

# Christ on the cross

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now this morning we might turn our attention to Luke chapter 23 and for guiding our thoughts we take verses 44 and 45. And it was about the sixth hour and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

Now it's noticeable from a reading of the Bible that any new era in the economy of God's grace is generally ushered in or accompanied by supernatural manifestations of God's power. Let me just for a few moments try to explain this. We can think of the era of the law which began at Mount Sinai. We are not saying of course that the law began at Mount Sinai but we might say that the era of the law began then. When the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses reached Mount Sinai, you remember preceding that there were these miracles that Moses had formed in the sight of Pharaoh. And then when they eventually reached the mountain, it tells us that the law was given to Moses amid thunders, lightnings and trumpet blasts.

And it was but fitting that that should be so. Because you see, this is how the law of God affects us. You know, sometimes when we are sitting down with the Bible and the law of God is coming to us, it's like the thunder clap. It hits us. Or sometimes it's like the lightning clap. It comes and it shows us some great light, some great truth that we had never understood before. Well, when Moses went up into the mountain, we read that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud so that all the people that was in the camp trembled and the whole mount quaked greatly. And then when our Lord died upon the cross on Mount Calvary, we might say that that was when the era of grace was ushered in. And again, we qualify that and we are not saying that grace began at Calvary. But we are saying that the era of grace can be said to have begun when Christ Jesus died on the cross.

[ 2 : 42 ] And you remember that with the coming of Christ, his advent was heralded by the angels who came down from heaven. And throughout the ministry of the Savior, there were miracles, supernatural manifestations of the power of God.

And now when the redemptive work of the Savior has been successfully completed, darkness descends over all the earth and the veil of the temple is torn down in two pieces in a mysterious way.

Now there will be another era in God's economy. It will come at the end of world history. When God is going to establish forever the final state of all things.

And when the end of world history comes, it will be ushered in too with manifestations of divine power. You might say to me, what's going to happen at the end of the world?

How will we know that the end of the world is coming? Well, you see, the Bible tells us that there is going to come a time when the vials of Israel will be outpoured upon the earth.

[ 4 : 00 ] When the seven last plagues, as he tells us, will be taken and poured out upon the children of men. And then too, there is going to come the final conflict between good and evil.

And then also at the end of world history, there is going to take place that extraordinary phenomenon. The general resurrection of the dead.

The graves. These hemathees that are full will burst open. The graves will burst open. I've often gone to Dreenas. I've often stood where my people are buried.

I used to take my elderly mother there. After she would weep, recollecting the memory of the family that are dead, she would go away and I'd still go there.

Just a loop. There's nothing to be seen. Just a plot of grass. And yet as I leave that place, I think to myself, one day that grave will burst open.

[ 5 : 05 ] It may be that something will be built over it for all I know in future time, but someday this grave will burst open and the dead will come forth when the spirits, their spirits, return from the eternal world and be joined again to their bodies.

So that has got to take place yet. It will be an extraordinary event, won't it? And then, of course, there will come too the setting up of the great white throne.

And God will set up his white throne for the purpose of universal judgment. And all peoples, nations and kingdoms will be gathered before him and you will be there.

And so will I. And God will open the book. And the dead will be judged out of those things that are in the book. And, of course, the question at the moment that immediately comes to your mind, to mine, and that is this.

Which book will your name be in? Will it be the book of life or the book of death? Yes. But we haven't come to that era yet when the end will take place.

[ 6 : 23 ] We are living in this day of God's grace. And we are living in days when opportunities for repentance and opportunities for reconciliation with God are given to us.

And the question that I have to ask myself, and that is this. What use, what use have I been making of the opportunities God has given to me? And what use are you making of the opportunities God has given to you to be reconciled to him?

After all, friends, we haven't got so very long to live. And all too soon your life will be ended and so will mine.

Fifty years ago, a different congregation used to sit in these self-same shoes where you are sitting now, but they are gone. I suppose some of the older people who have been away from me and who come back and who look around this congregation today, maybe it is, and we are using the word advisedly, maybe it is they see ghosts.

The ghosts of the past. People who once were here but are no longer here. And then in another fifty years, it is almost certain that half of us won't be here.

[ 7 : 46 ] A lifetime. It is so terribly short. And how so necessary it is to make our calling and our election sure while we are given these days of opportunity in this era of grace.

But let's go back to the text. I want us to look just for a few moments at the phenomenal darkness that came down over the cross at this time.

You see, it tells us that our Lord was taken out to die at the third hour. Now, the Eastern custom of measuring time was, I suppose it still is in some places, from sunrise to sunset.

Now, sunrise in the East is six o'clock in the morning. And when it tells us that our failure was taken out to die at the third hour, that means three from six in the morning, which is nine.

So at nine o'clock in the morning, Jesus was taken out to the hill of Calvary. And there they put him onto the cross.

[ 9 : 01 ] They asked him to lie down on this cross. And as each arm was stretched out, they took the spikes and drove them through the fleshy parts into the crossbeam.

And then having done that, they gradually raised this cross in an upright position. And for three hours underneath that blazing eastern sun, our Lord suffered.

You know what flies do when you have an open sword? They make straight for it. And it's a good thing when your hands are free, when you are able to brush aside these flies.

On a hot summer's day, you're out there and perhaps the flies are buzzing about you. You're glad to wipe them away with your hands. Scatter them.

It must have been awful for our Lord. With these open wounds made by the crown of thorns on his head. With these open wounds on the palms of his hands and on his feet.

[ 10 : 13 ] With all these insects buzzing about him. And no one is able to go near and to wipe from him the sweat of death. Or to give him some measure of relief from the distress that he is going through.

And then it tells us that a darkness came down over all the earth at the sixth hour. There was, it tells us it was about the sixth hour there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

Now, the sixth hour is twelve noon. So that at midday, suddenly there was a blanket of darkness. Came down over all the earth and that lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon.

Maybe it is as you've been reading these words, you haven't thought very much about this phenomenal darkness. But there are those who have made a study of this and they tell us that it wasn't a cloud covering.

It wasn't caused by storm conditions. It wasn't an eclipse of the sun. No, this was a strange darkness.

[ 11 : 31 ] And at that particular time of the year, this should have been the moment of the brightest part of the day. And yet at this moment when it should have been the brightest part of the day, suddenly there came down this darkness.

A phenomenal darkness. It was, you see, as if God Almighty in heaven placed his hand over the sun and stopped the sun from shining.

It was as if God Almighty was saying, well, if no one will mourn with my sun, I'll cause the whole of nature to go into mourning.

And so God placed his hand upon the sun, causing nature to sympathize and mourn with his sun in his suffering. You see, this darkness obviously was the work of God whose power is seen everywhere in nature.

Isn't it God who says this? Behold, he says, at my rebuke, I dry up the sea. I make the rivers a wilderness.

[ 12 : 44 ] Their fish stinketh because there is no water and diet for thirst. And this is the point. I, says God, I clothe the heavens with blackness.

I make darkness their covering. Do you remember the plagues that came upon Pharaoh? Away back in the days when Moses asked for his people to be allowed to go.

And just before the last plague, the plague of death, it tells us that God sent a plague of darkness, of thick darkness that could be felt.

And that darkness lasted for three days. It must have been terrifying. What would you feel like if you were locked in a dark room?

You might say, you know, I don't suffer from claustrophobia, but I tell you this, that you would soon suffer from claustrophobia if you were locked in a dark room.

[ 13 : 54 ] If you couldn't get near an electric switch to switch on the light, if you couldn't strike a match, if you couldn't put on a candle, it must be terrible.

If there are no stars shining on a night, if there is no moon, and you're groping about in the darkness, it must be terrifying. And that's the kind of darkness that God plagued Egypt with until at last Pharaoh relented and said he would ask Moses to pray that God might lift this darkness.

But then, I believe that this darkness typifies something more than just nature sympathizing with the Savior. And God, you see, allowed these conditions to prevail at this particular time, but there was symbolism here, speaking about other things, and so can we not say that darkness suggests evil, and the power of evil is spoken of as the power of darkness.

And doesn't it tell us in the Bible that men love darkness rather than light because they're evil? Here is a murderer.

He's going out onto Leith Walk and he's going to strike terror into some victim or other of his. He'll choose a dark night. Here is a man hell-bent on satisfying his lust.

[ 15 : 42 ] He'll choose the darkness. Here is a man who wants to make illegal gains. He'll break into some house in the darkness.

No wonder the Bible says men love darkness rather than light. Why? Because their deeds were evil. And you see, this darkness that came down over the cross was the time when men were doing the very worst that they could possibly do.

do you remember when our Lord was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane? He said an extraordinary thing. He said, this is your hour and the power of darkness.

Now all the hours belong to God, don't they? All time is in the hands of God and yet our Lord says to these men, this moment, this hour has been given to you.

This is your hour and the power of darkness. And so you see here we have Christ and he is reaching the crisis in his great work of redemption.

[ 17 : 02 ] And what is our Lord doing as he hangs upon that cross? Well you see he is doing two things. first of all he is destroying the devil and secondly he is making satisfaction to the law of God for the sins of his people.

Just think of this. You see in that darkness our Lord has gone into territory that is alien to him. He is the light of the world.

I am the light of the world whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. But in order you see for the kingdom of God to be opened the devil must be destroyed.

And so our Lord you see he goes into the territory that belongs to the devil or where the devil is we might say. He is going to engage in conflict with the devil.

Isn't it John in his epistle who tells us this that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. And oh how our Lord Jesus succeeded gloriously and triumphantly.

[ 18 : 20 ] And on that cross as the apostle Paul tells us in his epistle to the Colossians on that cross our Lord blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against us which was contrary to us and took it out of the way mailing it to his cross.

Now listen the apostle goes on to say and he says having spoiled principality and power he made a show of them openly triumphing over the minute.

You see he spoils and when you spoil a power it means that you destroy that power you triumph over that power and there our Lord you see on the cross was triumphing over the powers of darkness destroying the devil and all the works of the devil making a show of them openly.

You know what Jesus did on that cross? He bound Satan. You may say to me but I don't think Satan's bound.

It seems to me as if we're living in days when Satan seems to be raging about the world. How can you say Satan is bound? Well as one of the Puritan puts it the chain that's on the devil is the length of the world.

[ 19 : 55 ] As Hendrix in the commentator puts it too you know the devil it's like a mad dog.

Supposing you were to take a mad dog off the streets and put this mad dog in here of course we would get out.

We would shut the door and leave this awful beast in this place. What would this place be like after you would come in?

it would be a shambles. This beast would tear nor destroy everything that it possibly could.

But remember you've contained the power of the beast. You've contained the power of the beast within this dimension. And this is how it is you see with the devil his power has been contained within this earthbound dimension of ours.

Unlike the mad dog he destroys. Unlike the mad dog he is hell bent on our course of destruction.

But remember his power is limited and at the end what a fate awaits the devil.

[ 21 : 15 ] You know what Jesus said about hell? sometimes when you think of hell you think that hell was made for wicked people. No Jesus says that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels.

And you go and read again the final chapters of the Bible. Do you get depressed reading the book of Revelation? I don't. it's the greatest book that you can read as a Christian in the world that you are living in today.

See the triumph of Christ as the King of Kings and as the Lord of Lords. See how the devil is to be cast into the lake of fire that burns forever and ever.

and knowing his time is short he's like a dying man and sometimes when we have to visit dying people not all dying people are like this of course but there are some dying people and we have observed this they seem to get extraordinary strength you sometimes see them struggling on the bed in which they are you sometimes see them trying to raise themselves and you know that it's only a matter of time but there seems to be a strength that surges through them in these last moments of their life and that's how it is with the devil today but not only did that phenomenal darkness symbolize the terrible conflict that our Lord engaged in to destroy the devil and his power you see just before

I leave that point I want it to be firmly imprinted in your mind that at the cross you see two powers in conflict the one power is the power of Christ and the other power is the power of hell and Christ triumphed but also too that darkness symbolized the outer darkness through which our Lord had to pass in order to make satisfaction to God's law for the sins of his people you know you know that hell is described in the Bible as the place where the worm never dies and the fire is not quenched you know that if you take a piece of meat ordinary butcher meat and it's lying there if you do nothing to it what happens to this piece of meat well of course inevitably putrefaction begins and after a time you begin to see the worm destroying this piece you see the power of destruction has begun and that is what our

[ 24 : 25 ] Lord says hell is like you see it's the place where the power of destruction which never ends the place where the worm never dies the place where the power of destruction begins but never ends and just as the worm works from within so the fire works from without it's the place where the fire is never put out and you see hell is the place where from within and without a process

of never ending destruction goes on it's also called in the Bible the place of outer darkness the place of God's righteous retribution and when Christ bore the sins of his people let us remember this and we must never minimize this that Christ

Jesus had to suffer all the consequences that the sinner had to suffer he had to pay the price for the sins of his people and the price that had to be paid by our Lord and Savior could be no less than hell itself and so when the darkness enveloped him on the cross it symbolized now you see that our Lord was descending step by step down into the ultimate in God's punishment for sin and as I look at Christ Jesus the Savior on that cross that's what I see I see him entering as it were the threshold of hell and going down down down until he touches the ultimate in God's punishment for sin and in the place that we call hell that is the place where

God can only reveal himself in wrath and if we were to make a further study of this death of our Lord on the cross we would see that after these awful three hours and remember too that an infinite transaction was taking place here because Christ you see in his divine nature is an infinite person and so the time factor doesn't enter into it three hours no that doesn't enter into it at all an infinite transaction is taking place here and at the end you see of that period of time suddenly the silence of Calvary is shattered men have become quiet this darkness is surrounding them all and suddenly they hear a sharp piercing voice out of that darkness coming from that center cross and it's the voice of Jesus and he cries my God my God why hast thou forsaken me that was a strange experience a painful experience an experience indicative of something that surpasses human comprehension an experience you see these words are indicative of an experience that caused the Lord

Jesus Christ the greatest anguish and the greatest woe you will never hear our Lord cry out my God my God except on that occasion at all other times he is able to address God as his father my father even when they nailed him to the cross he was able to say father forgive them even when he expired on the cross and when he delivered up his soul he was able to say father into thy hands I commend my spirit but at this particular moment the distance between him and the father has become so wide so great that he can only cry out my God my God why hast thou forsaken me and hell is the place where God forsakes hell is the place of final abandonment where God finally dismisses a man and if he has died a filthy man

God says him that is filthy let him be filthy still him that is unjust let him be unjust still I want us to understand and I want myself to understand this that salvation wasn't secured in an easy offhand way no it took the bloody sweat of Gethsemane and it took the unfathomable agonies of Calvary to secure salvation for people like you and me as it has been put none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through ere he found his sheep that was lost but I must close this part of the service by drawing your attention just in a word or two to the rent veil you see something else took place not only was there the mysterious darkness which lasted for three hours but after it was all over in the temple and you know the temple was just a structure like this an oblong building like this on the one side of the temple was the golden candlestick symbolic of God's light to the children of Israel going through the wilderness on the other table on the other side of the temple was the table of show bread symbolizing the heavenly manna that God provided his people with in the wilderness in the center was the altar of incense where this beautiful incense went up symbolizing the prayers of God's people that go up to heaven and here at this end you see was a heavy curtain which cut off the enclosure beyond and in that enclosure beyond it was kept in perpetual darkness because there in the old days there was the ark of the covenant and only the high priest was allowed to go in there once a year and now you see the veil is torn as it were by the two mighty invisible hands of [ 32 : 10 ] God you see that veil spoke to the children of Israel of separation that there was a great gulf between God and men that there was a separation between them and you could only go to God through the high priest but of course all that was just a temporary arrangement until the great high priest the son of God came and when Christ Jesus died on that cross and when he completely shed his blood he was you see the high priest giving himself in death on the cross not offering up any human sacrifice or any animal sacrifice but offering himself without spot to God and as the epistle to the Hebrews tells us having done that he went into the holiest of all with his own precious blood not with the blood of bulls or of goats or with the ashes of

Anhefa but with his own precious blood he went into the presence of God having made an atonement for us and to show that the atonement was satisfactory that it was complete God

removed forever the symbolism and it was as if God was saying now the way is open and you come to me through my son it's no wonder you know that Jesus died with his hands outstretched and across because with these arms of his outstretched on the cross it was symbolic of the fact that with his one arm he was taking hold of his people those who love him and who trust in him and with his other arm he was laying hold upon God his father and bringing them together in himself in his own person and now there is no longer any separation and no symbols are needed what a wonderful work

Christ achieved what a wonderful salvation this is I no longer need any human priest I no longer need any symbolism I have the reality in Christ my savior and he is our great high priest if we believe in him and he has made a full atonement for our sins having borne them having suffered for them having gone down into the ultimate in God's punishment for them and God cannot ask for anything more can he and you know Paul puts it like this I am he says crucified with Christ nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me just ponder the words I am crucified with Christ Paul seems to say to us do you want to see Saul of Tarsus he's crucified with Christ he's dead and finished his sins have been atoned for in him in Christ on the cross and this new man that you see just now is Paul a Christ indwelt man a Christ infilled man and that is precisely what has happened to us and so God you see cannot ask for anything more because God actually put us into Christ and when Christ died on that cross in some mysterious way which I don't understand I was with Christ on that cross just as in some mysterious way that I don't understand I was in Adam my first father when he fell but I know this that the damaging the damaging results of my first father Adam I know only too well in my own life because of the twist in my nature and the corruption of my heart and I know too from my own spiritual experience that in some way in which I don't understand my sins were atoned for in me in Christ on the cross and his life flows through to me and I live but in some way or another it's not me but it's Christ living in me there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour the sun was dark and the veil of the temple was rent in twain in the midst may you and I then know something of this redeemer this savior may we be linked to him by faith so that we will never know what it is to go through that darkness that he went through but that we will only know the benefits that accrue to us through his life of perfect obedience and through his death on the cross let us pray eternal god we give thee thanks for that grand work of atonement that was accomplished by our lord and savior in his life of perfect obedience and in his submission to the death of the cross oh lord we can never understand why christ jesus thine own dear son should have come down to this world to go through such for sinners like ourselves it is the expression of thine own love to us god so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son and it is the expression of the love that christ himself had for us in that greater love hath no man than this than that a man laid down his life for his friends and so we thank thee for that never to be forgotten day in the history of this world when our savior died on the cross and bent his head in death be with us now we pray thee and as we attend to this memorial service when we will commemorate that death in the act of communion be pleased oh lord to bless us and forgive our sins for christ's sake amen