

It goes without saying that the season of Lent is largely about the cross of Calvary. It is about our Savior's innocent suffering and death for the sins of the world. It is about the blood shed for you and for me. It is about the heavenly Father's offer of forgiveness of sins and salvation from sin, death, and hell. It is about God's call to repentance and to turn from our sins to the Savior, Jesus Christ, in saving faith. But as we turn to the Gospel accounts of our Savior's death on Calvary's cross, we find other things that can rightly draw our attention. There is, for example, the darkness from noon to 3 o'clock in the afternoon on that first Good Friday. And at the moment of our Savior's death, a huge curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. There was an earthquake, splitting of rocks, graves being opened, and some of God's people being raised to life. This evening, I would like to direct your attention to the miraculous darkness.

Let's think of what preceded the darkness. Jesus had been nailed to the cross about 9 o'clock in the morning. From 9 o'clock to noon there was a lot of activity. Jesus had prayed that the heavenly Father would forgive those who had crucified Him. Jesus had heard the cry of the thief for mercy and had assured the thief that on that very day he would be with Him in paradise. Jesus had also placed His mother, Mary, into the care of His disciple John. The soldiers had divided His garments and cast lots for His robe. The chief priests and others were busy criticizing Pilate's inscription that said that Jesus was the King of the Jews. And scoffers were busy directing insults at Jesus.

And then noon arrived. Of it we read: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness until the ninth hour" (Matthew 27:45). St. Luke added in his Gospel: "while the sun's light failed" (Luke 23:45). From what we read, we receive the impression that this darkness brought a halt to all the activity; that silence fell over the crowd. The supernatural nature of this darkness is revealed by the fact that this was prophesied in Scripture. "It will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight." - Amos 8:9 After 3 hours of darkness we hear, Then Jesus cried out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). And again: "It is finished" (John 19:30).

And again: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Then as quickly as the darkness came at noon, just as quickly did the light appear at 3 o'clock that afternoon. This miracle is recorded in the annals of both Christian and heathen writings. Even early heathen opponents of Christianity acknowledged this miracle. Tertullian, a second-century Church Father, boldly wrote the following words to his adversaries: "At the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your own archives to this day."

Ancient writers, both believers and unbelievers, consistently indicate that this darkness extended over the entire Mediterranean area, if not the entire world. The best the heathen could do to explain this three hours of darkness was to speak of an eclipse. We know that is not a plausible explanation. There could be no eclipse of the sun during a full moon, in a solar eclipse total coverage of the sun only lasts several minutes, not three hours, and only a small portion of the earth's surface is darkened, not the entire half of the planet facing the sun. The early Christians did not explain this darkness. They simply proclaimed it. It was a historical fact, and it helped to set apart the death of Jesus from every other death in history. It seemed as though nature bowed in sympathy as its Creator was put to death. It seems as though its heart is broken and it gives no light. The darkness at the crucifixion of Christ represents God's divine judgment

on sin.

Read the Passion narrative, and you will find a combination of jealousy, unbelief, error, hypocrisy sham, and hatred. It was as if God through this miraculous darkness was, so to speak, “rubbing their noses in it.”

But this judgment was not only directed toward those who were directly responsible. This judgment was directed toward the whole world. Think of it: One half of the earth was in the darkness of night. The other half was covered by this miraculous darkness. God was speaking a word of judgment against the spiritual darkness of this world-against this world’s sin, unbelief, error, hypocrisy, sham, hatred and the like.

Jesus said before that first Good Friday, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from this earth, will draw all people to myself.

The darkness was also a word of judgment spoken against God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, as He hung on the cross. For He willingly assumed unto himself the sins of the world. He was hanging there in our place. Shortly after 3:00 P.M. Jesus cried out, It is finished. Then he died. God’s judgment upon the sins of the world had been carried out.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 the Apostle Paul tells us, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...* God the Father made “*him who had no sin*” (we know who that is, Jesus, the only one to live a sinless life on this earth) *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...* As Jesus hung on the cross of Calvary he became the embodiment of the world’s sin. When God looked down from heaven on the scene outside of Jerusalem, he didn’t see his only begotten Son, the one whom he loved. Instead he saw all the evil and wickedness, all the immorality and iniquity, all the hatred, unbelief, lust, greed and lies, all the terrible wrongs and transgressions of humanity. Instead of seeing his Son, God saw sin and he unleashed the full force of his judgment against it. Jesus, the light of the world, was forsaken by God in darkness. What a powerful visual aid. The darkness descended on the earth as God turned his back on Jesus and unloaded the ferocious punishment for sin which his justice requires. This death had significance for the entire world. Punishment for the sins of the entire world was inflicted on Jesus.

Yes, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.* The sinless one bore the sins of all. But let me read the entire passage to you. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Corinthians 5:21) “*In him*” that is, through faith in him “*we become the righteousness of God.*” The righteousness, the sinlessness of Jesus is credited to you, the believer in Jesus. So your sins were heaped on Jesus who bore punishment for them and, in exchange, you the believer in Jesus are clothed in his perfection and it doesn’t cost you a thing. Your salvation is free, but it’s not cheap. It cost the life of God’s Son.

So what happened to the sun to make it go dark for three hours? Was it a giant sunspot? Did God interpose a cloud of interplanetary matter that blocked the sun’s light from earth? Or did the Architect of the universe, the Creator of this sun and every other star in space merely ‘will’ the darkness to emphasize the magnitude of sin and to show the world-wide significance of this one death? When Jesus cried out, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30) and “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*” (Luke 23:46) he breathed his last breath. At 3 o’clock, the sun began to shine again. God’s judgment on the sins of the world was now complete.

Today is Ash Wednesday. We stand on the brink of a season designed to prepare us to remember and give thanks for the great work God did for our salvation. As we prepare, let us rejoice at what God has done in and through Jesus, the Savior long foretold, who leads the believer out of spiritual darkness into God’s light. Amen.