3-15-20

Matthew 27:45-46

Darkness fell over the land. Darkness fell over Israel. From noon until 3PM. This was not an eclipse or a sandstorm; this was supernatural darkness from God. In the Bible, we understand darkness to be judgement; and to represent a spiritual blindness.

The people of Israel have rejected, tortured, and crucified their Messiah. This is the One they claim to have been waiting for; this is the One whom they have cried out to God to send. Yet, now that He is here, they mock Him and have Him executed. They would not let themselves see who He was because He was not what they wanted. They wanted someone to free them from the Romans. In their hardness of heart, they were blind to who Jesus was. Darkness came over the land of Israel; it came to give them a hint that they were blind to truth.

In Exodus 7-12 is the account of the ten plagues or judgements against Egypt. The ninth plague was darkness over the land of Egypt that lasted for three days. A darkness so thick that it could be felt. Still the heart of Pharaoh was hard; so it was followed by the judgement of the death of the first-born son. Likewise, darkness fell over the land of Israel for three hours to let them know that they were now under judgement; this darkness was followed by the death of God’s first-born Son.

This darkness indicated another judgement; the judgement that was falling on Jesus. It was during these three hours of darkness that Jesus was separated from His Father. Jesus had undergone excruciating physical torture and we can partly relate to this; we have all experienced physical pain before. But what He went through physically was nothing compared to the separation from His Father. We have a harder time relating to this. Because we are sinful people, we have never had the close communion with God that Jesus had.

As Christians, we have fellowship with God and we experience closeness to Him. But because we are still fallen people, we cannot have that perfect communion with Him that we will have in time to come. We really cannot appreciate what a horrible ordeal Jesus went through being separated from God.

Non-believers are spiritually separate from God; they are spiritually dead. They have no other knowledge of what it’s like to have a relationship with Him. Still, because of common grace, they are cared for by God. They can still have things like hope and experience being happy. In hell, all that changes. Separation from God is complete; all hope is gone; abject spiritual agony sets in. This is what Christ experienced on the cross. He experienced being forsaken by His Father.

The Bible gives us an account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Luke 22:44 are the words: And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. How appropriate is the name “Gethsemane”, which means “olive press”. As the olives are pressed so that the oil comes out, so our Saviour was pressed beneath the coming weight of God’s wrath to the point of shedding blood.

Jesus had faced the wrath of men, the wrath of nature, and the wrath of demons and satan; all without trepidation. But now He knew that He was going to face the wrath of His Father; and He was sorrowful to the point of death. What a terrible time for Him, being God Himself, knowing what the wrath of God really was.

Once on the cross, Jesus suffers in relative silence, even during the time of the darkness of judgement. Finally, He cries out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” In this cry we see the strength of Jesus. Even after all He had endured; even while under the suffocating force of crucifixion; He cried out in a loud voice. There was no murmuring or whispering, in strength of voice He asked His question. In so doing, He taught us all the true nature of what He was undergoing; abandonment by God.

He called out to God. Even after losing all contact with His Father, He maintained His faith in Him. The Father had forsaken Him, the Holy Spirit had left Him, no angels were at His side to minister to Him; He was alone. Yet He held to His faith; He refused to believe that God would not save Him. A lesson for us when we are in a dark hour of our own lives. We must cling to Christ. Even if it feels like we are forsaken, we are not; Jesus was forsaken, but we will never be.

Forsaken is a strong word; it is a miserable feeling to have. Notice how Jesus cries out “My God”. Throughout the Gospel accounts, He has always referred to God as “Father”. But now, He can’t say that because Jesus is now bearing the sin of the world, and God cannot be with Him as Father. He cries out as to one He is not familiar with; not intimate with. But still, He cries out in faith.

Jesus was completely unstained by sin. Being God, sin was abhorrent to Him. He had lived for eternity past in glory and even as a man in perfect righteousness with the Father and the Spirit. Now sin was poured out upon Him, it all became His to pay the price for. He bore the weight of sin and He bore the weight of God’s wrath. He became a curse; and He did it all for us.

In the crucifixion and in this cry of Jesus, we see both the justice and the mercy of God. First, we see His justice. The price of God’s judgement on sin had to be paid in full. Jesus didn’t get off a little easy because He was righteous. God didn’t let a few sins slide because Jesus is His Son. No; Jesus took it all; He drank the entire cup; He suffered the wrath of God for every little sin committed by those who would become His followers. And that is the way it had to be. God is just in His very character; He will let no sin pass by or He would cease to be the God He is.

But this justice does not contradict mercy. It is because of mercy that God had Jesus go through all this. This was the only way for God’s justice to be satisfied, without having us pay the price ourselves. God took the punishment in His Son in our place so that we wouldn’t have to. The mercy is for us and is offered to us freely. We can pay the price ourselves if we choose, but because we are unrighteous and have sinned against an infinite God, our repayment will last forever.

In Matthew 3:17, God Himself said regarding Jesus, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” But we also read in Isaiah 53:10, “But the LORD was pleased to crush Him”. This passage in Isaiah tells us that God the Father was pleased to crush Jesus. Again, we see this difficult combination of justice and mercy; God’s hatred of sin and His love for us. It wasn’t that it made God happy to have Jesus go through all the suffering He did; it means that God was willing to have Jesus pay the penalty on our behalf in order to save us.

Dwell on what God was willing to do for us. He poured out His wrath on His beloved Son to give us a chance for eternal life. In this God shows His love for us. Really, it should have pleased God to crush us. We are the ones who rebel against Him, the all-powerful God of the universe. We who were created by Him dare to think that we can raise our will against His. When we consider these things, we see that it is absolutely true and right and just that God the Father requires the acceptance of His Son Jesus for salvation.

In Jesus and in His actions, we see true, deep, meaningful love. In God there is no squishy surface love that has no foundation; no love that is simply a feeling that may come and go; or be stronger or weaker depending on mood. This is no love that will let anything go; will give in to the desires of the moment. The love of God is strong and self-sacrificial; it is constant toward us and willing to save, if we are willing to accept the way of salvation.

The first love we see in Jesus is His love for the Father. He loves the Father such that He is happy to be obedient to Him even to the point of death; even the death He underwent on the cross. He went to the cross because it pleased the Father that He did so. He went to the cross because it was the only way for the Father to offer salvation to us; undeserving sinners. He loves the Father such that He submitted to being forsaken by Him. He suffered that horrible separation from God the Father because that was the Father’s will.

The other love we see in Jesus is His love for us. He suffered that terrible death on the cross because He also wants us to have eternal life. His desire is the same as the Father’s; our salvation. Unworthy as we are, Jesus was willing to be forsaken by God that we may come to Him.

We as Christians are called to this same kind of love; solid, self-sacrificial love for God and for others. We are not capable of this by ourselves, but we are by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is another demonstration of the love God has for us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He Himself gives us the ability to do what His holiness requires us to do.

Jesus, out of obedience to the Father and out of love for us, put Himself in the position that He had to cry out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He did this so that I wouldn’t have to. He did this so that you wouldn’t have to.

Prayer

Our Saviour Jesus; it is truly beyond us to comprehend what You went through on that cross; what You went through on our behalf. If not for our sin, You would have never had to suffer the separation from Your Father. It is we who deserve that separation; yet Your love for us is so great that You experienced it on our behalf. We do not know how long that three hours meant for you, but it would have been an eternity for us.

Jesus, Your word tells us that You are the only way to the Father. We know that Your word is truth. It is marvelous that there is even one way to be cleansed of sin and be present with the Father; because we deserve no way at all. It is also marvelous that by Your grace, that one way is open to all people; salvation is a beautiful gift to all those who choose to accept it.

Lord Jesus, we humbly and gratefully accept this gift; accept what You did on the cross for us. We thank You for even giving us the faith we need to believe to salvation. We offer ourselves to You, to use for Your glory; a poor offering, but all we have.

Lord Jesus, in Your precious name we pray

Amen