

A Declaration From Darkness

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Various Scriptures
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The course of our yearly calendar this week does bring us to the celebration of some of the most important events in human history. Consequently, those events which were prophesied hundreds of years before they happened have become events that are the cornerstone of our faith. So we gather together on this Good Friday to recount, to reflect on and to rejoice in the glorious work of God that sovereignly happened and was ordained on this blessed weekend nearly 2000 years ago. As we begin, I think it's important to ask and to answer the question, why is Good Friday good? After all, what happened on that Friday morning and afternoon, April 3rd of A.D. could be seen as an epic disaster. It could be seen as a travesty of cosmic proportions. It could be seen as a failure on the part of Jesus to fulfill his role as Messiah. After all, he was murdered.

His mission came to a seemingly ignominious end, disgraced, shamed, mocked, humiliated, and put to death. But emerging from the darkness, we hear Jesus pronounce a monumental phrase from the cross, a phrase without which Good Friday would indeed not be considered good. However, with this phrase, the entire landscape of the biblical narrative takes a colossal turn. Because of this phrase, Good Friday is indeed good, and we'll get to that phrase shortly. But in the course of events laid out before time began, it was only on this road, only following God's divinely decreed will, that Jesus could have possibly uttered this earth-shattering declaration, the road to the cross, the road to the darkness.

You see, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, but good news can only and must be given. In contrast to the very bad news that is the current state of reality for all unrepentant sinners before God. Without the bad news, the good news wouldn't even be necessary. But in God's perfect plan, creating the world, creating all mankind to live in perfect fellowship with him, man fell into wicked rebellion against God. Man looked at eternal God and said to his face, I know better. I will follow my own path. And thus Romans 5 tells us that due to the sin of Adam, our genetic father, and since we were all present in potential form in Adam's genetics, we all not only inherited Adam's guilt, but the nature that would enslave us into to sin.

Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us that all men, save those who have been brought to spiritual life by God according to Verse 4, are dead in the transgressions and sins in which they once walked. Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Only by God's miraculous intervention of a divinely given

infusion of spiritual life as we read in Verse 4 and following, and as we read in Titus 3:4-5, can anyone escape that slavery to sin and to death, escape being children destined for God's wrath.

Now, God, we know from his word is a God of justice. Now that word has been thrown around a lot today. So we want to understand that justice means living and holding to his own law, not to our standards. Justice means that all offenses against him and his law will be punished. God's word tells us in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The soul who sins shall die." John 3:36 tells us, "Whoever does not obey the Son, the wrath of God remains on him." And by the way, it doesn't say it comes onto him. It says it remains on him, meaning he was born in that state. Exodus 34:6-7 tells us that "God will by no means pardon the guilty." Romans 3:23 says that "All men have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." We are all guilty, and before a perfectly holy, righteous, infinitely pure God, any offense is an infinite offense that requires infinite payment.

God is a God who established the world in his righteous law and demands perfect satisfaction of that law for any sin committed. So that's the bad news. That is the current state of affairs for all men, great and small, rich and poor who stand guilty before God. Whether or not they believe they stand guilty or not, belief has zero bearing on reality. By the way, all men will stand before the God of the universe as judge and they will stand alone.

So the good news is introduced to us from God in his word, the good news that this insurmountable debt that we owe to the holy and righteous judge, a debt by the way that we could never repay, God the gracious, kind, slow to anger and abounding and steadfast, king of the universe, who according to Psalm 24 owns the earth and everyone who dwells therein has provided the means of deliverance. God himself, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, sent Jesus who was perfect, righteous, divine, eternal and of infinite value to be sin on behalf of all of his people in order that we who are his people would receive his perfect righteousness and be counted as justified before God.

But there's the rub, there's the problem right there. God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, had to become sin. In his body on the cross. Jesus had to bear the weight of God's punishment for your sin, for my sin, an infinite number of times over in a single act of divine destruction. Thus, we examine tonight what actually took place on the cross, specifically what happened in that three-hour period on the cross when God in his infinite grace and mercy covered the eyes of the watching world in a divinely extended veil of darkness. So we look at God's word together this evening and through a survey of prophetic and descriptive texts in their culmination in the death of Christ on the cross, we will see that God completely exhausted his wrath toward his people in the atoning work of Christ on the cross, emerging from the darkness declaring victory and truly making Good Friday good. We'll be looking at a few key passages along the way and examining some others as we traverse our study. But let me pray for time before we continue.

Father, we stand looking at a very dark picture. We stand looking at something that would absolutely obliterate and crush us in our grief without your intervention and your grace. So as we

look at this topic this evening, I desire to make known your grace and glory. I desire to make known the greatness of our Savior and our king. May Christ be glorified. Amen.

So as we begin, I want to take us backwards in time, 700 plus years. Before the events of passion week. We must go back into Israel's past and meet a prophet who in his own voice will tell us exactly what the Messiah, this glorious servant of Yahweh will endure. And so we're going to read from Isaiah 52:14 for our first point. You can turn there if you like. We have a simple outline for tonight, three points. You'll see them on the screen as we go, and they're as follows point #1, the prophecy of the darkness. Point #2, the picture of the darkness. And point #3, the pronouncement from the darkness. But we'll start in **point #1) *The Prophecy of the Darkness.***

For this point, we will be in Isaiah 52:14. And I want to note something and admit something freely that the word darkness does not even exist in this passage. I get that. However, what we learn from this text is what God reveals for us through the prophet Isaiah about what happened in the darkness on the cross. Isaiah 52:14 is the central verse of the first of five stanzas of the last and most glorious and grand of the servant songs of Isaiah. Isaiah dedicated four songs to the prophetic foretelling of the ministry, of the servant of Yahweh, a figure who would come to serve as the agent of salvation for Israel and for all the nations for those who would according to Isaiah 50:9, "Walk by the light and trust in God for their salvation."

Contrast it against everyone else who according to 50:11, "Who kindle their own light and walk according to their own wisdom." God declares of them; their end will be torment. But in the opening stanza of this fourth song, the servant here is positioned under the destructive wrath of God. God shows up to explain the mechanism by which the servant would accomplish salvation for God's people. The servant would, according to Verse 13, he would act wisely, he would be high and be lifted up and be exalted, but in order for that to happen, he must first accomplish the will of God. He would be high and lifted up and exalted after Isaiah 53:10, which reveals the will of God was to crush him. That is what we see happening in Isaiah 52:14 and that crushing has a two-fold significance that we must understand. This verse tells us that Jesus was completely, utterly, and totally laid to waste both physically in His body and in his mind and more significantly, spiritually.

Verse 14 says this, "His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance." In his body, physically, mentally and emotionally, Jesus would endure unimaginable suffering. And yet the most significant thing that happened to him on that cross was not his physical torture. In fact, if we were to leave the significance of Jesus' death at his physical death, then we would be hopelessly lost in sin because even though Jesus' death was a death of an innocent man, innocent of crimes that he was accused of his physical death though horrendous, saves you from nothing. However, God the Father in his infinite mercy because of the great love with which he loves his people, did not end the suffering of Jesus simply in his body. Nor was that even the point of the crucifixion. Rather as the rest of verse 14 states "And his form, beyond that of the children of mankind." God, the gracious, loving and saving Father God, the just righteous and wrathful

father poured out his wrath upon Jesus utterly laying him to waste spiritually. That was the point of the cross.

Brian Russell, theologian, puts it this way, "Only those who by the grace of God are given eyes to see what happened on the cross at Calvary will understand in some small measure that during those three hours from noon to 3:00 P.M. when God forsook him and total darkness fell on the land that Jesus endured unimaginable suffering. For he bore not just the punishment of one of his people's sins, but all of them. By divine intervention, darkness fell over the land so that no human eye should see how terrible the torment of hell he endured in a stead would mar his appearance beyond human semblance. Behold, my servant says Yahweh, keep thinking of what it cost him both physically and spiritually to die for our sins and be appalled at what it did to him personally."

You see, what we learn from this prophetic passage and what we learn from its fulfillment in the death of Christ on the cross is this, the darkness on the cross was both necessary and absolute. God in his infinite kindness to wretched sinners, even those sinners who were busy crucifying the Lord of glory would veil their eyes from the very real and practical hell that Jesus endured on the cross.

Jesus in his body and in his soul, and I want us to understand this bore the full and infinite wrath of God for every sin times infinity for all of his people accomplished as we'll see in the next point in three hours on the cross. But God knew that the unimaginable horror of such a picture would have utterly destroyed the world had it not been by his grace veiled in darkness. God literally poured out darkness over the world to preserve the world as he destroyed his son. Jesus was both individually and physically crushed on the cross, but more importantly, he was corporately for all of his people spiritually decimated with a wrath from God, measured from infinity times infinity for the children of mankind. I'm reminded of the hymn, In my place, condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah. What a Savior.

So as Isaiah predicted this perfect atonement over 700 years before the events of Jesus' life and ministry, he prepared the readers for what they would see. Though they ignored his words and failed to see it when Jesus was among them, we who have been granted spiritual eyes to see and been given the Gospels to read can see this truth unfold for us in *point #2*), and that is ***The Picture of the Darkness***. For this, we must fast-forward in time to the first century from Isaiah's life to the first century. Again April 3rd, A.D. 33 to the best reckoning, and we find ourselves on a hill outside the city of some 1,991 years ago. We're suspended between heaven and earth, hangs the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Crucified between two criminals assigned a death with wicked men, a death four wicked man hung the perfect God man who as he was being crucified, continued to uphold all existence by the word of his power. As the centurion who crucified him would know, truly this man was the Son of God.

We find this picture painted for us in the gospels in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23 and John 19, all four accounts show us details that paint a full picture from the perspective of four different eyewitnesses and all are necessary to honor what Jesus actually accomplished on that blessed

Friday afternoon. Want to read for us a few of these excerpts as we just look at these briefly. Matthew 27:45. "Now from the sixth hour," that would be 12:00, "there was darkness all over the land until the ninth hour." That's about three o'clock. "And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani,' that is, 'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" We turn over to Mark 15 in verse 33. "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Sound familiar? "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried again, 'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

Luke 23 down to Verse 44. "It was now about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed and the curtain of the temple was torn in two." More details. "Then Jesus crying out with a loud voice, 'father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.'" We're given more details. This is why we have four gospel accounts. Again, to honor the details. And in the picture painted for us, I want to focus our attention on these hours on the cross between that sixth hour and the ninth hour, between 12:00 and 3:00. See what they would do in Jewish clocks, the Jewish days they would account seven A.M. being the first hour of the day. That's the beginning of the day. So you count six hours later we're at noon, 8:00 AM would be the second hour, nine A.M. the third hour and so forth.

So again, we see in Matthew 25:45, Mark 15:33 in Luke 23:44, it was the sixth hour darkness fell over the land until the ninth hour. The Gospel of John does not mention this event by the way, because after 30 years or so of the other gospels having been circulated, it was a well-known fact of what had happened that day. However, John will add a critical detail in a moment. In fact, one of the most critical moments of the entire Bible. Later in our third point. So as we traverse Good Friday in the previous evening, Jesus has been arrested. He has been tried six different times all by the way illegally according to Jewish law. He's been imprisoned, scorched, tortured, beaten, dressed as a false king, mocked and made to carry his own cross to the hill of Calvary until he could no longer carry it and they had to get a man, Simon of Cyrene to carry it for him.

After being nailed to that very cross, the gospel accounts tell us that passers-by mocked him, that members of the Sanhedrin mocked him, that soldiers who crucified him mocked him. That the criminals on both sides of him mocked him. And yet Jesus endured the scorn. As Hebrews 12 said, despising the shame. Not even considering the shame worthy to be considered. He willingly had gone with the soldiers the night before, knowing that this would be the outcome. He willingly submitted to the will of the Father in heaven knowing that this would be the outcome. Why? Why would Jesus, the perfect eternal Son of God, the perfect human, submit himself to this when John's gospel demonstrates that he had every power to avoid it?

Recall when we were in the garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers came and they were looking for Jesus? What was his answer? He said, "I am He", and they were blown backwards to the ground. At the simple mention of his name, they were swept from their feet, blown to their backs and wiped out. The fact that any of them had the courage to stand up and ask the question again boggles my mind, but that was God's will then in an astonishing act of humility and in

submission to the Father's will, he purposed to let them take him. Nothing outside of his sovereign control, not one second. Nothing happened outside of the watchful eye of the Father in heaven. So as we reach now the sixth hour, about three hours into his physical ordeal, the crucifixion began around the third hour. The real offering of atonement would commence, the darkness would descend and God the Father, present purely in full wrath, anger, and justice would arrive, and we see three elements to this picture, concealment, crushing, and completion.

First the concealment, and we see this in Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44. And as we described in Isaiah 52, the complete and total metaphysical destruction of the Son by the Father. The father had to intervene for the good of those that he would save. His judgment and wrath would arrive but would do so shrouded in darkness. Like when God had to hide Moses in the cleft of the rock and Mount Sinai in order not to smite him with his pure and unfettered glory, in the same manner God hid the world in darkness in order not to smite all of mankind with the full weight of his divine fury. The concealment, ladies and gentlemen, was for us. The darkness was a grace of God. So darkness fell, as the text says, over the whole land, and I would make the case over the whole earth. This cosmic justice was not local and thus the veil of divine protection in this darkness was not local. The whole earth went completely dark in order to conceal.

Secondly, the crushing, we see that in Matthew 27:45-46, Mark 15:33-34 and Luke 23:44-45, and again as Isaiah 52:14 outlined for us, Jesus, in his body bore the full weight of God's wrath, expressed wholly unrelentingly, unceasingly and unfettered in every square inch of Jesus' body and soul. He would single-handedly serve as the vicarious, that is substitutionary representative, in his body for all the sins corporately for all mankind who are his people in the very essence of his being on the cross. Remember this, each offense, each sin is against an infinitely Holy God. Each offense and sin thus is deserving of an infinite amount of wrath. The divinely poured out judgment that crushed the son would have completely obliterated from existence anyone other than Jesus.

Only Jesus the perfect human, only Jesus the perfect God, only Jesus, the all-powerful creator and sustainer of the universe could have borne the full wrath of God being fully crushed by the Father, paying the divine penalty for every sin of every one of his people. We must understand though that a partial payment would not be accepted. This is why Isaiah 52:14 matters. Only a full payment would be accepted. That's why it's so important to understand, thirdly, the completion. You see, the darkness came to an end. All three gospels that mentioned the darkness, describe the fact that it lasted three hours. Three hours. Luke adds that the sun's light actually failed in this moment, that God overwrought the power of the very star that gives our planet life. Think about this. God blotted out the light of the sun as he was blotting out the life of his own son in order to preserve the future spiritual life of all of his sons.

By God's grace, the darkness did not last forever. Unlike a human sinner who must pay eternally forever for their sins in the darkness, apart from God's grace in a very real hell, Jesus, the perfect God man, was able to complete the payment required by divine justice. Jesus was able to pay in full in his body, offering his infinite perfection, offering his infinite worth and in turn satisfying

the wrath of God completely never again to be rekindled, and because of that, because Jesus accomplished a complete crushing under the divine darkness of God's eternal wrath, we understand with fresh eyes the significance of Jesus' final few words from the cross.

That brings us to our final point for the evening. *Point #3), The Pronouncement from the Darkness.* Our passages from Matthew, Mark and Luke described for us the scene that took place between noon and 3:00 P.M. on the cross at Calvary and our passage from John's Gospel in Chapter 19:28-30, John adds for us a key and necessary detail that the others do not add.

We see two things happening in this passage that are critical to the life and ministry and success of Jesus, the servant of Yahweh. One from John 19:31 from Luke 23:46. By the way, John doesn't solely give us these because he invented these truths. John gives us these because as we recall from our church's time in the Gospel of John, the purpose of the Gospel of John in being written in this directed narrative was to prove that Jesus Christ was indeed God, and in this detail that John adds, he does in fact prove that. Only Jesus could have been the righteous sacrifice that satisfied the wrath of God for the sins of his people. While Matthew and Mark and Luke all record Jesus words asking his father crying from the darkness, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" During this epic of darkness, Jesus felt the full forsaking of God's divine fellowship and love. He pulled it back.

This is a fellowship and love that Jesus had experienced unbroken from eternity past. In a completely real human moment of terror, Jesus experienced the practical hell of being divorced from all of God except for his wrath. And yet as the veil of darkness is lifted, as the wrath of God is exhausted, we see recorded from John's witness the most significant words that Jesus could have spoken. "It is finished." So the first thing we learn from these pronouncements is the atonement is completed, it is finished. Not, "Hey, I got you most of the way. Good luck with the rest." Not, "Well, I gave it my best shot. Let's hope God is pleased." No authoritatively, confidently, and in perfect knowledge of what he had just achieved, Jesus shouts in victory, "It is finished, tetelestai," from the cross. Meaning completed, perfect, done. Nothing else can be added.

Hebrews 12, two tells us that Jesus endured the cross that he despised. Again, not even considering the shame. Why? For the joy that was set before him. You ask, what joy is that? That's a good question. Christian, it is the joy of seeing you redeemed. Not the joy of seeing a potential redemption in some random possible future audience, but in your redemption. Not a generic face. In your face. Not a generic soul. In your soul. He saw your face if you are in Christ and He looked beyond the cross, despised the shame and said, you are worth it. You want to know why Good Friday is good despite everything that Jesus had to endure? That's the reason. Jesus says it is finished. The wrath of God is exhausted, it is satisfied, and you can have my righteousness. Jesus effectively and fully paid the price for your redemption, for all who would place their faith in him, for you in particular if you place your faith in him.

God saw you. He foreknew you; he predestined you, adopted you, and sealed you in his spirit all because of what he accomplishes on Calvary's cross. So when Jesus declares, "It is finished," that

phrase ought to take on a whole new depth of significance for you because without that truth, we have zero hope in the full atoning work of Christ. But with it and it's there, we have every reason to stand in victory, and not in our victory, but in his victory. And even on the darkest afternoon in human history, God's divine victory closes out our mixture of darkness with divine victory and with hope. We have hope even on the worst day ever, we have hope.

As we close out our time tonight, I want to show a personal reason that Jesus had to see Good Friday as good. Just moments after suffering, the greatest hours of suffering any person could ever suffer in the history of everything, Jesus, in full control, expresses in Luke 23:46, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit." And having said that, he breathed his last.

Second thing we learned from these pronouncements is this, the fellowship restored. Jesus, having earned redemption through his blood, having exhausted the wrath of God in his person and having suffered forsaking in fellowship from his father, now acknowledging for all of world history to bear witness that his work was complete, saw no more redeeming quality in remaining on that cross. Instead, as he had done from the beginning setting his gaze on Jerusalem, determining to go to that cross, submitting to the will of the Father, consenting to be taken by the soldiers submitting to the trials of the leadership and remaining on that cross, though he could have exercised his will to end his suffering at any time, Jesus now in perfect submission of the Father's will and with the Father's permission consents to shed his mortal body and complete his mission in the grave. John 10:18 says, no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I've received from my father. And so Jesus willingly and willfully and in perfect control yields up his own spirit and returns to the perfect fellowship of the Father in the same manner that he had always known since before creation. Now we know that he did not in that moment ascend to the Father, but in the same manner that he had left his heavenly abode and yet still remained in perfect union with the Father, that union was immediately restored upon his emergence from the darkness and the yielding up of His own spirit.

So Jesus' personal experience was a glorious one in that moment. Wow, what a journey, to go from the worst moment in human history to the greatest declaration of redemptive history in one sentence. This is the significance of the darkness on the cross. This is the gracious and sovereign path set forth by the Father for the Son to accomplish our redemption, and this is the most blessed reason why Good Friday is indeed good.

My friends, if you are sitting here and you do not know Jesus, if you're a guest with us this evening and you have never heard this gospel, if you've grown up in the church and you've placed your hope in your own performance of good works, if you find yourself right now outside the grace of God facing that very darkness that Jesus paid to satisfy, standing before God is a guilty sinner, my friends, I have good news for you on this Good Friday, because the truth of the matter is this Jesus Christ, the perfect Savior, both fully God and fully man, able to vicariously

bear the sins of mankind because he was fully human and able to pay an infinite penalty for the sins of mankind because of his infinite and perfect divinity came to earth to save sinners.

Jesus lived a perfect life, died a substitutionary death, meaning death for someone else or for many, and as we will learn this weekend, he was raised again to victorious life. Just as he saw no purpose in remaining on that cross another second longer than he had to, as soon as Jesus had fulfilled his mission in the grave, he burst forth to glorified life, becoming the guarantee of our future, glorified existence. Jesus, for all who would repent of their sins, who would turn from their rebellion against God and who would seek forgiveness from God, guarantees your salvation. Friends, there are two eternal realities for every human being. Everyone will have one of these. Either Jesus paid it all or you will. Which will it be? Either Jesus exhausted the wrath of God for you in three hours or you will suffer exhausting that wrath for all eternity.

The gospel is very simple. John 3:16 says, "For God's love the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, will have eternal life." 1 John 2:23 says, "No one who denies the Son has the Father, but whoever confesses the Son also has the Father." Romans 10:9 says that "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Ephesians 2:8,9 says, for by grace, you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast." Hebrews 1:3 says, "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, the Father, in heaven," by the way, "proving that his work was finished."

It is done, it is finished. What do we sing? No more debt I owe, paid in full. All sufficient merit now my own. That is the gospel. We understand that when we come to the cross, we contribute nothing to our own salvation other than the sin that made it necessary as Dr. Steve Lawson says. God in his infinite mercy is looking upon you rebellious sinner, looking at your guilt, looking at your offenses against his holiness and saying, "Come, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be white as snow." Jesus is saying, "Come all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest for your weary souls." God is not an angry drum beating God who's demanding your perfection. He knows you can't do it. He knows you've already failed in doing it. Instead, he is a gracious and merciful God who will grant you the perfect righteousness that Jesus Christ alone accomplished to give you.

All you must do is trust in his saving work, reject the sinful rebellion that you are committing and perpetrating against him, seek forgiveness and restoration from God and he will give it to you. Isaiah 61:1 teaches us, "A broken and contrite heart, oh God, you will not despise." I encourage you, repent from sin. Trust in Christ. Find forgiveness from sin, and don't let this simply be another Good Friday. Let it be the best Good Friday ever as you leave this place reconciled to God in heaven to whom we give all glory, honor and praise for His grace and kindness toward us. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, what a study. What a tremendous truth that we see in these passages. What a tremendous work of salvation that Jesus accomplished on the cross, not simply suffering physical pain and

death, but exhausting your infinitely inexhaustible divine wrath. Only he could have done so, only he is capable, only he was willing and only he was successful. We're so grateful to you as our God and our king, so grateful to Christ as our Lord and our Savior. May he continue to receive all glory, honor and praise from our church this evening as we worship and close together in Christ's name, Amen.