

Jesus had been betrayed and delivered into the hands of men. The religious court condemned Him for blasphemy when He was honestly confessing the truth of who He is (Mark 14:61,62ⁱ). They knew He had verified the fact that He was the Messiah by the very signs they had taught the people to watch for (John 3:2ⁱⁱ). Despite those signs being fulfilled, He was not the kind of king they wanted and His rise in popularity threatened their positions. They took Him to the secular court to try to have Him executed. Governor Pilate figured out what they were doing, but His tenuous position with Rome gave the religious leaders the opportunity to blackmail him into giving in to their will.

Jesus was nailed to the cross around 9 a.m. (Mark 15:25ⁱⁱⁱ), the time of the morning sacrifice in the temple. The religious leaders mocked and taunted Him. The thieves crucified beside Him did the same. Something happened in the heart of one of the thieves that caused him to repent and ask Jesus to remember him. Jesus promised he would be with Him that very day in the paradise of God. Then something very unusual happened at noon, the midpoint of Jesus' suffering.

⁴⁴ *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ^{45a} while the sun's light failed.* Luke 23:44,45a At noon, the brightest time of the day, darkness settled over the land. The sins of the thief and the whole world upon Jesus brought a darkness like that of the plague of darkness that came on Egypt for three days, a darkness that could be felt (Exodus 10:21^{iv}). There was light where the people of Israel lived (Exodus 10:23^v). It was a sign that God was turning His face away from the Egyptians. 1 John 1:5b tells us that *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.* It was the ninth plague. The stubborn defiance of Egypt through the previous eight plagues led to this sign of final warning before all the firstborn of Egypt would die.

C.H. Spurgeon eloquently describes the scene in Jerusalem: *What a call must that midday midnight have been to the careless sons of men! They knew not that the Son of God was among them; nor that He was working out human redemption. The grandest hour in all history seemed likely to pass by unheeded, when, suddenly, night hastened from her chambers and usurped the day. Everyone asked his fellow, "What means this darkness?" Business stood still: the plough stayed in mid-furrow, and the axe paused uplifted. It was the middle of the day, when men are busiest; but they made a general pause. Around the great deathbed an appropriate quiet was secured. I doubt not that a shuddering awe came over the masses of the people, and the thoughtful foresaw terrible things. Those who had stood about the cross, and had dared to insult the majesty of Jesus, were paralyzed with fear.* -Biblical Illustrator - Luke.

The darkness in Jerusalem at midday was a sign of God turning His face away as Jesus became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21^{vi}; Amos 8:9,10^{vii}; Habakkuk 1:13^{viii})? It was then Jesus cried out the first lines of Psalm 22, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Perhaps the darkness was so that we would not see the agonizing punishment inflicted upon Jesus bearing God's justice for our sins (Luke 22:53^{ix}; Galatians 3:13^x)?

It is impossible to express the suffering that Jesus endured during those hours of darkness. Imagine a timeless funnel into which all the horror of past and future sins of mankind were poured along with the just punishment for them all landing on Christ. Every abuse of another, every hurtful word, every evil thought, every selfish act, every vile deed pouring in for three hours was something no sinner could endure, for our

minds would go insane. But the sinless Christ took it all in and became sin for us, along with all the justice those acts deserve (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xi}). I don't imagine we will fathom it even when we are in heaven. Only the One who endured it could know the agony within those three hours.

Another Gospel tell us Jesus then said, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30^{xii}). It is a Greek word that was also put on paid invoices. Paid in full! It was a sigh of great relief as well as a shout of victory. The Father's will was accomplished. The prophecies were fulfilled (Acts 13:39^{xiii}). And now all who will come with repentant hearts can find forgiveness and grace (Matthew 26:28^{xiv}). Who would reject so great a gift?

^{45b} *And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.* Luke 23: 45b At the moment that Jesus died, the thick veil that that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple with its cherubim woven onto it warning of the holiness of God and man's inability to approach God, was miraculously torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51^{xv}). No longer do we need a priest to access God (1 Peter 2:9^{xvi}). Jesus torn body is the veil through which we can enter God's presence without fear (Hebrews 10:20^{xvii}). Our sin debt was paid in full which gives us access to present our prayers before God's throne.

For a thousand years of Jewish history, only the High Priest could enter behind that curtain to behold the manifest presence of God as a ball of light over the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. He could only enter once a year to make offerings according to the Law for the Jewish people. The tearing of that massive curtain indicates that we can now boldly enter in. Like the priest who would wash himself and wear special clothing, we have been washed by the water of the Word and clothed in Christ. His holiness allows us free access to the throne of God where we find grace that helps us in our times of need (Hebrews 4:16^{xviii}).

⁴⁶ *Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.* Luke 23:46 Notice that Jesus cried out with a *loud* voice. This tells us He had strength to continue on, but His mission being accomplished He yielded up His spirit to His Father.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" It was a prayer Jews prayed before going to sleep. It was also recited during the slaying of the afternoon sacrifice that was taking place at that very moment in the temple. It comes from David's prayer of protection for his life (Psalm 31:5^{xix}). The only difference from the verse in the psalms is that Jesus began it with His enduring term for God, "Father." The following line in David's psalm proclaimed God's faithfulness and redemption. Jesus' last words were a declaration of faith.

I used to wonder why my Jewish friend would pray every morning, "Thank you for bringing our souls back to our bodies." It was because he prayed David's prayer before he went to sleep. Was Jesus thus declaring that God was going to bring His soul back into His body? With one final breath, Jesus' spirit left His lifeless body hanging on the cross.

At the hour of the afternoon sacrifice of the lamb, 3 p.m. when Jesus died, the light returned. The priests must have been horrified to see the massive curtain before the Most Holy Place torn in half.

⁴⁷ *Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"* Luke 23:47 The pagan centurion who most likely oversaw the flagellation and then the crucifixion praised God and declared Jesus'

innocence. That was a bold move for he was contradicting the sentence of the governor, his commander. Matthew tells us that an earthquake shook the ground when Jesus died, and that this centurion said, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* (Matthew 27:54^{xx}) While some would say the different sayings are a contradiction, it is easily resolved by the fact that he could have said both expressions. They go together. Each was taken from a different witness who each heard only half of what he said. The fact that Luke didn't just copy Matthew's version shows that he sought his own eyewitness (Luke 1:1,2^{xxi}).

This reminds me of Jesus' declaration to the towns of northern Galilee. *"It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for you."* (Matthew 11:24) for having seen Jesus' miracles they would not repent. The centurion praised God, but the religious rulers went on their way ignoring the evidence that was piling up to their condemnation. This pagan soldier believed when the religious elite chose to remain in denial. They knew the prophecies, they heard Jesus teach, they heard of the veil in the temple tearing and had seen the signs from God of darkness and an earthquake during the crucifixion, along with Jesus' gracious words even toward them, but they chose to harden their hearts.

That centurion saw Jesus tell the women to weep for themselves. He heard Jesus forgive Him. He heard Him promise the thief he would be with Him in paradise. He saw Him assign His mother to the care of John (John 19:27^{xxii}). He saw the darkness descend. He saw it lift as Jesus loudly declare God as His Father. Most victims of crucifixion slowly fade as their strength fails them and their minds become unclear. Jesus was in control of His faculties and strength to the end. He didn't succumb to the ordeal, but rather He cried out that His purpose was accomplished and with a prayer released His spirit into His Father's hands. Then the earth shook! All these things together convinced the centurion he had overseen the crucifixion of the Son of God. It must have struck fear into his heart. I wonder if he prayed the thief's prayer. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." **The thief and centurion remind us that you cannot be too bad for Jesus, only too good like those religious elites.**

I am certain that this is a daily occurrence. God's Spirit draws people, convicts them of their sins, gives them signs and they either recognize their sin and repent like the thief and the centurion, or they harden their hearts like the rulers. Did you see signs in your life? I've seen so many: close calls when I could have easily died, weakness that almost led me to destruction, coincidences that went way beyond any probability, the wonder of the created world all around us, and spontaneous remission from a physical problem. Do you see them? Which is it for you, repentance, or hardening? The amazing thing about the Bible is that we can see ourselves in nearly every page. James said it is like a mirror, and some people go away and forget what they really look like (James 1:23-25^{xxiii}).

⁴⁸ *And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.* Luke 23:48 Crowds gather when there is a calamity. Man has a morbid curiosity about the suffering of others. Videos about actual death scenes are extremely popular. You have seen how cars slow down to gawk at an accident scene. It was no different in Jesus' day. Many people had gathered to watch the crucifixion. Some of the people may have been in the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem and heard Him teach in the temple. Perhaps some of them thought they were deceived by Jesus. But seeing the signs that surrounded His death, they

realized a travesty of justice had taken place. On the eve of the celebration of Unleavened Bread, there was no celebration in the hearts of these people. How can you celebrate when the religious leaders you depend on for civil and religious authority have just murdered a prophet? It was a repeat of history, for their forefathers had also killed the prophets who were sent to them (Acts 7:52^{xxiv}).

⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things. Luke 23:49 Jesus' followers feared being arrested, but they had to find out what would happen to Him. Would He come down from the cross? Was He really going to die? Now the sad reality hit them hard. He was dead. The One who said He is the resurrection and the life was dead (John 11:25^{xxv}). The One whom they believed to be the Messiah was hanging lifeless on a Roman cross. How could it be? What about Him reigning forever on David's throne (Isaiah 9:7^{xxvi})? Even though Jesus had given them a sneak-peek into the future (Mark 10:34^{xxvii}), they could not have imagined this or what was soon to take place.

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. Luke 23:50,51 Two men out of 71 members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph and Nicodemus, were secret followers of Jesus (John 19:39^{xxviii}). As is often the case in Luke, only one is mentioned. Joseph did not approve of the decision to convict. My guess is that the Sanhedrin knew these two men had sympathies toward Jesus and did not notify them of the early morning trial, for death sentences had to be unanimous (Mark 14:64^{xxix}).

Joseph is described as a good and righteous man who was looking for the kingdom of God. That is the description in Hebrews 11 of the patriarchs. They were strangers and pilgrims in the earth and were seeking a heavenly city (Hebrews 11:10^{xxx}). In other words, Joseph was not satisfied with worldly governments run by men or the pleasures the world had to offer. He was looking for God's Kingdom where the Messiah reigns over all. Is that what you long for? Are you satisfied with the little passing trinkets and pleasures of this world or does your heart long for something much greater?

⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. Luke 23:52,53 While Joseph's sentiments were probably known, he may have not yet come out and declared himself to be a follower of Jesus. That would get him thrown off the council, the highest ruling body of the land. It would be like impeaching one of our senators for siding with an enemy of the state. Now that Jesus was dead, he had to decide what he would do. Would he just go along with this ruthless body of men who care only about their authority and power, or would he step away from them and continue seeking the kingdom of God? One choice would maintain his prestigious position. He could have justified it by saying he wanted to stay to influence it in the right direction, but his conscience would not let him do that. He sided with a dead Messiah. He would risk his very life because he knew Jesus spoke the truth. He saw the signs and not only believed but surrendered his life to follow Him (John 3:2^{xxxi}).

Verse 52 and 53 is his resignation notice to the council. He went to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus. There was no going back now. He wrapped the body in linen shroud. Some people believe that is the Shroud of Turin. Then he laid it in his own freshly cut tomb. Another gospel tells us that Nicodemus brought spices to cover the scent of

decay. The women followed behind and would return after the Sabbath and prepare the body with spices and ointments.

In John chapter three we read that Nicodemus had come to Jesus at night to ask Him about entering the kingdom of God.ⁱⁱ Now in the daytime he is no longer hiding. Joseph and Nicodemus took a stand for a crucified Savior. These two bold men were now willing to give up their high positions and associate themselves with Jesus. There was no going back.

Some of us are comfortable talking about Jesus and declaring our allegiance to Him when surrounded by Christians, but would we give up our jobs and security to follow Him, even if we never heard of the resurrection? May God help us all to be as committed as these two religious leaders were. They were taking up their cross to follow Jesus wherever He would lead (Matthew 16:24^{xxxii}). They became disciples.

⁵⁴ *It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.* Luke 23:54 It was Friday, and when the first two stars were visible, the Sabbath had just begun.

⁵⁵ *The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid.* ⁵⁶ *Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.* Luke 23:55,56 The women could not carry out the work of scenting the body because of the prohibition not to work on the Sabbath. They would stay in their homes and mourn the death of their beloved leader while looking forward to carrying out the work on early on the first day of the week.

The disciples had locked themselves in the same upper room where they had celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus. The memories of Him washing their feet had to come to mind (John 13:3-5^{xxxiii}), as well as the teaching He gave that night of the arrest (John 15:13^{xxxiv}; 14:18,19^{xxxv}). They probably fought the guilt of fleeing when Jesus was arrested. Wondering what they were to do and what would happen next, they grieved the death of their friend and teacher.

It has been said that the darkest hour is just before the dawn. There was a dawn coming that will outshine any dawn in history. And there is another dawn coming when He comes again! How quickly our mourning can be turned into dancing when Jesus appears (Psalm 30:11,12^{xxxvi})!

Questions:

- 1 What is significant about the time Jesus was crucified?
- 2 Why was their darkness over the land?
- 3 What two expressions came from Jesus before He died?
- 4 What can we learn from His words?
- 5 What is significant about the curtain tearing?
- 6 What happened to the Centurion? Why?
- 7 Does something similar happen in our lives?
- 8 What do you think convinced Joe and Nick?
- 9 How hard was the decision they made? Why?
- 10 What must Friday night have been like for the disciples?
- 11 How can we avoid such despondency?

ⁱ **Mark 14:61-62 (ESV)**

⁶¹ But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” ⁶² And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

ⁱⁱ **John 3:2 (ESV)**

² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Mark 15:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him.

^{iv} **Exodus 10:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.”

^v **Exodus 10:23 (ESV)**

²³ They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.

^{vi} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{vii} **Amos 8:9-10 (ESV)**

⁹ “And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

^{viii} **Habakkuk 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

^{ix} **Luke 22:53 (ESV)**

⁵³ 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.”

^x **Galatians 3:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

^{xi} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xii} **John 19:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

^{xiii} **Acts 13:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

^{xiv} **Matthew 26:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

^{xv} **Matthew 27:51 (ESV)**

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

^{xvi} **1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

^{xvii} **Hebrews 10:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

^{xviii} **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{xix} **Psalms 31:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

^{xx} **Matthew 27:54 (ESV)**

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

^{xxi} **Luke 1:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,
² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,

^{xxii} **John 19:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

^{xxiii} **James 1:23-25 (ESV)**

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

^{xxiv} **Acts 7:52 (ESV)**

⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,

^{xxv} **John 11:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

^{xxvi} **Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

^{xxvii} **Mark 10:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

^{xxviii} **John 19:39 (ESV)**

³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

^{xxix} **Mark 14:64 (ESV)**

⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death.

^{xxx} **Hebrews 11:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

^{xxxi} **John 3:2 (ESV)**

² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

^{xxxii} **John 3:2 (ESV)**

² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

^{xxxiii} **John 13:3-5 (ESV)**

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

^{xxxiv} **John 15:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

^{xxxv} **John 14:18-19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

^{xxxvi} **Psalms 30:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,

¹² that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!