

When Darkness Seems to Be Winning

Luke 22:47–53

Historians and news anchors often speak of “the darkest hour.” We’ve heard it used in December 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked and Nazi armies marched across Europe. We’ve heard it used to describe the terrorist on September 11, 2001. Many of us have lived through moments—personal or shared—when it felt like darkness had the upper hand.

But there has never been a darker hour in all of human history than the one we just read about in Luke 22—the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Consider what took place: the deepest betrayal imaginable, coming not from an enemy but from a close friend, sealed with a kiss of affection. Then chaos erupts—swords flash, an ear is severed, and suddenly the One the disciples had followed for three years is arrested like a common criminal. In that moment, everything looked lost. Evil appeared to have the upper hand.

Have you ever had a night like that in your own life—when darkness seemed to be winning?

To the disciples watching, it must have felt like it was the end. Their Master was betrayed, overpowered, and led away. Their hope was shattered.

Yet right in the middle of that chaos, Jesus speaks three times—two questions and a command—that reveal unchanging truths about who He is.

I’ve heard it said that to remember, we need to be reminded. And there’s an old saying that captures the heart of this passage: **“Never doubt in the dark what God has revealed to you in the light.”**

Sermon in a sentence: In our darkest hours, when evil seems strongest, we stand firm not by understanding everything God is doing, but by clinging to what He has already shown us about who He is.

This morning, from this darkest hour, we will be reminded of three truths about Christ's character that we must never forget—three truths that sustain us when darkness seems to be winning:

1. Remember that He sees you completely—and loves you still

First, remember that He sees you completely—and loves you still. In verse 48, as Judas approaches to betray the Lord, Jesus asked, *“Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”*

Jesus knows exactly what is happening. He has known it all along—He predicted it at the Last Supper. Nothing surprises Him. Yet notice how He speaks: not with explosive anger, not with bitter accusation, but with a sorrowful question that still holds out the possibility of repentance.

Here is the heart of grace: Jesus sees the worst in Judas—the greed, the deceit, the treachery—and still addresses him by name. Still draws near.

Even in this diabolical moment, Jesus reaches out to Judas with love. He doesn't lash out or curse him. He appeals to him: *“Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”* Luke 22:48

It's as if Jesus is saying, “Judas, how could you choose this way? Couldn't you have found another sign? Are you so far gone that you would twist something meant for affection into the signal of betrayal?”

As Alexander Maclaren so beautifully put it, Jesus “with meek patience resents not the indignity (the insult and humiliation), but with majestic calmness sets before the miserable man the hideousness of his act.” Most of us, if betrayed so deeply, would react from wounded pride—feeling the sting of disrespect, defending our honor, or striking back. But Jesus does none of that. In the very hour when Judas is Satan's agent, Jesus still treats him as a lost soul worth saving.

Even more strikingly, in Matthew's parallel account, as Judas approaches with the mob and seals the betrayal with a kiss, Jesus responds with these piercing words: *“Friend, do what you came for”* (Matthew 26:50).

Jesus had treated Judas as a close companion for three years—sharing meals, including him in ministry, even washing his feet that very night—knowing full well the hardness of his heart. Yet in this moment of ultimate treachery, He still calls him “Friend.” It’s not sarcasm; it’s staggering, unreciprocated love. Jesus sees the greed, the deceit, the full weight of the sin—and loves Judas still. He holds out one last tender invitation amid the darkness, giving space for repentance right up to the arrest.

Beloved, this is the kind of Friend Jesus is to us. He knows every hidden betrayal in our hearts, every way we’ve turned from Him, and yet He draws near with grace, calling us by name, offering forgiveness before we even ask.

And because we have such a Friend in Jesus, we are called to reflect that same love. When someone wounds us deeply—when friendship is betrayed or trust shattered—we can, by God’s grace, love still: speak truth gently, extend kindness, hold out hope for restoration, and entrust justice to Him. In doing so, we glorify Christ, who loved us—and even His betrayer—to the end.

Oh what a friend we have in Jesus, but does He have a friend in you? Can He count on you to be a friend to others as He is a friend to you?

We see this same grace centuries later when Jesus deals with another family facing a dark hour—Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. When Lazarus was deathly ill, the sisters sent word to Jesus: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” They appealed to His love, confident in it. But Jesus delayed. He stayed where He was for two more days. By the time He arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. Both sisters, in their grief, said the same heartbroken words: “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*”

In that moment, it could have felt like Jesus didn’t care—like He was wasting time, indifferent to their pain. But John inserts a crucial line right before describing the delay: “*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus*” (John 11:5). Why say it there? Because what followed could make you question His love. John wants us to know:

the delay wasn't the absence of love; it was because of love—for them and for us—that Jesus waited. Greater glory was coming.

Church, this is who Jesus is. He sees everything in your life and mine—the failures we're ashamed of, the ways we've betrayed Him, the doubts, the delays that feel to us like denial—and He still offers grace. He still draws near, He is still working for our good.

As Adrian Rogers used to challenge his church: "The next time you're afraid, say to yourself and mean it: 'God loves me perfectly.'" Why? Because perfect love—His love for us—casts out fear.

When darkness makes His love feel distant, look to the cross. That is the unshakable proof that He's for you not against you.

When darkness seems to be winning, **remember that He sees you completely—and loves you still.**

2. Remember that we win only by surrendering

Second, remember that we win only by surrendering. In verses 49–51, the disciples see what's coming and ask, "*Lord, shall we strike with the sword?*" (v.49) Peter doesn't wait for an answer—he swings and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. (v.50).

Peter thinks this is how you win: fight back, defend yourself, take control.

But Jesus says, "*No more of this!*" (v.51) He stops the violence, touches the servant's ear, and heals him—an enemy, in the very moment Jesus Himself is being arrested.

This is astonishing. Jesus wins not by drawing a bigger sword, but by laying the sword down. He wins by surrendering to the Father's will and extending mercy even to those who hate Him.

We see the same truth lived out centuries earlier in the life of Jacob. Genesis 32 tells us Jacob was left alone by the river Jabbok, and "a man (who was the Angel of the Lord) wrestled with him until the breaking of day" (v. 24). All night they struggled. When the man saw he had not prevailed, "he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and

Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him" (v. 25). Then the man said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob answered, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v. 26). The man asked his name, and when he said "Jacob," he replied, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (v. 28).

Many of us know that story and hear it preached as a model of persistent, tenacious prayer: "Hold on to God! Don't let go until He blesses you!" There is an element of truth in that—Jacob was desperate and persistent. But Hosea 12 gives us God's own commentary on that night. The prophet recalls: *"In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor"* (Hosea 12:3–4).

Notice what Hosea emphasizes: Jacob wept and sought favor. He didn't prevail by strength or cunning—the way he had lived his whole life. No, there at the place he wrestled with the Angel, God touched his hip, left him with a permanent limp, and only then, in brokenness and surrender, did Jacob receive the blessing and the new name.

As one commentator wisely put it: "We prevail when we lose and know it, surrendering to God." The limp became Jacob's lifelong reminder that true blessing comes not by muscle or manipulation, but by losing—by surrender, by clinging to God.

This was the exact opposite of how Jacob had always operated. From the womb he was a schemer—grabbing his brother's heel, deceiving his father for the blessing, manipulating Laban for wealth, always leaning on his own understanding and cunning to force outcomes. He trusted his plans more than God's promises.

But now, utterly broken, with no strength left to fight or scheme, Jacob does something new: he clings to God in weakness. He weeps, he seeks favor, he refuses to let go, (not to wrestle "against" God), but to hold on for the blessing only God can give. He waits, he cries out, he surrenders his self-reliance.

And notice the beautiful timing in the story: this all-night struggle takes place in literal darkness. Jacob is alone, wrestling through the long night of fear and self-reliance. But the turning point comes at dawn. The Angel says, *“Let me go, for the day is breaking.”* Jacob clings in weakness, receives the blessing, and Scripture tells us explicitly: “The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip” (Genesis 32:31).

Think about that picture—a limping man, forever marked by weakness, walking into the sunrise with a new name and a new future. The night of wrestling looked hopeless, but surrender ushered in the dawn. The Light broke through the moment Jacob stopped striving and started leaning.

That is the gospel pattern. Jesus Himself, in this very garden, surrenders—not by fighting back, but by yielding to the Father’s will. And three days later, the ultimate Sunrise rose from the grave.

When we surrender our swords, our schemes, our desperate grasping, His Light shines into our darkness—revealing what needs healing, awakening what is numb, and guiding our limping steps into the way of peace.

As with Judas, evil thrives in secrecy—in the hidden corners we refuse to open: unspoken resentments, nursed grudges, secret habits, unconfessed wounds. They fester in the dark, growing uglier the longer they stay concealed. But righteousness grows in the light. The moment we surrender those hidden things to Jesus—naming them first to God, and when the Spirit leads, to a trusted brother or sister—they begin to lose their power. The very secrets we feared would destroy us become the first crack of dawn.

Healing begins when we finally let the Light in.

As R.T. Kendall puts it, God is deeply “territorial” over vengeance and vindication—both belong to Him alone. He hates when we step into His territory to “help Him out” by clearing our own name or punishing those who hurt us. In those moments, He steps back. But when we take our hands off and surrender, letting Him work in His way and in

His time, He delights to vindicate us perfectly. Trying to vindicate ourselves robs Him of glory and leads to a hollow victory. Surrender gives Him the pleasure—and us the peace.

In our dark hours, our instinct is the same as Peter's and the old Jacob: fight harder, control more, lash out, protect ourselves. But Jesus says the path to true victory is surrender—to His way, His timing, His mercy.

When darkness seems to be winning, **remember that we win only by surrendering.**

Third, remember that even in the darkest night, He reigns sovereign

We learn in verses 52–53, that Jesus turns to the chief priests, officers, and elders who have come with swords and clubs. And He responds: *“When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”* Luke 22:53.

Jesus openly names the reality: this is the hour when evil appears strongest. Yet listen—He is perfectly calm. He knew this was coming and He surrendered to it. He is not a victim caught off guard. This moment is permitted, but only because a greater victory is coming.

Jesus is absolutely sovereign, even when darkness has its hour. His timing is perfect. The cross is not defeat—it is the plan.

When darkness seems to be winning in your life—when evil seems to have the upper hand—**remember that even in the darkest night, He reigns and remains sovereign.**

Conclusion

That night in the garden, the disciples couldn't see it. They scattered in fear and doubt. But three days later, the tomb was empty, and everything Jesus revealed in that dark hour was proven true in the light.

John 1:5 declares: **“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”**

In the very hour Jesus called “the power of darkness,” the Light was shining—and darkness could not overcome it.

The key to standing when darkness seems to be winning is not understanding every detail of what God is doing. It’s knowing the One who rules over it.

Someone once asked Albert Einstein’s wife, “How do you live with such a brilliant man? Do you understand his theories?” She replied, “No, I don’t know much about the theory of relativity—but I know my Albert.”

Beloved, that’s what we need in our darkest hours. We may not understand the full “theory” of what God is doing—the why of the pain, the timing of the trial—but we can know our Jesus. We can rely not on our feelings but on what we know and believe about Him.

There’s an old hymn that says it so well:

**“When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.”**

When darkness veils His lovely face—when God feels hidden, silent, or far away—we may lament, we may cry out honestly like the psalmists, “How long, O Lord?” That’s not faithlessness; that’s keeping the conversation open with Him. But in those moments, we don’t turn away to lesser comforters—distractions, addictions, bitterness, or self-made solutions—for a quick fix. We **rest**. We surrender. We lay down our swords and anchor ourselves in the unchanging grace revealed at the cross and the empty tomb.

After World War II, Corrie ten Boom traveled sharing the message of God's forgiveness, even after the horrors she and her sister Betsie endured in Ravensbrück concentration camp, where Betsie died.

One day in 1947, in a church in Munich, Corrie finished speaking about forgiveness when a man approached her. She recognized him instantly—he had been one of the cruelest guards at the camp, who had mocked the women as they showered. He beamed and said, “A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

He thrust out his hand. Then he added, “You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk. I was a guard there. But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein, will you forgive me?”

He did not remember her, but Corrie remembered him all too well. In that moment, she felt no forgiveness—only the pain and hatred rushing back. She knew she should forgive, but she couldn't. Silently she prayed, “Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.”

As she took his hand, something miraculous happened. A current of love flowed through her—not her own, but God's. “I forgive you, brother!” she cried. “With all my heart!” For a long moment, they grasped hands—the former guard and the former prisoner. She had never known God's love so intensely as in that moment of surrender.

Corrie realized forgiveness isn't something we manufacture—it's a miracle we receive when we lay down our right to hate. She was willing to be made willing. That former guard walked away changed, and Corrie's testimony of grace has touched millions.

Beloved, that's the power of knowing our Jesus.

We know that He sees us completely—and loves us still.

We know that we win only by surrendering.

We know that even in the darkest night, He reigns sovereign.

And because we know Him, the darkness will never overcome us—because it has never overcome Him.

So here's the call: Never doubt in the dark what God has revealed to you in the light. Bring your darkest hour to Jesus. Lay down your sword. Trust His grace, His way, His timing.

He knows your night. He's not surprised by it. And He's already writing the ending.

Hold on—the Light is coming. And the Light has already won. He's always on time.