

Mark - Good Friday Meditation

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the significance of the darkened sky and the rent veil on Good Friday, highlighting God's wrath against sin and the opening of the way for sinners to access God's presence through Jesus' sacrifice.

Duration: 39:42

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 15:33-41, Hebrews 9:6-8

Topics: "Good Friday"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the passage from Mark's Gospel, specifically chapter 15 verses 33 to 41. The sermon aims to explore the deeper meaning of Jesus' crucifixion beyond the physical act. The speaker highlights two main threads in the narrative: Jesus' cry of 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' and his final cry of 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' The speaker emphasizes that Jesus willingly chose to give up his life and surrender his spirit, completing the work of salvation that the Father had given him.

Transcript

I would like to invite you to turn with me to the passage we read a little earlier to Mark's gospel in chapter 15 verses 33 to 41. We are going prayerfully to look at this passage and see what it has to say to us about the momentous event that we remember today as we meet here in the sanctuary and as others gather in various places. Now, if you have the New Testament open at that point, I don't need to read the verses again, though we shall be referring to them as we proceed in our meditation.

This passage takes us well beyond the mere physical act of our Lord's crucifixion. It takes us really into the innermost depths of the meaning of that event. And what I want to do this morning briefly is to take two of the main threads in this narrative and to dwell upon them and by the grace and the goodness of God to try and discover something of that hidden meaning as it is so graphically suggested in this passage.

Now, there are two things then I would like us to concentrate on particularly. First of all, the darkened sky and then the rent curtain. Let's look at the first, the darkened sky above.

Look at verse thirty-three. At the sixth hour, says Mark, darkness covered over the whole land until the ninth hour. We have been tracing the footmarks of our Lord in recent days.

We have seen him arrested in Gethsemane, taken from Gethsemane to the court of Annas, the aged high priest who was still very much alive, arraigned there before he was taken to Caiaphas, where at least the majority of the Sanhedrin awaited him, both of which arraignments took place illegally in the hours of darkness in the night. Early next morning, the morning of the crucifixion, very early as a matter of fact, at the crack of dawn, the whole Sanhedrin met again under the presidency of Caiaphas and here made legal what they had illegally done in the hours of darkness. They had decided upon the charges to be made against the prisoner and from here they took him to Pilate's court to be sentenced to death.

Pilate questioned him, in due course sent him to Herod. Herod found no fault in him and sent him back to Pilate. Pilate three times over said that he found no cause of death in him.

But nevertheless, he delivered him first to be flogged and finally to be crucified. By 9 a.m. our time, according to Mark, Jesus was physically crucified between two thieves on the brow of Calvary. Now, between the hours of 9 a.m. our time and noon, many things took place.

Mark scarcely refers to them. The other writers do. As the Savior's physical, mental, and spiritual anguish became increasingly aggravated by each moment he was suspended to that cross, so too were there all kinds of insults and reproaches heaped upon him by men and by demons.

When the soldiers had performed that dastardly act of nailing him to the cross and placing the uplifted cross in its socket and left him there, you remember that they offered him vinegar mixed with gall to deaden some of the pain which he refused. Then they sat down and cast lots for the few garments that he left, bystanders blasphemed. The chief priests and the scribes have come to the brow of Golgotha, if you please, to jeer and to scoff, arrogantly presuming that justice had been done and that the victory was theirs.

Unexpectedly, one of the thieves that were crucified near Jesus cried to him in words that are out of this world, Lord, he said, remember me when you come to your kingdom. The dying Savior said to him, today you shall be with me in paradise. These are some of the things that took place during those intervening hours.

Then came this totally unexpected and humanly inexplicable darkness, of which Mark speaks in verse 33, and the sixth hour, at the sixth hour, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The very fact of the mention of this darkness implies how unexpected it was and how unusual it was. You see, it was high noon.

It was midday. This is not the time for darkness. This is the time to go and hide from the light and from the heat of the sun.

But everything is totally dark. An overlapping carpet of impenetrable darkness overarches the earth or the land. Now what does all this mean? What's the significance of it? Before we answer that question, let us say the obvious.

That darkness was a supernatural phenomenon. There is no known explanation of that other than that it was an act of God. It could not have been an eclipse of the sun for many reasons.

Not only is it midday, but it lasted 12 times longer than any known eclipse of the sun in history. This was no natural phenomenon, but supernatural, an act of God. God did it, directly so, specifically so.

But what's the meaning of it? Two things I want to say this morning about it. That darkness was a symbolic portent of at least two important spiritual realities that feature in the event recorded here. One, the darkness overarching Golgotha symbolized the holy wrath of God against the sin of men.

Now this is the day, a day when we hear very little about the holiness and righteousness and righteous indignation of our holy God. But you cannot honestly read these passages in the Gospels, nor indeed in the Epistles, without recognizing that God is indignant with his world. God is angry with sin.

And one, at least, significance of this awful, hideous, terrifying darkness is this. It betokens, it bespeaks of the anger of God against sin. First of all, the sin that made a Calvary necessary in order to be removed.

A sin that made the incarnation of God a necessity in order to be dealt with. And then, of course, the sin that machinated, that planned Calvary. The sins of which we heard as Greg Scharf was expounding a previous passage in Mark last Lord's Day morning.

The envy of the Jewish leaders. They did, they did not want him to have the power he had. They wanted it.

And they didn't have it. And they were full of envy. And for envy, they would send him to the cross and have him crucified.

Not only that, God was angry with the careless self-seeking of Pilate, the crazy superficiality of Herod, with his sole concern to see the miraculous done by Jesus. Angry with the fickleness of the crowd. Angry with the behavior of the disciples.

Angry with the world that was responsible for nailing his incarnate son to the cross of Calvary. God was angry. Darkness is so often in scripture a symbol of judgment.

And there is an element of judgment that surrounds the cross of Christ. If you read through the prophets, you will find over and over again, it would keep us a very long time if we were to try to expand this theme in the prophets of how darkness is symbolic of divine judgment. Let me just give you one or two illustrations.

I could quote from Isaiah. I have before me a passage from Joel in chapter two. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and the dreadful day of the Lord.

There are judgments of God which are described here as darkness before the great and final judgment day. Or again, Amos, woe to you who long for the day of the Lord, says Amos. Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.

A day of darkness. But when you come to the New Testament, you find that Jesus is still more explicit. Jesus himself spoke of those who will end up in outer darkness.

Outer darkness. And Jesus' brother, according to the flesh, child of the same mother, Jude, whose short letter we have in the New Testament speaks of those who are being reserved for the blackness of darkness forever. What does all this mean? My friends, it means this.

It means that God's holy antipathy to sin is expressed itself in terms of this amazing thing that happened when the land was covered with an impenetrable blackness and darkness. I guess this notion, this fact, this truth may well have been in the mind of Isaac Watts when he penned those words. Woe might the sun in darkness hide and shut his glories in.

When God, the mighty maker, died for man, the creature's sin. That supernatural phenomenon then spoke first of all of the fact that God was righteously indignant with a sin that had spoiled his world, slew his son, and made Calvary a necessity. But secondly, the same supernatural darkness symbolized the sense of that judgment in the sense of forsakenness in the soul of Jesus on the cross.

Verse 34 reads, And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lamas abachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now this 34th verse is a massive verse and we are not attempting to expound it now in any of its serious detail, but we want to get the main, perhaps the main thrust of it. It really defies human imagination in all our attempts to plumb its depths. Human wisdom is left staggering here.

You notice it in the text. The people standing there just simply did not know what Jesus was saying. And they thought he was calling for Elijah.

And when one of them went to offer him some wine, vinegar, probably his partner said to him, look, leave him now and see whether Elijah comes to help him. Leave him, leave him. They were out of their depth.

They couldn't make sense out of this. Who could have forsaken him? Now, will you mark the time of this cry? I think this is very, very important. It coincided with the end of the three hours darkness.

The darkness is over. The darkness to which we have referred. And that was the very hour when the evening lamb, the evening sacrifice was being offered in the temple, the lamb, the daily lamb.

You remember that part of the religion of the Jews involved that in the early morning and then in the evening, lambs were offered, acknowledging the sins of the nation. And this was the hour of the evening sacrifice. At the very stroke of the ninth hour, the temple priests would, would slay the evening lamb.

And at that very hour, it would seem Jesus uttered his poignant yet triumphant cry, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now you ask me, why am I calling attention to the timing for this reason? I believe that when I get to heaven, and we'll be able to ask many questions about things unanswered in the gospel, I believe that two things will be seen to coincide. Just as the knife cut the neck and drew the blood of the innocent lamb in the temple, and it let go its bleating, poignant cry of rebellion. At that very moment, I believe the lamb of God on the cross, upraised, cried, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? His words cannot be understood of anything else, nor of anything less than the sense of forsakenness, which had crept over his sinless soul as he there bore our sins as the lamb of God.

The mystery and the inner meaning of the death of Christ is there in the heart of that cry, if only we have the capacity to understand it properly. He did not whimper at the physical manhandling and the spitting of men, not a whimper. He begged no compassion of those who nailed him, literally nailed him to the cross, any more than from his false accusers in the various courts through which he has passed.

He asked no compassion of his judges, but the withdrawal of his father's smile and the sense of his father's presence turned his peace into the experience of woe. Oh, my God, says the sin-bearer, not his own sin but ours. My God, says my sin-bearer on Calvary's cross, why have you forsaken me? It was not because of any sin in him, for he had none.

It was because of the sin on him which were yours and mine. God poured the vials of his wrath upon our substitute sin-bearer, and this made his soul shudder as if having a foretaste of hell in his own soul. You notice how this comes out so clearly in the Gospels, the first cry that Jesus, the first prayer which he had

uttered upon the cross, he addressed to God as Father.

For matters had not at that point come to such a poignant issue as they were going to a little later on. And the last cry he uttered on the cross, he addressed God as Father. But here the sense of the presence of God as Father has vanished.

God could not forsake God in the absolute sense, but the sense of the presence of God has been withdrawn. As Jesus bore the consequences of the wrath of his Father against our sins there on Calvary's tree. That then is the essential meaning, I believe, of the awesome darkness that lingered over the land and enveloped Calvary in particular for a span of three long hours on that black Friday.

It symbolized the wrath of God against the sin of men, and it symbolized that same holy wrath experienced by Jesus, not against himself, but against the sin that he bore away in his body on the tree, yours and mine. We sometimes sing Sankey's hymn about the ninety and nine, and you remember the last verse, there is much more to it than meets the eye. None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through ere he found the sheep that was lost.

The darkness of that impenetrable blackness surrounding Golgotha and there in the depths of the Savior's soul is something that we shall never, never plumb. Let me turn for a few minutes to the other main thread that awaits our comment in this passage, this tremendous passage before us this morning. I want to look at the rent veil.

Verses 37 to 38 read, with a loud cry Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. You notice Mark is very cryptic here.

He doesn't elaborate, he doesn't dwell in detail, and he doesn't cause his sentences to be protracted. He's very cryptic. They're almost shorthand ways of saying things or writing things.

There are two things that coincide here, namely the raised voice of Jesus and the rent veil of the temple. I just want to say a word about both of them. First of all, the raised voice.

Note the text, with a loud cry. The suffering Savior did not simply and passively allow his life to ebb away. Have you sat by the dying? Have you ever been involved in that sacred vigil? Watching someone leave this life.

Then you know that normally people do not cry with a loud voice, but worn out, wearily, sob their last or just move into silence. There is something different here. Jesus is not dying naturally like other people.

Jesus is not just wasting away and his strength being sapped as a man that has been on his bed suffering from some terrible sickness. He died voluntarily. He, with strength his own, surrendered his spirit, gave up his spirit.

These are biblical terms. He gave his life. He poured out his life unto death.

He laid down his life. Or as Matthew and John put it, he gave up the spirit. He yielded the spirit.

He dismissed his spirit. It isn't that death overtook him and he couldn't breathe another breath. It was that he dismissed his spirit and sent his spirit back to the Father.

He dismissed the spirit. He chose to die. He laid down his life.

Not simply did he yield himself to the soldiers in the garden, neither did he simply yield himself to those that nailed him to the tree. He now dismisses his spirit and he gives his spirit back to God to say, I choose to die and I give myself, my spirit to you. Now, this is clear from the last... Jesus knew exactly what he was doing.

This is clear from everything that we read in the gospel narratives. The last two utterances, the sixth and the seventh cries from the cross are these. The sixth, it is finished.

Meaning that the work that the Father had given him to do with the salvation of men was over and done with. He had finished it. And then the last cry, Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit.

And so with a loud triumphant cry, that's why I said it is not simply pinent, but it is triumphant. He dismissed his spirit because all was done. The raised voice of triumph as he chooses to die, such was his love.

But that brings us to the other feature here, the rent bail. We have already said that the evening sacrifice was in process of being offered. So that if you can imagine it, the priests were involved in the temple in Jerusalem.

I can't tell you how they managed to get on when everything was dark, but I do remember that there were the candelabra in the temple and there were other artificial lights there too. And somehow or other, they had come to the time of the evening sacrifice and they had slain the lamb. And then something happened.

You know, we need a little bit of imagination here. A sanctified imagination, not to run away from the truth, but to recognize the truth. I want you to imagine these priests involved about their business in the holy place and separating the holy place from the holy of holies where God dwelt among his people was this curtain of blue called the second veil.

We read about it in Exodus 36 and in 2 Chronicles 3.14, for example. As pictured in these passages, strands of blue, purple and scarlet were interwoven into a white linen fabric in which there emerged in consequence a mass of cherubim. You've got the point.

These colors interwoven in such a way, in such a manner that the colors formed a mass of cherubim on the curtains. The guardian angels of God's holiness symbolically, as it were, barring the entrance of anybody beyond that curtain. Now those of you who know your Bible will remember that we encountered these cherubim right at the garden of Eden.

When man has sinned and God has cast him outside of the garden, he bars his way to the tree of life and he places cherubim there with flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life, because man is under condemnation and under the wrath of God. And here we find these same cherubim woven into the fabric of the curtain, as it were, barring access into the place where God is, as if telling every sinner, every Jew, or no Gentile ever came there anyway, but every Jew, keep out. On pain of death you enter here.

The only one ever to enter was the high priest, and he only once every year. And each time he did so, he did so first with blood to offer as an atonement for his own sins and the sins of his family, and then with blood again, which he sprinkled on the mercy seat for the sins of the whole nation. He went in and he performed that rite, and then when he came out, the curtains were drawn again, and they were never opened until the next day of atonement.

And the cherubim, as it were, inscribed on that curtain of blue, barred everybody, challenged everybody, warned everybody, keep out. But as the priests were about their business in the temple, something happened. The curtain separating the holy place from the holy of holies was torn in two, split in two, from the top to the bottom.

Not from the bottom upwards, but from upwards down to the bottom. An unseen hand, I say, because that's what the scriptures say. The same hand that caused the darkness over Golgotha and over the land now tore the temple veil.

Until this point it was closed and it was one, and it barred the way in. Why did it bar the way in? The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us in chapter 9, verses 6 to 8, where you find these words, that the Holy Spirit was thus showing that the way into the most holy place was not yet opened, not yet disclosed. As long as the first tabernacle was standing, there was no way into the presence of God for the ordinary sinner.

But when Jesus died, God tore that veil in two, because the blood of Jesus offered for our sins had opened for us, as Hebrews 10 says, a new and a living way into the very presence of God. That's the significance of the rent veil. The way is now open.

You know you're a sinner this morning. You know you're guilty of breaking the law of God. You know that you, by the justice of God as myself, we could all and should all be consigned to outer darkness forever, justly condemned by the law of a holy God.

The curtain that once said, stay out, keep away, says now the way is open. Come. Come.

Let us draw near, says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, with full assurance of faith. There's no need to doubt anymore. God has opened the way to his heart, to his presence, to his feet, to his heaven.

And of course, on Calvary's cross, we have one of the most beautiful illustrations of this, when Jesus said to that sin-soiled life, that spoilt, ruined life that was dying and breathing its last on the side of him, today, he says, shalt thou be with me in paradise. Jesus, you see, has opened a way for sinners to come into the presence of God by his blood. Now then, what is the message of this passage? If the black sky above spoke to pagan Romans, as well as to Jews of the wrath of God over mankind as a whole, and experienced in the soul of Jesus as our sin-bearer, the rending of the veil spoke decisively to the Jews especially, that the messianic work of Jesus was finished, and the old order was gone.

Oh, they didn't want to believe that, and they didn't, but some did. And the way for a sinner to draw near to God and call him father is made possible by the sacrifice of Calvary. I close with this.

There are two groups of people here. You notice them? Right at the end here, we read, um, in verse 39, when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus heard his cry and saw how he died. I can't attempt to describe what he, what is meant there.

But he saw how he died. He said, surely this man was the son of God. Here is a Roman centurion brought up in paganism and fed on paganism and starved of, starved of truth.

And the Jewish people have been incapable of telling him much more than he knew already because of their own spiritual condition and rebellion. But at last he's seen something, and out of his pagan soul comes the acknowledgement. This is something totally unusual.

This must have been the son of God. And with some measure of faith, we dare to believe he said it and he confessed it. I want to say to you today, if there is an unbeliever in our service this morning, I can hardly think there is, and yet there may be.

If the spectacle of Christ, the son of God dying for your sin does not squeeze willingly from your lips and from your heart, the confession that he is the son of God and the only savior, then there is nothing in this world that can save you. You must perish. You must die.

For this is God's last word to man. And the gospel involves the repetition of that last word to every generation. But the word is uttered, the deed is done, the fact is finished.

And if this does not bring penitence to my heart and faith into my spirit, nothing else will. I must die. If you're in that condition this morning, stand with the pagan centurion and acknowledge with your lips and tell someone around you, I believe that Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah that was sent.

And for the rest of us, let's take our place with these women, folk. The men, I guess, were too busy. They always are, you know.

Some men, some women, rather, were watching from a distance. They dare not draw too near, though some of them did at one point. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and Salome.

In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. What were they doing? Oh, just dare to show their sympathy, to watch with him.

As the disciples were unable to watch with him in the garden, they watch with him, they wait with him. And dare I suggest, though the Bible doesn't say it, but I believe it is true, there was some sense of holy wonder in their souls. My friend, where are you this morning? Have you come to the feet of Jesus and by his sacrifice into the presence of God that you can call him Father? That is the way that is open.

Let us pray. Almighty and ever-blessed God, our Father, glorious in power and gracious as glorious, we worship you for the gift of your Son. We bow with a sense of awe before you, Almighty, glorious, glorified, risen, reigning, coming Son of God, that you died for us on Calvary's tree.

Spirit of God, we thank you for opening the eyes of the blind, the centurion of the cross as well as the thief, and equally blinded men and women down through the centuries of time to see in the crucified sin-bearer, the Son of God, the only Savior. Make this day a day of joy and rejoicing for us in the discovery that these things are true. Amen.

Speak peace to our troubled hearts and to our troubled world through the blood of the everlasting covenant in Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

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