



HILL COUNTRY
BIBLE CHURCH | AUSTIN



The Day of Darkness

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February 24, 2013

(Video From the sixth hour)

(Tim Hawks) Good morning. I would ask you to grab your Bibles and turn to Matthew 27. We're going to be looking at the crucifixion of Jesus today, and hopefully as we've worshipped together the theology of these songs that we've

been singing have prepared your hearts for our chance to dive in here together. For the last several weeks we've been looking at the time period between the time Jesus rose from the dead and when he ascended to heaven. That 40-day period where Jesus was giving his followers, his disciples and then us who come after Him, clarity on what our mission would be in the world. In fact, we entitled the series Commissioned because Jesus says to His followers "As the Father has sent me, I'm sending you." And we've had a chance of sent people to actually identify places in our community and beyond, to the ends of the earth, where we believe God is sending us with the good news of the love of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we looked at that and we have a challenge or a goal this year as a church. We've said, why don't we this year, since the government can't do it and since the economy can't do it, and the environment's not going to do it, why don't we change the world. Let's change the world this year. We've been talking about what would it look like for us at least to do our part to see the world transformed, and we believe the gospel is the answer for the world. The good news of God's love changes everything. So we're on that mission this year, but we're going to take some time between now and Good Friday during this Lent season to stop and look at the last three hours on the cross. In other words, we're going to look at the three hours that changed the world.

Lots of people spend time talking about the miracle of the resurrection, and we probably have learned a lot about that over the years if you hang around a church much, but very little attention is given to the actual time period that happens between noon and three o'clock, that last three hours of Jesus on the cross. Do you realize that the Bible records five miraculous signs that take place during that period and just immediately afterwards. And that's what we're going to be look at over the next five weeks, is each of those miraculous signs.

So in Matthew 27 let's jump in at verse 45. This is halfway through the crucifixion, and it says at verse 45:

*"From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, **"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"** (which means **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**)*

When some of those standing there heard this, they said "He's calling Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Now recorded in these verses are five miraculous signs that accompany the last three hours of Jesus' suffering on the cross. The first one is the darkness; that's what we're going to be looking at today. And then the vail of the temple rent from top to bottom, torn open. We'll look at that next week. The week after we're going to take up the topic of the actual earthquake, the stones breaking, and the week after that we're going to be looking at the tombs being opened, people being resurrected showing up in the city, what's all that about? I know, I know. So we'll get to that. And then the final of the five miracles is the faith of the Roman centurion. This was a centurion who was standing there during those three hours along with the people with him after all this had happened and he saw Jesus and how he died and all the miracles, he is converted. Truly this man was the Son of God, and it appears that there was actually a group of people that trusted Christ, which is the greatest miracle of all. The point of the gospel is to transform the human heart. So we're going to be looking at these leading up to Good Friday and Easter.

So we're beginning today with the darkness. In order to help you guys understand the context of what takes place here, Jesus Christ is crucified at the third hour, so that would be in our time 9:00 a.m. in the morning. From 9:00 a.m. in the morning until noon Jesus suffers in the light. In other words, normal day, normal daylight hours; Jesus Christ is suffering in the light. And there is a lot of activity that happens around Jesus during those first three hours. In fact, when you take Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each of them record the same event giving some additional or slightly different details so you can fill in the whole picture. We're going to stay with Matthew today and just kind of look at what Matthew said, and I'll fill in the rest from the other gospels. But starting in verse 32, from the time Jesus leaves Pilate's judgment hall it says in verse 32:

"As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross."

So down the Via Dolorosa, the “Road of Tears” as they’re going outside of the city for the crucifixion they grab Simone to help Jesus carry the cross.

They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

That would have been some kind of a sedative mixed with gall to take the pain off, take the edge off. Jesus says no, he refuses to take it. And it says:

“When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, KING OF THE JEWS. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him,”

I like that word, hurled. They’re not just making comments, they are throwing it in his face; hurling insults at him.

“shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”

“In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

So I want you to picture in your mind the scene. They bring Jesus there, they strip his clothes off of him, they nail his hands and his feet to the wooden beams, and they raise him up above to begin the process of a slow and painful death. Probably the most slow and painful type of death, form of death ever dreamed up by the sickness of the depraved minds of men. And as Jesus is hanging there naked, the first thing that the soldiers do is right below the cross they’re down they’re playing dice, seeing who can win his clothing. So they’re trying to, they’re gambling for who gets his clothing. That’s going on at the foot of the cross.

It also says that there are two robbers that are crucified, one on one side and one on the other. Those guys get brought out, they get laid on their crosses,

they get nailed to their crosses, they get raised. All of this is going on. While all of this is going on it says that they erected the charge against him, or they wrote on a sign and nailed it to the top of the cross where everybody could see his charge. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. So even in that part there's mocking going on, and then the crowd of people like a carnival circus are gathering around and people are throwing insults at him. Not just the people, but the chief priests dressed in their regal robes come out to mock him. The teachers of the law, the venerable elders of the city of Jerusalem are standing around, making fun of him, and you can imagine their mood. These are the people who hated him. These are the people whose security he threatened. These are the people who trumped up false charges against him. They, who were so careful to keep the law that they literally tithed on their spices, are lying to get him killed. They're having a hay day, a field day. In fact it says that the robbers join in and they start criticizing him, they start yelling at him, they start mocking him on the cross.

So in these first three hours in the light Jesus is not only suffering the physical pain of what his body is going through, all of this activity is going on around him. So what is Jesus doing during these three hours? Scripture tells us that Jesus utters his first three of the seven words that he speaks from the cross. And you know what the first one is? Luke's gospel records it as this: Jesus looks out over the crowd and he says 'Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.'

Now the text of the - of Luke, the word that's used for "said", made the statement implies that it's something Jesus said more than once. He repeated it over and over again. So while the soldiers are gambling for his garments he's looking down on them and he's saying, 'Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.' While the robbers are criticizing him he's saying 'Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. While the crowd and the leaders are mocking him, he's saying to them Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.' While they are killing him, he's offering them forgiveness. While they're torturing him he's offering them grace. While they are mocking him in their pride, he's offering them humble compassion. What a contrast between Jesus and the rest.

He utters his second word from the cross. Finally one of the two robbers comes to his senses and thinks 'I'm fixing to die here.' And he turns to Jesus and starts defending him, and then he finally says 'Jesus, remember me when you go into your kingdom.' And Jesus utters his second word from the cross and he says to the man, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' Here's a guy that's deserving of death, that's dying for the crimes he committed against

humanity, and Jesus, who is perfectly innocent, never done anything wrong, turns to this man and offers him a full pardon in heaven. What a contrast.

The third word that Jesus utters from the cross, as he looks out into the crowd and there he sees his mother. Jesus' mother Mary is a widow, and Jesus is the oldest son responsible to take care of her, turns and speaks to her. She's standing there with the Apostle John, and he says to her 'Woman, behold your son. John behold your mother.' In other words, John's going to take my responsibility to care for you. So at the moment when Jesus was in the most critical need of care he's taking care of other people. What a contrast to the cruelty, and the mocking, and the scoffing, and the pride, and the evil in the hearts of the people that are there. And Jesus, who offers grace, and love, and forgiveness, and compassion. And all that was going on while he suffered in the light. But something happened at noon. In fact, if you look at it in verse 45, it says

"From the sixth hour," that's twelve o'clock noon, 'until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land."

Now that phrase, 'came over', Luke translates it literally "fell." That implies that the darkness didn't come gradually. It came immediately. In other words, at the point in the day when the sun is the brightest, when you would expect the sun to be shining above all, everything goes black. Everything goes black. And it says that it was a big area that went black. In fact, the text says 'it went dark over all the land.' Now the word "land" there can refer to the whole earth. So it could refer to every part that's illuminated by the sun as the earth is turning on its axis and picking up the sun's light. Or it could refer to the area of Palestine, the land there. We're not really sure what it was. Now a lot of people have tried to speculate, 'Well what could this have been?' What happened there at noon? Some have suggested a solar eclipse. The reason why solar eclipse is not probable is because that's something that comes on gradually and certainly doesn't last for three hours, and in addition to that this is the time of the new moon, it's Passover, so this would not be the right time for a solar eclipse. Some have suggested a thunderstorm, but a thunderstorm that turns the sky completely black, covers the whole area, lasts for three hours is very improbable. Some have said sand storms, I mean all kinds of things that people have kind of tried to figure out what could have happened here. Personally I think what the text is describing here is probably a miracle. Where God just decided to withhold the laws or the rules of time and space to suspend those for a 3-hour period to make a point. Now some of you guys are skeptical and you say, 'Yeah that's what I hate about the Bible. There's a lot of good stuff in there, and then every once in a while they throw one of those universal darkness moments on us and it's like whoa, like that's convenient.

You know, we can validate anything by making up something like that.' And you know, if that's what you're feeling today I get that. So I, I went through a phase of that myself where I was trying really hard to find any way I could to disprove all of the miraculous things in the Bible and the lack of validity in the Bible, and in that process really tried to give myself to the study of it to see if it was true. And after eight years of academic study pursuing these questions, I came away more convinced than ever before that the Bible is absolutely true. It's absolutely true. And there are myriads, myriads of documents that testify to this. Let me just give you one here.

Okay. Tertullian, so Tertullian is an apologist who lives in the 2nd century, 160 AD to 225AD. So this is like 130 years after Christ is crucified, Tertullian is born. Tertullian grows up, embraces Christianity, and has a life of prolific writing. Most of his writings we have today are preserved, and he wrote talking to the Romans and the Greeks, and the Jews who tried to discredit the accounts of the crucifixion. Did this really happen? And so in the midst of all of that Tertullian is writing about this, and I want you to actually see the words he wrote, right around 200, so 140 years after the event. Here's what he's writing to his critics, who buy the way are writing back. Okay. I want you to see it. He writes these words – I'll put it up here for you.

Tertullian graphic

'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 archives to this day.'

Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying you guys have this event recorded in your history book. In your annals of what took place in 33 AD, you guys have a written record of a time when the sky went dark, right at noon. You have that recorded on your historical records and you can't explain that. Now what's interesting is we don't have any evidence in any of the recorded literature of anybody successfully coming back and saying 'oh no, that never happened.' Why . . . because it did. So if the Romans, and the Greeks, and the Jews wrote about this day that's one of the things that's hard for me to just say 'Ah, the sky went black for three hours, here we go again. Hocus pocus, somebody's making stuff up.' The people in the day experienced it. It was written about and they couldn't explain it. Okay. So what does all this mean?

I want us to get the scene again. This carnival feeling is taking place. All of this activity is going on. And in the middle of all of this activity, with the leaders mocking and the soldiers gazing on and everything that's happening, right at

noon, the sun quits shining. Everything goes black. The lights go out. **(the lights go out in the sanctuary)**

Now don't anybody panic. I just want us to sit here in the dark for just a moment. Keep in mind it's noon, right? What happens at home at night when your lights go out? Everybody starts looking for a flashlight, where are the candles at, honey go crank up the generator. What would they have done? Nobody's got a torch, nobody brings a torch out in the middle of the day. Somebody would have had to grope their way back into the city to find light to even light the area. It was dark, and for a period of time people sat in the darkness for three hours, why? Do you recall the first thing God did when he created the world? In Genesis 1 God spoke the words, 'Let there be light' and light illuminated the universe so we could see the colors and the hues, we could see matter, we could see face-to-face, we could see or relationship with other people. When God sent Jesus into the world John records that Jesus is the light of the world who comes to bring light into the human condition, the darkness of the depravity of human hearts. Here's something that's very critical for you to get. Jesus Christ described separation from God, eternal judgment, as being cast into outer darkness. Being separated from God because of sin is darkness. And for three hours on the cross the world got to experience what life would be like without the light of God shining into the world.

Something else was happening. During that three hours Jesus Christ was suffering on the cross as he literally took the punishment for the sin of all humanity. For a moment I want you to think about what Jesus experienced those three hours. **(lights begin to shine on the cross)** I want you to think about the impurities, the sins, not only of your own life, but of the whole world. And for three hours, in the dark, all alone, Jesus physically experienced the pain and the punishment for all of those sins. Jesus was feeling pain for all the shameful things that we inflict on our bodies, on minds and on souls. What we do to each other and what we do to ourselves. For the self-abusing - cutting, overeating, drugging, drinking, starving, consuming. All the mind numbing things that only mask the pain and create more shame. For the self-hatred born out of insecurity and nurtured by distant parents, for every look that says "you're not good enough" and each word that says, "I wish you were different." For all the long buried secrets - rape, incest, perversion, porn, all the things that shatter innocence, and the ever present guilt that strangles away any hope of healing. Jesus suffered for each act. For each act of our rage that simmers beneath the surface of a well-managed smile, resentments that seem justified, outbursts that protect our pride and the comforting excuse that life or God has dealt us a bad hand. For each racial slur or act of harassment that gives hatred more ammunition, and the invisible line that separates "us" from "them" that

no one wants to acknowledge. Homicide, genocide, the destructive fruit of human pride.

Jesus was feeling the pain for the crimes committed to feed personal greed while crushing those who dared to trust. Money making schemes, playing with the dreams of the most vulnerable. To cheat, to steal, to lie, to scam the only rule is – don't get caught. He was feeling the pain for the selfish choices that separate and tear apart, leaving a wake of broken marriages, shattered homes, shot-up schools, crippled friendships, oppressive governments, and ruined people. Serving self through casual sex, molestation, adultery, and manipulation. Playing with other people's lives to get what we need – what we want. Three hours of human suffering -- Jesus suffered for the sins of humanity. Three hours of human suffering -- Jesus suffered alone.

(lights begin to come up in the sanctuary) You see as the darkness that enshrouded the cross actually prevented people from actually looking on and witnessing the agony, and I can't imagine the agony of the one who knew no sin that became sin on our behalf. The one who never lusted, carrying the perversion of lust. The one who never molested carrying the punishment for molestation. The one who never tried to eradicate an enemy, experiencing the joy, the blood on the lips, the satisfaction, celebration of that win-at-all cost. At the same time bearing the tears of all the abuse and all of the pain. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, so that we might know the righteousness of God. Jesus suffered alone, walled off from the human world that was shrouded in darkness, hoping and waiting for the day of forgiveness. In addition to that, Jesus suffered alone in separation from the father which caused this reaction. In verse 46,

"About the ninth hour," that's three hours after this began. "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

Recorded in the original Aramaic and preserved in the original Aramaic because those people were standing there who heard his cry. It was so penetrating, so powerful that they wanted to actually preserve the sound that came out of his mouth so that every generation would know the magnitude of what Jesus was experiencing. And in our translation in our language it's translated

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

'Why have you left me alone? Why have you turned your back on me?' It's that the eternal relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit was temporarily suspended. The Father who had been in constant communication with His Son, in perfect harmony and relationship who would always be able to

say, 'This is my Son, the one I love, in Him I am well pleased.' He was not pleased. He couldn't look and Jesus was alone. How can you look on this man and ever doubt the love of God for you? How? How could you look into the eyes of his suffering and his aloneness and see anything less than love and compassion and a desire to know you personally. You see "**Jesus suffered alone**" in the darkness so that you would never have to be alone in the dark. In addition to that "**He suffered completely.**" He suffered completely. In that three hours that was an eternity of my behavior and your behavior and the sin of the whole world, that was all poured out on him in that three-hour period of time. I don't know how that works. That's a mystery of the crucifixion. Jesus took every single one, and we know he took every single one because in the passage it says in verse 50:

"And when he had cried out again in a loud voice he gave up his spirit."

What did he cry out? Luke's gospel tells us he cried out "*It is finished.*" *Tetelesthai*, the Greek word which means completely done. Over, every single bit of it, the suffering for sin, the punishment, the justice necessary to pay for the crimes of every single human. Jesus said I did it completely. It is finished.

I asked you a minute ago how could you doubt the love of Jesus. Let me ask you again: How can you doubt the completeness of your forgiveness? How can you doubt, how do you get up in the morning having messed up yesterday and "Ah, I guess I just blew it, I guess God can't love me. I guess God can't take me back." What Jesus did on the cross paid for all of the sins of the world. All of the sins of the world -- every one that you've committed, every one that you will commit, every one. Let me ask you this: How can you look at another person and think that they are unredeemable? How could you ever have a judgmental eye towards someone who's still stuck in the trap of sin? When Jesus died to completely pay for their sins too. Jesus' death paid completely for our sin.

Finally, Jesus' death was very, very personal. Jesus' suffering was personal. It was for you. It was for you. "**He suffered for us.**" Peter writes this: he says he himself bore our sin in his own body on the cross. Can you say that with me? He himself bore our sin in his own body on the cross. Whose sin did he bear? It was our sin, right? It was our sin. It was for us. He said "*He himself bore our sin in his own body on the cross that we should die to sin and live to righteousness for by his wounds we have been healed.*" (1 Peter 2:24) This is very personal. Jesus Christ died for us, his suffering was for us. Is it possible that you're sitting here today saying 'Yeah, that's really cool, but I don't know if it's for me.' How can it not be for you? How can it not be for you?

So here's your choice. God came to bring us light, love, beauty, righteousness, a relationship, and in spite of what we've done wrong he secured it through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. So if the light of God's love and a relationship with God through Jesus Christ brings us the hope of a life with God, adopted into his family, all eternity to experience his light. What does rejecting Jesus bring? You see those three hours on the cross made it very clear that people who walk away from the love of God and say 'I don't need it, I don't want it, I don't want what you did for me Jesus. I will do this on my own.' The Bible says you're going to find yourself separated from God in darkness from everything that's perfect and beautiful. Those are the alternatives. God pours out his love in Jesus, he pours out his wrath on Jesus, and he says to each of us, 'Come, come to me. Come to me. Walk into the light. Let me give you my life, let me give you my love.' I beg of you - do not turn away from such great love on your behalf.

Let's bow our heads for a moment. I know within the human limitations of the sound of my voice there's no way I can put into words the magnitude of what happened in those three hours. So as you sit in silence, resist the urge to think of where you go from here and what you've got on your plate, how you're going to get out of this parking lot, and give yourself a chance to allow the Spirit to open your eyes to the darkness of the soul without the love of God pouring in. May you in this moment see your eternal destiny covered in love, enveloped in the beauty of God, or separated from him. Maybe you'll see your friends in the darkness of that moment and you'll be motivated with the good news of the gospel. The love of God has been shown in our hearts so that we can be called the children of God. May that be true of you.

(Prayer) Father in heaven, there's a lot about this world we don't understand and a lot more that we don't like. There's a lot about being human that we don't understand and there's some that we like and some that we don't like. And in the middle of all of that the one thing we don't get is how much you love us. I pray that no one here would leave today without an overwhelming sense that you have gone to extremes beyond anybody could ever imagine to draw us into your family. Let no one leave here today without having confidence that they've put their trust in Jesus. May they do that even now with heads bowed. May we go out of here filled with joy. The darkness is lifted, the light of day has come. The future is bright in Jesus, and may we take that good news to the world so that all may know what you have done. Thank you Father. We bless you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Day of Darkness
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February 24, 2013