Garden. He'd never not had fellowship with the Father. That was the intimacy that God wants for you and me to have with Him. And so there's this anxiousness, this pressure upon the Lord, not for the physical (which is horrible enough) but this, the separation. Now there's a parallel to this in the Scriptures. If you've read through the Old Testament, and you've gotten to Exodus 10 (right before the LORD sends the Angel of death into the camp of the Egyptians and the firstborn in

every house that doesn't have the blood of the lamb upon the door is taken), the LORD says to Moses (Exodus 10:21), " 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand," and He writes (there in Exodus 10:22), "there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days." Before the lamb's sacrifice, before the blood that was shed that would save the people of God, three days of darkness. Here, three hours of darkness before that death would come, and the freedom would come through His sacrifice. If you go to Revelation 16:10, it talks about (in the Great Tribulation), as the fifth angel pours out his bowl, that there is "full of darkness that falls upon the kingdom of Satan; there's gnawing and pain," the judgment of God falling.

So there're three hours of mystery and horror as Jesus is left to His own agony. Nothing is said. No one can help. The Father watches His Son suffer, if you will, the cost of our redemption. Paul wrote to the Hebrews (in chapter 2:9), "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." And He does. Isaiah tells us (in chapter 53:10) that "it pleased the LORD" (the Father) "to bruise His Son; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied" with this sacrifice. This was once and for all. This is all that it took. Nothing else can be added. And then He goes on in Isaiah, and He says, "By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." I'm amazed that the gospel accounts give us no, really, response (much) to the darkness; but that it, indeed, took place for three hours.

And we read in verse 34, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' " Now all of these last four utterances from the cross take place, like I said, very close to 3:00. This is the only one, by the way (verse 34), that Mark records; the other ones, you have to go to the other gospels to read. But these were important to Mark - of His suffering, of His servanthood (as we've told you before). It's a direct quote from Psalm 22:1, which was written a thousand years earlier. If you were with us on Good Friday, we spent the entire service talking about that psalm in particular. But here is the first of the final

four words (in close succession) that Jesus cries out. And He cries out because He feels like He's been abandoned by the Father, which He has.

Verse 35 says, "Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, 'Look, He is calling for Elijah!' Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, 'Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down.' " So, nearing the end of this three hours of darkness, where Jesus is the sin-bearer, I think He came to the point where He could suffer it no longer. This is as much as He had to give, and He is crying out for that Father that He hasn't ever been separated from. But He suffers and was treated in the way that we deserve to be treated so that you and I could be treated the way He deserves. We're going to get what He deserves - the glory of the cross. Well, in His weak and parched state, having difficulty (no doubt) breathing, He cries out in Hebrew. Now this is in Aramaic, what Mark is writing. Mark writes to mostly Gentiles, a mostly Roman audience. The Hebrew words are "**Eli, Eli.**" This is written in Aramaic, "**Eloi, Eloi.**" And no doubt they thought that Jesus was crying for Elijah. The Jews, in His generation, would often cry out to Elijah in times of distress and danger. We were taught as kids to pray to Saint Christopher who, I think, has been demoted, but he used to be the guy; and Saint Jude, I think, for traveling mercies. That's what I grew up with. And so there was that kind of element, "Well, let's see if he comes!" And somebody wanted to give Him something to drink to help Him to speak. Others just wanted to leave Him alone and see if Elijah would come or not. It is at this point (according to John 19:28) that "Jesus, knowing ..... the Scripture might be fulfilled," (is the way John wrote it), "said, 'I thirst!' " Now, interestingly enough, out of Psalm 22 (again) and also Psalm 69, there are these verses that speak about the thirst that the Lord suffered upon the cross. "My God, why have You forsaken Me? I'm groaning all these days." And then you read (Psalm 22:15), "They brought Me to the point of death. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws." And Psalm 69:21, "They gave Me vinegar to drink for My thirst." And so the Lord wanted to have a clear capacity to yell out, "It is finished!" I'm sure. Having not said anything for hours, difficulty breathing (which I think we mentioned to you last week - you die by suffocation at the cross), Jesus asked for something to drink, and the wine would moisten His lips. And Jesus knew that this was the last verse (by the way - that verse out of Psalm 69:21) that needed to be fulfilled before He left. In fact John writes it that way. "Knowing ..... the Scripture might be fulfilled," like, "I've got to do one more thing, one more verse." Always in

control. Right? He's the Lord. They didn't take His life; He gave it for us. And so Jesus, knowing this last verse, is now ready to die.

We read in verse 37 - here's how Mark ends the story, "And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last." We are told in John 19:30 (Mark fills in the "loud voice"), John fills in that "when Jesus had received the sour wine," (the vinegar), "He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." And so, "My God, why have You forsaken Me? I'm thirsty. It is finished!" The Greek word "*tetelestai*." It literally means God has finished. The work is done. It's done. Three hours of this darkness, the suffering of separation, and now the end is near. Man's victory, his redemption, is accomplished. If you could fist pump when you were being crucified, I think you'd do it. I mean, this is like the cry of victory. Jesus had come to seek and to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:11, Luke 19:10), and He accomplishes it here. So, from this day forward, the door into heaven is open. There's access. There's a welcome for you there. Finished. The road into God's presence is paved and ready for use. Finished. And I hope that you tell your friends or tell yourself, if you ever doubt, that there's really nothing that you can do to save yourself. When Jesus did what He did, it was finished. Nothing you could do to put in your efforts to make things better, to improve your position before God. It is just His work. Hebrews 9 talks about His sacrifice and that He is finished, once and for all. This is all that God required. In fact, Luke records Jesus, with His last breath - as He bows His head, saying, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit' " (Luke 23:46). Breathing His last, bowing His head, declaring, "It is finished," and then giving Himself to the Father. Jesus' life on the cross didn't ebb away. They didn't kill Him. It would take days to die. They were so surprised - Pilate and the soldiers who did this for a living - that He was already dead six hours later. He didn't die from physical causes. He laid down His life. It was in John 10:17 that Jesus said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." And He does so. It's now done. This work of your salvation is finished. "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Again, Mark doesn't cover it. He's interested in the servanthood of Jesus. But he certainly gives us the one line that isn't found anywhere else.

Now, with the work finished, Jesus regains His fellowship with the Father. Through the blood that He shed, fellowship is restored - just for you and me as well. So now He can use the word "Father" like He used to. It was one of His

favorite words. He uses it seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount, "Father." He uses it forty-five different times with the disciples, just the night before He goes to the cross. As you read the accounts, forty-five different times. It was His favorite word, "My Father in heaven." That's the relationship God has made available through the death of His Son for you and me. Jesus will teach the disciples, "Pray like this, 'Our Father who is in heaven.' " And Jesus will show us how much the Father longs to have fellowship with you. But first this sin has to be removed, and it's removed here, at Calvary. Here's where the door is. Here's the way in. This is the passage. It's narrow.

For the last eighteen hours or so, He's been in the hands of sinners who have mistreated Him and misused Him. In fact, Jesus said (in Mark 14:41), "The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners." And for the last eighteen hours or so, they've had Him. But now He says, "Into Your hands. Father, My life is now - I'm giving it back to You." And He's headed for the loving arms of His Father. You get better treatment when you go to the Lord than when you go to the world. That's for sure. When David was guilty of numbering the people, and he made a bad choice - he decided rather than looking at the LORD, he would just look to his army and how many army members he had (in 2 Samuel 24) - the LORD was angry with David. He wanted him to trust Him. And so a plague fell upon the land, and the prophet came to David, and he said, "You've got three choices of punishments. God'll let you pick." Well, two of them had to do with man and his dealing with David; one had to do with God. And David just said, "I'll just pick the one that God's involved with" because he realized that man was going to be more harsh, certainly, than God would ever be. So, those hands are the ones that He returns Himself to. "Lord, uphold Me with Your hand. At Your right hand, there are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

"Into Your hands I commit My spirit." If you read church history, there are lots of folks - over the centuries - who have died saying the same thing. Stephen would say so (Acts 7:59). John Huss would say so. John Knox would say so. Mary Queen of Scots said it three times in Latin before they cut off her head. It's good to know where you're headed, isn't it, and good to know what's waiting for you.

So Jesus breathes His last. He dismisses His spirit. The soldiers, like I said, come and are so surprised that Jesus is already gone. But He's in control every step. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Finished. The work accomplished.

Well we read in verse 38, "Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." The Bible gives us (and I'll give you a couple to think about) lots of signs that accompanied Jesus' death. Mark is the only one who records this one - that the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. Now, at 3:00 in the afternoon on a Passover, there would literally have been thousands of people gathered around in the temple area as the priests prepared for the evening sacrifices, especially at the Passover. The veil that was hung was hung between the entrance to the Holy of Holies so that sinful man could be kept out, away from the presence of God, because God won't tolerate sin in His presence. So, in the Old Testament economy (as we mentioned), the high priest could only go beyond the veil once a year, and literally everything about that whole temple setup - the courts, the approach, the veil - all screamed at you, "Stay away! Get out! Step back! Don't come any further! Don't come any closer!" Everything was designed to keep you away, but yet God provided a way where you could stand, if you will, in His presence - in a spiritual sense - covering your sin. But you weren't really invited into the Holy of Holies. You weren't welcome there. It was, "Keep out!" if you will. Yet Jesus dies on the cross, and He opens the door into God's presence. And notice that the veil is torn not from bottom to top but from top to bottom. Jesus dies, and God opens the door. He rips the curtain, if you will. He puts the sign out, "Open for business. Come on in. You're all welcome." And it's impossible for us to open that door on our own. In fact, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century temple, this veil was 60' tall, 30' wide, took 300 priests to hang it, and it was as wide as the span of your hand. Imagine how heavy this thing was. It was a huge temple with huge everything. Right? And this veil was no exception.

So, God tears the place open. Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote of it. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote about it as well. So does the Talmud. It speaks about this day where, for no apparent reason, this veil was torn open. You can get in now. How do you get in now? Well, there's only one thing left to do now. You can read about it in Numbers 21 where, you remember, the people murmured against God, and the LORD sent snakes into the camp. And the solution was, as Moses prayed, to make a serpent of brass. Brass is the metal of judgment in the Bible. And he was to hold it up on a stick for these 3½ million people to look at. And his words were pretty simple, "You look at this brass serpent, and you'll live. You look away, and those snakebites will kill you." And they're reduced to just faith because it makes no sense. Looking at some image on a stick doesn't seem to be very hopeful. But the LORD said, "This is what you need to do," and those who looked, by faith in God's Word, lived. And Jesus said to Nicodemus (in chapter 3:14 of John), "And as

Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up," "that I will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). What's left to get in the door is just to look to Him by faith. Jesus is the way to God. He's the only way. He's the open door. He assures you eternal life. And I can only imagine how the priests must have freaked out that afternoon. But here's the deal - the Old Testament sacrifices would not be needed any longer. They were all pictures and signposts to say, "He's coming." Oh, He's come. And so the admission price has been paid, and now we can all come in. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:14-15). But He opens the door for us to come in. The price is paid. Matthew tells us (in chapter 27:51) that, as Jesus died, there was a great earthquake and that the rocks began to split. Jesus had said the very rocks would cry out (Luke 19:40). I guess they did! And something very interesting in Matthew 27:52-53. It says that some of the saints (that had died) arose and came into town. Kind of the symbolic action of the Lord will bring life to the dead. It sounds like a scene from "Night of the Living Dead" to me. It would be quite a shock to have old Uncle Bill who died ten years ago knocking on the door for dinner. But it's just another sign. Jesus brings life to the dead, to those who believe in Him. "I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in Me, though you die, you will live. If you live and believe in Me, you'll never die" (John 11:25-26).

And then we read, here in verse 39, "So when the centurion," (one of the Roman soldiers there) "who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God!' There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem." A reaction from the centurion - part of the crucifixion detail; I would think a hard-hearted man. His job was to keep order. Crowd control. Execute this prisoner. He'd watched lots of other people die. But this Man was different. This Jesus was different. Matthew 27:54 adds the words, "he watched in great fear." It just didn't sit well with his heart. "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" Luke 23:47 adds that he then said, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" and that "he glorified God" in the process, in response. Maybe the second fruit that came out of the death of Jesus - the thief on the cross and now this centurion at the foot of the cross. Luke tells us that many others stood in profound despair; they were

smiting their breasts (Luke 23:48). I have to believe that many of these folks ended up in that three thousand group six weeks down the road when the gospel would be preached to them; and then five thousand others that would follow. But finally these ladies at the end, who had followed the Lord everywhere - among them His mother, His family, Mary Magdalene - Luke writes that they stood afar off in shock (Luke 23:49). They were waiting for, I think, a miracle that never came, at least not yet. And the cold reality of Jesus' death certainly would cause them to lose hope. It did everyone else. But even though they lost hope, and their tears were tears of grief, these women stayed till the end, watched His body taken down, followed Joseph and Nicodemus to see where the burial plot was, came first thing in the morning when the religious travel restrictions were released on Sunday morning. And they would follow Him out of love.

So, some were moved to believe He was the One. Others left in confusion and doubt. Most of the disciples were gone, hiding. The ladies were overcome with grief. All of them would have to wait until Sunday to have their joy restored. But know this. Why do we talk about Jesus so much and the cross so much? Why do we sing those songs so often? It's because there isn't any other way in. Right? This is it. This is our banner place. This is the place we place our flag. You can't turn from here. You can't go to your religious ways. "Well, I'm just going to clean up my act. I'm going to do a little better." That's not going to help. Jesus opened the veil of separation so that you might come to Him. It's what God wants. Sin will keep you in the dark. It'll keep you separated - as it separated Him. But the minute you go to Him by faith, if you believe in Him, trust in Him, you will have eternal life, and you will have the relationship with God that God wants to have with you. But you're going to have to come to Him. You're going to have to decide about who He is. But don't get this wrong. There's no better place for us to be than right here, in that position, looking at His death on our behalf.

Well, we're not done yet. We're not going to leave Jesus in the grave. So praise the Lord for chapter 16. It could be a horrible day otherwise.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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