

## God's Message at Calvary

(45 minutes)

Opening hymn #324 – "Cause for Gratitude

Closing Hymn # 111 "My Redeemer Lives"

As we think about the final hours of our Lord's human experience, we often mentally put ourselves at the foot of the cross trying to gain a deeper appreciation of what he was willing to do for us. And when we look at that experience we see many messages that move us.

➔ When we look at the cross, we see the love which motivated Jesus to be willing to endure such physical agony.

We see the requirements of justice, which demanded a perfect life be sacrificed as a ransom for Adam.

We see the ending of a life of sacrifice that would provide an offering for the future sins of the world and a great Mediator that would oversee the experiences of a sinful race, endeavoring to erase the effects of sin in the heart of mankind.

➔ As the Apostle John, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and a few other women, stood at the foot of the cross they did not, at the time, understand why all this was happening. For them, it was simply a heart wrenching experience. Then, to hear the hateful words of his enemies was another knife in the heart, when they knew he was sinless and pure. How awful that must have been as they stood there, helpless.

In addition to all that they saw and heard, there were other events that added to their confusion. There were additional messages directly from God Himself.

Here is part of the account from the Gospel of Mark.

➔ As men mocked and jeered at Jesus it says, **"At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'** With a loud cry Jesus breathed his last. **The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.**

Mark 15:33-38 NIV

➡ Earlier in this same passage we were told Jesus was nailed to the cross in the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour of their day. That is 9:00 AM by our reckoning. And he was there until the 9<sup>th</sup> hour, our 3:00 PM.

➡ There was darkness from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> hour, that is, from noon until 3:00 PM.

This was an usual occurrence, a message from God.

The darkness could not have been caused by a solar eclipse, where the path of the moon blocks the sunlight and darkens the earth with its shadow.

➡ Here is an illustration of a solar eclipse. You see how the moon blocks the light of the sun and creates darkness.

But during a full moon, which was the case during the Passover season, the moon is on the opposite side of the earth.

➡ Here is an illustration of where the moon would be at the Passover. It was in the wrong position to have been the cause of the darkness.

An interesting thing to notice here is that the orbit of the moon is tilted so lunar eclipses are rare, whereas full moons happen every month. So, this darkness from noon to 3:00 PM had to be a miracle.

➡ There will actually be a solar eclipse on July 16, 2186, which will be the longest total eclipse for thousands of years. It will last for only 7 minutes and 29 seconds. So, once again we see the darkness was not a natural occurrence.

➡ So, why would God do this? And why for three hours? There's got to be a message there.

By orchestrating these events around the crucifixion, God spoke in almost a parable-like way. The messages He conveyed related to the crucifixion in one way or another. But He's left these for us to think about and try to understand.

➡ There were at least five events that God arranged. The darkness, the tearing of the temple veil, an earthquake, the opening of some graves near Jerusalem, and then one more very subtle symbolic message at the tomb of Jesus, after his resurrection.

➡ The darkness is the first miraculous event we're going to look at this morning.

I think there was more than one message God was conveying with the 3 hours of darkness

➡ My first thought was that the color black, like darkness, is the color of mourning. Even though it was God's plan for Jesus to have this experience, how painful would it have been for God to watch his son treated so badly, with such cruelty?

➡ This isn't meant to be an advertisement, but if you get a chance to read the booklet "And God Cried," you'll see the opening chapter describe how God identifies with those who suffer.

➡ For example, in Genesis 6, just prior to the Flood it says, **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become... and His heart was filled with pain."** Genesis 6:5, 6 NIV

In another instance when required to punish Israel for turning to idolatry

➡ it says, **"Shall I not visit them for these things? saith Jehovah; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing..."**

Jeremiah 9:9, 10

As a good Father, God had to punish Israel, but it brought Him no joy. God is not emotionless. He suffers when others suffer and even when He has to cause that suffering by sending a punishment. It causes Him pain.

➡ Here is a quote from the booklet.

"How can one so omnipotent communicate His capacity to suffer with finite man? He uses imagery we can understand – 'tears.' Far from being an indication of weakness, God's imagery of shedding 'tears' assures us of a profound fatherly care and concern." Page 8

When we think about that we have to wonder, how much more would this characteristic response be demonstrated as God watched Jesus suffer?

➡ This darkness then may have been God's way of expressing the pain He felt as the crucifixion played out. I think we're seeing God's tender heart expressing great sorrow.

But why bring darkness for three hours? If anyone has a suggestion I would love to hear it. This is what came to my mind.

There had never been a time after Jesus was created that his life was extinguished... until now.

➡ We're told this in Matthew 12:40.

“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Matthew 12:40

For three days and three nights, there would be no communication, no fellowship between Father and Son. For Jesus, his thoughts perished and there was only darkness, no thoughts, no feelings in the grave. God would have missed that fellowship for there was a bond between them that we can hardly understand. Not hearing prayers from His son meant three days of waiting.

➡ Breaking that bond actually started earlier and led to Jesus crying out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” As difficult this was, God knew forsaking Jesus was a needful experience for Jesus' own growth and development. So, there was great restraint on God's part as He held back that precious fellowship which Jesus craved. And, upon his death it was fully broken.

They were willing to break that bond for us, so that we could be lifted out of the darkness of sin and death.

The history of man has seen many dark times, but these few hours were the darkest as the only truly innocent man was put to death. But now that Jesus' personal sacrifice was complete God's plan could move forward and begin to accomplish its purposes.

Another message being conveyed through the 3 hours of darkness had to do with Jesus personally. It may also have been a gesture indicating the gradual extinguishing of Jesus' life as the Light of the World.

➔ During his ministry Jesus said, **"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."** But as his life slowly ebbed away, the light was fading with it. The coming age would be filled with gross darkness when evil men would dominate the Christian world. The term "Dark Ages" is a fitting description of what Christianity was largely to become.

It would be a religious system that would claim the name of Christ and yet commit such atrocities in his name, that they were anything but a light in the world.

➔ And a third message God may have been conveying in the darkness may be indicated in the book of Amos. Something he says there bears a striking similarity to what happened at the cross.

➔ "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation..." Amos 8:9, 10

In Amos' day, this was describing a time when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was going to be punished, but the imagery of the sun being darkened at noon suggests that God used this to predict a coming calamity. In this case, He used it in ancient Israel, and He uses it again at the cross to point to the trouble coming upon Israel for their rejection and mistreatment of Jesus.

➡ The Gospel Age has been a time of great darkness, for both Natural Israel in their Diaspora, which brought bitter persecution, and for religious truth. Daniel prophesied that truth would be cast to the ground. In scripture "truth" is depicted as light. So, casting truth to the ground meant a time of spiritual darkness.

But, despite this foreboding prediction there is another interesting thing we don't usually pay attention to.

➡ The darkness ended precisely at our Lord's death. I think there's a message there too. Obviously, it shows that Jesus' suffering was over. The Father's sorrow could be lightened, knowing His son would never experience anything like this again. But the light coming back may also contains a message of hope.

➡ For the true Gospel Age church, the Apostle Paul explains how his death made hope a reality.

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Romans 5:2, 9-10

➡ What I've gleaned from these verses in the past is difference between being justified by faith And being justified by blood. The Ancient Worthies could have faith justification, which gave them a measure of standing with God. But now that Jesus' blood is available Paul says much more than being justified by faith, we can now be justified by blood. I love that distinction.

➡ But there's another distinction in these verses that I never noticed before. We were reconciled by the death of Jesus, that's justification, But, he says again, **"Much more, being reconciled we shall be saved by his life."**

There's a two-step process there. The first is justification, which reconciles us to God, and the second is sanctification, which is the process of how the Lord "saves us." He does that by directs our lives and helping us to become holier. That's a wonderful addition I had never seen before in this passage.

➡ And so, in this we see that Jesus' death was not enough. He had to be resurrected so that he could begin the work of sanctifying us.

➡ So, for you and me his death made hope come to life.

➡ By bringing the light back at 3:00 PM God was saying that darkness was destined to end.

But, as we all know, it's not just for you and me. This two-step process is for the world as well. The ransom will raise mankind from the grave, but the sin-offering will give them eternal life.

We can now read the words of Paul in Romans 8 with a bright shining light fixed on the future of mankind. This is how it reads from the Phillips translation.



"The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose it has been so limited – yet it has been given hope and the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay, and have its share in the magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!" Romans 8:19-21 (Phillips)

That's the hope our Lord created by his death, and maybe that's part of what was meant when the darkness ended precisely upon his death.

Another hope-inspiring passage is in Ephesians 1. Reading from the Weymouth translation.

➔ It says:  
“... So abundant was God's grace, the grace which He, the possessor of all wisdom and understanding, lavished upon us, when He made known to us the secret of His will. And this is in harmony with God's merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it – the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one head in Christ; yea things in heaven and things on earth, to find their one head in him.” Eph. 1:7-10 (Weymouth)

We should stop and read those verses a few times. How perfectly they encompass the benefits mankind will reap and why it was essential for Jesus to be raised from the dead. As we understand the truth of God's plan the darkness gives way to the light of hope and the prospects of the future as God's merciful purpose, which He has cherished since creation, comes to fruition.

➔ So, the three hours of darkness was full of meaning.

- It was first an expression of God's personal sorrow
  - It indicated the gradual extinguishing of Jesus' life, as the light of the world.
  - It was a pointer to the coming calamity for Israel in an age of darkness
  - Lastly, when the light returned upon his death it was a message of hope for the future.
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There was another remarkable event that coincided with the death of Jesus. It is probably the one brethren discuss the most. It's described in Matthew 27.

➔ *“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom...” Matthew 27:50, 51*



➡ Josephus records that Herod's Temple was 60 feet tall and 30 feet wide. This then provides the dimensions of the veil. He adds that the veil was 4 inches thick. So, this veil, dividing the Holy from the Most Holy was immense. It was so massive and heavy that no human could have torn it like this.

➡ The words translated "from the top to the bottom" literally mean "from above downward" (Strong's #'s 509, 2736). Coming from above shows this was directed by God.

➡ In referring to the Most Holy Paul said, *"...The way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning."* Hebrews 9:8 NIV

So, from the death of Jesus on, the temple building was not going to be the meeting place of God. The type was now being fulfilled in the antitype.

Paul goes to say,

➡ *"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh... Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..."* Hebrews 10:19-22.

➡ If the veil represented his flesh as indicated by the apostle, it was fitting that it should be torn at the moment his flesh died.

The account also indicates that the tearing of the veil was "in twain," i.e. in two parts.

➡ We may be seeing another reference to the two parts of Jesus' sacrifice, his death, which provided the ransom, and his suffering life which was an additional offering for the future sins of the church and the world. Both are required to provide full atonement with God.

As the church can now boldly approach the throne of grace, pictured in the Most Holy, that same privilege will one day be available to the world. And even though they do not know this yet, it lays a wonderful prospect before the human family. Much greater than any of us can fully appreciate.

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Now we get to an event mentioned only in the Matthew account.

➔ Upon Jesus' death we're told, **"...the earth did quake; and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the city, and appeared unto many."** Matthew 27:51-53

Here's another parable God has given.

➔ First, why did God send an earthquake?

In the scriptures an earthquake is used to describe social upheaval. There's an example of this in Joel 3 where its speaking of the Great Time of Trouble at the end of this age.

In verse 16 it describes how God will fight for Israel in Armageddon.

➔ **"The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel."** Joel 3:16

Here an earthquake is used to describe the social upheaval that will occur at the end of this age, as God fights for Israel as in the days of battle.

Now taking that symbolism of an earthquake back to the cross,

- ➔ God was saying that, **“For the nation which crucified the Lord there was a great social upheaval coming.”**
  
- ➔ This, of course happened, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and carried off its treasures. But there’s a phrase back in the Joel text that also applies here.
  
- ➔ After the trouble it said, **“but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.”** When God punishes His people, He always leaves a ray of hope. It would be a long arduous journey for Israel, but there was always a glimmer of good things to come.

At the cross, the effect of both the darkness and the earthquake was powerful.



“Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly, this was the Son of God.” Matthew 27:54

It took Roman soldiers to make this observation. They could see there was a power at work greater than they had ever seen before. And they were right.

God was angry at the evil and the unbelief of so many. He was in pain at seeing His son suffer so much and having justice violated in so many ways. But God never punishes simply to cause pain.

- ➔ His punishments are always corrective and meant to uplift in the long run. There is great wisdom in the way God meets our punishment. So, in reality, His love is the reason He punishes, just as a father corrects his children for their own good.

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Another interesting event that occurred in connection with the earthquake was the opening of the graves.

➡ Let's read that again.

"...The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Matthew 27:51-53

The meaning of this passage has been questioned because it seems to contradict the statement in 1 Corinthians 15:20, that our Lord was the first-fruit of them that slept.

However, we know that others were awakened from death prior to our Lord's resurrection.

➡ The Greek word used when saying these individuals "arose" is the word is "*egeiro*" (Strong's # 1453). Though it can also be used for waking from natural sleep, its use here is consistent with the other awakenings from death that Jesus performed

➡ It is the same word used for the awakening of Lazarus (John 12:9), the awakening of the widow's son (Luke 7:14) and the awakening of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:54). These resuscitations stood in marked contrast to the resurrection of Jesus who was rewarded with immortality and would never die again. In this he was the first. All these others would eventually see death once again. Their awakening was simply meant to be a witness and to prove the authenticity of who Jesus was.

I'm not quite sure why brethren have trouble with the graves literally being opened at the cross and some dead raised to life.

Possibly, it's because they are called saints. We know these cannot be the saints of the Gospel Age, since Jesus was the first of these. I doubt it was even any of the Ancient Worthies. But the use of the word saints in the Old Testament is slightly different than in the New. In the New Testament it is used exclusively of the Church Class. But in the Old Testament it is used generally of those endeavoring to follow the Lord, faithful ones of old.

➡ For example, you remember the story of Hannah. She wanted a son and when the Lord answered her prayer and she bore Samuel, she dedicated him to the service of the Tabernacle. That's all in 1 Samuel 1. Then in chapter 2 she utters a prayer of thanksgiving,

➡ that has come to be known as "The Song of Hannah." It goes on for 10 verses.

➡ In verse 9 she says, **"He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. "**

Now, she's not referring to the saints of the Gospel Age but to those who served God faithfully, as she did.

➡ The Hebrew word for "saints" means to be religiously pious. These would be safe under God's protection.

➡ We can continue this concept to the end of the Jewish Age, knowing there were Jewish men and women who were faithful to God and served Him through the Law. These too could be termed saints, in the Old Testament sense of the word. They were religiously pious.

➡ To me, it would be reasonable then that if God was going to raise someone as immediate evidence of Jesus' own resurrection it would be from a group of people that the citizens of Jerusalem would recognize and know that they had been dead.

➡ We remember how the Chief Priests and Pharisees demanded that Pilate put guards at the tomb of Jesus, lest the disciples steal his body and say that he was raised from the dead.

Now, if you were a Jew living in Jerusalem and heard that his body was no longer in the tomb and then heard the rumor that his disciples had stolen it, you might believe it. Why would your religious leaders lie to you if someone was raised from death?

➡ But if you met and spoke with someone whose funeral you had attended there would be no question that this individual had been raised. That might lead you to find out why. To the ones who needed proof that Jesus was Messiah, and that even death could not hold him, here was another powerful evidence. And that, as Messiah he would bring life to the dead. It's a message that summarizes the purpose of all these events surrounding our Lord.

One explanation that has been suggested for these saints coming out of their graves is that they may have been the apostles who were hiding in the cemetery after the arrest of Jesus but came forth upon his resurrection on that Sunday morning.

That, of course, is a possibility.

➡ But, in John 20:19 we're told this;

"Then the same day at evening, (i.e. the evening of day Jesus was resurrected) being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews..." John 20:19

If the apostles had been hiding for fear of their lives, why would they go into Jerusalem to be seen, as the Matthew account tells us?

It could not have been that the resurrection gave them new courage because at this point Mary Magdalene had just told them of the resurrection, but it's not clear that they believed it yet.

It's interesting that there's a timing issue here.



The earthquake occurred at the death of Jesus. But it was not until his resurrection that these saints arose. If this was simply the apostles hiding they would have been hiding there for two full nights and parts of three days. Although, that is a possibility, to me, it seems unreasonable.

So, I think the preponderance of evidence suggests that we should take the raising of some sincere Jews at face value and see it as another piece of evidence of our Lord's faithfulness,



a witness that he died to bring forth life.

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Now there's one last event I'd like to examine.



We're going to move over to the Garden Tomb, on the morning of Jesus' resurrection.



Now, you know that the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, usually in the same sequence and sometimes even identical wording. The word synoptic means "a general summary."



But the Gospel of John, was written later and meant to fill in information that was not included in the Synoptic Gospels. At the tomb of Jesus, John adds one small detail that is omitted by the others.

➡ After running to the disciples to tell them the tomb of Jesus was empty Mary Magdalene then returns with Peter & John who go into the tomb. The two apostles see it's empty as Mary had said, and they leave.

➡ After they leave, Mary stoops to look inside the tomb and sees two angels. John specifically tells us their position.

➡ **“But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping: so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. John 20:11, 12**

➡ Mary saw two angels sitting, one at the head and one at the foot of where Jesus had lain. This picture on the screen doesn't really give us a good perspective, but it's all I could find. So, in your mind turn it more sideways, so they are at opposite ends of the stone table.

➡ Here's a blurry image of a burial table. It's similar to the one Jesus would have laid on. So, picture in your mind the two angels sitting at either end.

Does that remind you of anything?

Brethren, I believe the Lord provided this small detail to remind us of something we have studied many times.

➡ Here, in a different setting is an image of the Ark of the Covenant.

By giving us this little detail of where the two angels were sitting John is drawing us a picture.



Unlike the angels on the Ark of the Covenant who were facing inward and looking down on the Mercy Seat, as if waiting for the atoning blood to be applied before they could fly.

➔ Now, two living angels were facing outward and speaking. Now that the antitypical sacrifice of Jesus was finished they could act and carry out the next phase of God's plan. The merit of Jesus' blood could now be used to provide justification to the Church.

➔ From the John account the only thing the angels said to Mary was "Women, why weepiest thou?" And as she turned away, she met Jesus and finally understood what was going on. He was alive.

➔ And so, in this quiet little picture inside a dark burial tomb we see the beginning fulfillment of what was pictured by blood being applied to the Mercy Seat.

➔ We often use the term God's throne of Grace. Here is a symbol of it. It's called the Mercy Seat.

➔ His grace and mercy can act once justice is satisfied.

The merit of Christ justifies us before God. His angels can now fly to our side and be used to direct our lives, mold our characters and teach us great truths.

We would have missed this subtle message had it not been for the Apostle John's testimony and, of course, for Mary's tender heart in such need for comfort.

Two angels, ambassadors of God's love and power, were released to accomplish God's purpose with the church and soon with this world. And this one woman was honored to share that lovely visual message with us.

➔ So, as we examine God's multiple messages at Calvary and at the Garden Tomb through the filter of the divine plan, we can see a depth of meaning that we could easily have missed.

- In the darkness we saw God's personal sorrow and the coming dark age for Israel and the world.
- In the tearing of the temple veil we saw the opening of a new and living way, that through our Lord's death we have gained total access to God.
- The earthquake indicated the social upheaval that was about to transpire in Israel.
- The raising of some noble Jews was a witness that Jesus' death would bring life to the world.

And finally,

- The scene in the Garden Tomb showed that Jesus' merit would satisfy justice and bring God's plan to fruition.

➔ **"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruit of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.**

**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**

**But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruit; afterward they that are Christ's at his presence." 1 Corinthians 15:20-23**

We have more to be grateful for than we can understand. But, God's wants us to try to grasp the depth of His love and the power of His plan. And so, He gives us parables and pictures and types so we can better understand the beauty of His desire to bless all His creation, a plan which He cherishes in His own heart!

May the Lord help us to more fully grasp what he is doing and how that should change us.