

The Word Of Agony

Matthew 27:45-39

Pastor John Miller

I want you to follow with me as I begin reading our text in verse 45 of Matthew 27. Matthew records it from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. Sixth hour being 12 noon, and ninth hour being three in the afternoon, so three hours of darkness. And about the ninth hour, 3 PM Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of them that stood there, when they heard that, they said, this man's calling for Elijah. And immediately they ran and they took a sponge and they filled it with vinegar and they put it on a reed and they gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, let alone let us see whether Elijah will come and save him. Of the seven words spoken by our Lord from the cross, this fourth utterance, this fourth word, is the central word in every way, not as it only is it the middle of the seven words.

It is the heart of the cross. I believe the cross is the central truth of the Bible, Old or New Testament, and that this cry from the cross is its deepest expression. The Great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, said this about this cry. He said, "Here you may look as into a vast abyss; and though you strain your eyes, and gaze till sight fails you, yet you perceive no bottom; it is measureless, unfathomable, inconceivable." This fourth utterance from the cross introduces to us to a mystery that we can never fully understand. I never preach from this passage, but what I sense, an inability, I'm overwhelmed by its depth and its mystery, not easy to preach on these great mysteries of the Bible. And I confess to you, this is one of the greatest mysteries in the Bible. Great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther was studying this passage for days meditating on it and looking over it.

He gave up food and water for days to study this passage. And it was said that when he finally came to the conclusion after studying this passage, he walked away saying, "God forsaken of God. Who can understand?" And that's the power problem we have. How could God be forsaken of God? And I don't think that we fully can understand, but what we're going to attempt to do this morning is contemplate and meditate on the mysteries that surround this word of agony. If you're taking notes, I've got three points I want to share with you this morning about this fourth utterance. First of all, we see surrounding the utterance, the mystery of darkness, the mystery of darkness. Go back with me to verse 45, and let's look at that. Matthew says, from the sixth hour I pointed out is high noon, 12 noon, there was darkness, there it is, over all the land until the ninth hour.

Now Jesus hung on the cross for six hours, from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon. Normally crucifixion took days. But as we're going to see in a few weeks, Jesus would dismiss his spirit, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." and he gave up his spirit and he died. So no man took his life from him. He laid it down voluntarily and freely. But these last three hours from noon until three in the afternoon, there was this darkness that is surrounded the land. What was this darkness? It's a mystery. Some say that it was a solar eclipse. They try to explain

it away by just a natural occurrence. One of the problems with that is that Jesus died at Passover. In Passover, there's a full moon and you don't have a solar eclipse when there's a full moon and a eclipse would've only lasted for a few minutes.

This lasted for three hours. So I'm convinced that this is a supernatural divine intervention in the normal working of nature, that from 12 noon to 3 in the afternoon, the cross was surrounded in darkness. And it mentions in verse 45 that it was over all the land. Now, that could be the land of Israel, that could be the land of the Roman Empire, but I just venture to say, this is one of the questions I'll ask the Lord when I get to heaven. I believe that darkness surrounded the whole world. I believe it was a universal darkness. I have no biblical basis for saying that other than the all creation I'm going to point out in a moment is groaning and travailing with Jesus as the creator is crucified on the cross. So why did this darkness come? Well, just my point. I believe that number one, it was a divine darkness, but it was also a darkness of sympathy.

Write that down, a darkness of sympathy. You say, well, what do you mean by that? Well, Romans 8 tells us that all of creation is groaning, catch that, and travailing. Waiting for what the Bible says is the manifestation of the sons of God. Now, the manifestation of the sons of God happens at the second coming when Jesus Christ comes back in power and glory and every eye will see him. Guess who comes back with Jesus Christ. Are you ready for this? You and I, the church. Amen. We will be coming back with him. And all those that rejected him and didn't believe in him, they're going to go, wow. They're going to go, Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow.

I know this may seem like a pipe dream or some kind of a crazy idea, but I believe the Bible. Do you believe the Bible? I believe the Bible. And I believe it's trustworthy. And even as the Bible prophesied his first coming, by the way, over 300 prophecies fulfilled in his first coming. Mathematical probability of any one man fulfilling those prophecies, one in a goodal. Pretty good statistics. Christ fulfilled the prophecy. Even so the Bible predicts he comes back a second time, not as a lamb to be crucified, but as a lion of the tribe of Judah to reign in righteousness. Amen? What a glorious coming that will be. And as we come with him, it will be manifest who the children of God are. We will be glorified coming with him, and for 1000 years we will reign with Christ on the earth. It's the theocratic, millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

And there will be peace on earth. That which man has longed for, that which man has desired to have will not come until the prince of peace Jesus Christ comes back, and he will put an end to war. Isaiah the prophet said they'll beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and righteousness will cover the earth as waters cover the sea. And so it will be manifest. But until that day, what is happening? The whole creation is under the curse and it is groaning and it is travailing and it's waiting for that day to come. But as Jesus died on the cross, I believe creation was groaning. It was sympathizing with the creator as he died upon the cross. And I believe that the creation is groaning and travailing because of Adam's sin. Interesting that one of the results of Adam's sin was thorns, right?

If you ever prick your finger on a Rose Bush, say, "Thank you Adam. I appreciate that." Imagine

a beautiful rose with no thorns on it. What an awesome thought. But how fitting that they took a crown of what, thorns? And shoved it over his brow reminding us that he took the curse, he took our curse and became a curse for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The creator was suffering on the cross and all creation was suffering with him. We sing "Well might the sun in darkness hide. And shut His glories in. When Christ, the mighty Maker, died. For man, the creature's, sin." So I believe the creation was groaning in darkness. Second thing about the darkness was that it was a darkness of silence. It was the darkness of silence. Do you know that from 12 noon till 3 PM. From the sixth hour, which is Jewish time of reckoning, till the ninth hour there was silence.

No audible voice from God, the father from heaven, no cries from cross, Christ from the cross. He'd already uttered his word. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He had already said to the thief on the cross, "today you will be with Me in Paradise." He said to his mother, "Behold thy son and son, behold thy mother." And then for the next three hours, darkness comes over the land and silence. It was the darkness of silence. What is happening here? I believe that during that time of silence, that God was shrouding Jesus Christ from the view of man, I believe the birth of the son of God. There was brightness at midnight, which is interesting. At his death there was darkness at noon. So it was silent. But then thirdly, it was the darkness of secrecy. The darkness veiled the anguish of the Son of God while he was bearing the punishment for our sins, shutting him off from the eyes of sinful man. Someone said the darkness cried out against the blackness of our sin and testified to the tremendous cost to God of our redemption.

So it was a darkness of secrecy. This going on here as our sin was being placed upon the Son of God on the cross, it was though as God the Father veiled what was going on so that sinful man could not look upon him. Elizabeth Kipling wrote, "None of the ransomed ever knew. How deep were the waters crossed; Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through. Ere He found his sheep that was lost." How amazing. How mysterious that the light of the world would be shrouded in darkness so that we who live in darkness could be brought into his marvelous light. When a transaction was taking place here as Jesus hung upon the cross, and it was at this moment, this time of darkness toward the end of the three hours of darkness, verse 46, that he cries, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

This is the cry of agony. Now, the second point I want to make is the mystery of his being forsaken. So there's first the mystery of the darkness, and then there's secondly this mystery of my God, why have you forsaken me? This is the heart of this cry. This is the only utterance from the cross recorded by Matthew and by Mark. Matthew and Mark chose to skip over all the other utterance, but this one utterance, they recorded why? Because it is the essence of his death. And his death is central to Bible revelation, all the Old Testament and New Testament point and culminate in the cross of Jesus Christ. I believe all history culminates in the cross of Jesus Christ.

And here we have the heart of that cross. Why did God forsake his son as he hung and cried upon the cross? This is not the cry of anger. Jesus isn't angry with God the Father. Why did you

forsake me? This is not the cry of unbelief. He kept his faith even during this time. Notice he said, My God, My God, he still believed in God the Father. He never lost his faith. So what are we to make of this cry of agony on the cross? "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Well, I would say first of all that it was a cry of separation. A cry of separation. Did the Father actually separate and forsake his son? Now this is the great, great mystery. Did for a moment. The word forsaken, by the way in the Greek is in what's called the aorist tense.

That means it happened for a time, at a point in time in history, and then it had effect for eternity afterwards. So it happened in a point in time, not you've forsaken me permanently, but at a point in time, why have you forsaken me, that has an eternal result. But here's the big question. And I've had people argue with me and debate with me and go round and round with me and they want to talk about did the father actually forsake the son? And how can you divide the triune God? How can you divide the persons of the Trinity? And how can God be divided? And here's the answer, I don't know.

You go "well, you're getting paid to preach, you ought to know." It's a mystery. And I'm okay with that, because God is infinite and I'm finite. That means I have a pea brain and God knows everything. Oh, but we got to figure this out. We got to know what's going on. We got to figure it out. Let me just say this. I do believe that for a time Jesus Christ was actually forsaken by God the Father. The Bible says he tasted death for every man. For him to become a curse for us, for him to take our sin would make it necessary that there be a time of separation. He had to taste death for every man, not only physical death but the worst of death. And that's spiritual death, which is separation. Death means separation. Physical death is your soul and spirit separating from your body. Spiritual death is when your soul and spirit are separated from God.

And if you die without faith in Jesus Christ, you will be spiritually separated from God for all eternity. This is why he cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Why? Because he became sin for us. He who knew no sin became sin. And I believe to put it in the simplest terms, God the Father had to turn his back on God the son. I'll break that down a little bit more as we go along. C.H. Spurgeon said, "There could have been no vicarious suffering on the part of Christ for human guilt if He had continued, consciously, to enjoy the full sunshine of the Father's presence." So God as the righteous judge had to be separated from Him, that is Christ. For he was bearing the sins of the world and the wages of sin is death. The God man, Jesus who'd endured the divine judgment for sin that we deserved.

Now, you need to remember, and this is what makes it so mysterious and hard to comprehend, is that Jesus had two natures, fully God and fully man. One person, not two people, not one God and one man, kind of combined together. But one person, two natures a divine nature and a human nature. And he took on humanity through the womb of the Virgin Mary. That's why it's consistent. The Bible teaches that Jesus was born of a virgin. She miraculously conceived without the agency of a man, and he was born of a virgin. No one before, no one after. No one will ever have that experience. I don't care what kind of movies Hollywood produces. He is the God man. And he was dying as a man on the cross for man the creature's sin. And at that moment, the Father forsook him. It's hard to comprehend. Think of how painful this must have

been to experience this separation. He took the darkness of sin and separation from God as the sinless man. Jesus had known communion with the Father for all eternity.

He had known communion with his father for all eternity. He is the eternal second person of the Godhead. And now for a moment, aside from the shame, and the pain, and the spitting, and the physical crucifixion, the nails in his hands and feet, this is what breaks my heart more than anything else, to think that Jesus had to endure separation from his father, so that I would never have to be separated, so that I would never have to be lost. It's hard for me to comprehend. It's hard for me to fathom. This is what he recoiled from when in the garden of Gethsemane, why did he sweat great drops of blood? Why was he in agony in the garden? Why did he pray, "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me." He wasn't afraid to be crucified. He wasn't afraid to be mocked or to be spit upon.

He wasn't afraid to have the nails driven through his hands and feet and the thorn on his brow. He was recoiling in Gethsemane from drinking the cup of the wrath of God. What was in that cup? "Let this cup pass for me." What was in that cup? God's wrath, for man's sin and he had to drink it. This is what Jesus is recoiling from. And to enter into this utterance, it is just a chasm that we could never see and fully understand. Any wonder that Martin Luther said, God forsaken of God, how can this be? Who can understand? We can't. And it's foolish for us to try to explain it away rather than just accept what the Bible teaches and to worship this awesome God. He took the cup and drank it to the bottom, but it was also a cry of substitution. "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In Isaiah 53, it says He was wounded for our, underline the word 'our', transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquity and by His stripes, we are what? We are healed. So Jesus Christ took our sin. He became the substitute. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Jehovah lifted up His rod. O Christ, it fell on Thee! Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God; There's not one stroke for me." So he took your penalty, he took your punishment, which was separation from God and he became a substitution for you and I. remember when Abraham, in Genesis 22, laid Isaac on the altar, lifted the knife and God stopped him. And God said, over in the bushes, check it out, there's a ram caught by the horns, and he loosed the ram and he brought it over and catch this. He took Isaac off the altar and he put the ram in his place, substitution.

But when God, the Father placed his son on the cross, there was no substitution. He took you off the cross. He took me off the cross. He took us off the cross and he put his own son on the cross. I can't fathom that. We were enemies rebelling from him and he was willing to take his own son because it was the only way that man could be redeemed or man could be saved. But thirdly, it was a cry of scripture. It was a cry of scripture. Psalm 22 verse 1, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Did you know that Jesus was quoting scripture on the cross when he said these words? When Jesus uttered this word of agony, he was quoting Psalm 22:1. I believe the entire Psalm is messianic and prophetic.

Years before crucifixion was ever instituted as a means of capital punishment, it graphically

describes crucifixion, the thirst, the bones broken, they look at me, they stare, they shoot out the lip. All of the cross is described in Psalm 22 by King David. So Jesus was actually quoting scripture and in Psalm 22:3, the answer is given as to why God, the Father forsook him. "For thou art holy." We think of the love of God and we wonder how could God forsake him? But we also also remember that God is holy God, God is a righteous judge and God is holy. Let us not forget that God is righteous and holy, and sin will be and must be judged. No sin is going to escape the judgment of God. And so Jesus was quoting the Psalms in Matthew 27 verse 46. As I said, forsaken there means only for a moment, but what a moment that was.

Now if you are a Christian, God will never, ever, ever forsake you. Isn't that wonderful? In Romans chapter eight, verse 1. Every Christian ought to memorize Romans 8:1. There is now therefore what? No condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Period. That's where that verse stops. "There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." How do you get in Christ Jesus by repenting of your sins and believing on him as your Savior and receiving him as your Savior and Lord, and you are in Christ Jesus. You're born again, you're placed in Christ. Every Christian is in Christ, and Christ is in every Christian. So how does Romans 8 open? No condemnation. I can never be separated from my God, but it ends with these words. Romans 8, verse 38 and 39, "For I'm persuaded, Paul says, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from what the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."

There's that phrase again. So no condemnation, no separation. Why? Because Jesus was separated for me on the cross. But here's my third main point. Not only was there the mystery of the darkness, the mystery of the forsaking, but thirdly, there's the mystery of the blindness. The mystery of the blindness. You say, well, what do you mean by that? Look at verse 47 to 49. Some of them that stood there when they heard that said, he's calling for Elijah. Maybe they heard Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, by the way, which is Aramaic and the Jews, common Jews in those days spoke Aramaic. Matthew actually puts it in Aramaic for us, and then he translates it for us. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" And when they heard Eli, Eli, they thought, wow, he's calling for Elijah. How blind could they be? So immediately verse 48:1 ran and took a sponge and he filled it with vinegar.

This was kind of a sour wine, not to deaden the pain, but just to quench his thirst. And they put it on a reed and they gave it to him to drink, and the rest in the crowd said, let it be. Let's see whether Elijah will come and save Him. This was the mystery of blindness. To me, amazing that people are still standing around the cross when it's dark out at noon. If it was dark at noon, "I'd go, I'm going to go home and put some lights on and shut the door and freak out." Duh.

Now, we may not get into it for a couple of weeks, but at the same time, at the end of those three hours of darkness, the earth shook and the rocks broke up and the graves of some of the saints in Jerusalem popped open. Wow, I'm really going to go home and lock my doors. And the dead dudes that were in the tombs, they popped out and they walked around and said hi to people in Jerusalem. That's a free paraphrase of that verse. It's like, ah. Is it any wonder that

the centurion who is in charge of the crucifixion said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" Wow, that was powerful stuff. But right now we're just looking at the darkness. That's enough to freak anybody out. And the craziness is they were so blind, they stood there in the darkness, da da da, da da dee. They couldn't even hardly see Jesus on the cross, but they yelled at him and they mocked him in the darkness. Oh, the folly.

One thing they could is still hear, they couldn't see, but they could hear, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" They could hear those words. If they were not so blind, they could have realized. That's Psalm 22 verse 1. He's quoting the Psalm. That's a Messianic Psalm. That's a Psalm describing our Messiah, could he be the Messiah? That is true. In Malachi chapter four, the last book of the Old Testament, that the Bible prophesied that Elijah will come before the great and notable day of the Lord before Jesus Christ returns. But I believe that's the second coming. And that during the tribulation period, sometime Elijah will show up maybe in Menafee, I don't know. And every good Jewish family at Passover, they have that little empty seat at the chair, that empty chair because they're waiting for Elijah. I thought it'd be cool to dress up like Elijah sometime and freak out some family.

Maybe they thought Elijah was going to come. Maybe Elijah will come and deliver them. But I would say just like this, they were blind to the scriptures, they were blind to the Savior, and they were blind to their sin. No blindness so great as the blinded by sin. The Bible says that today the God of this world has blinded their minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto them, and they would believe. Oh, blessed day that the Holy Spirit shined in my heart and showed me that I needed Jesus as my Savior. Oh, blessed day when I became painfully humbly, aware that I am a sinner, I need a Savior, and Jesus died on the cross for me. If you're filled with arrogancy and pride and think that you haven't sinned, you don't need a Savior, then you're to be pitied. You're to be prayed for. Blessed day when God opens your eyes to your need of Jesus as a Savior.

Do you see yourself as a sinner? Do you see your need of a Savior? Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Let me close with three lessons before we enter into our communion service. Number one, our sin is extremely horrible. What do I learn by this fourth word? "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I learned how horrible our sin is. And if you want to know how deep a well is, you just drop the rope with a bucket on it, right? Depending on how far down the bucket has to go to reach the water, that determines how deep the well is. How great is God's love? It's so great that Jesus had to come from heaven all the way down to earth, and then he had to go even further down. He had to die on a cross for our sins, suffer and die.

How great is our sin? It's great. It's so great that it took God the Son coming all the way from heaven coming all the way to earth to die for us. Second lesson we learned from this fourth word is God's love is wonderful beyond comprehension, God's love is wonderful beyond comprehension. Isaac Watts wrote, "See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown." God's love is wonderful beyond comprehension. 1 John 4:10 says, for "This is real love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a sacrifice for our sins." "Oh, the

love of God that drew salvation's plan. Oh, the love of God that brought it down to man. Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!"

How can you look at the cross? How can you look at Jesus suffering and dying on the cross and not be overwhelmed? Not only with the depth of your sin, but overwhelmed with the wonder and the glory of God's love. The love of God demonstrated for you and I, on the cross of Jesus Christ. And thirdly, salvation is a free gift. Salvation is a free gift. Ephesians chapter two, verse 8 and 9, by grace, you have been saved and that not of yourself, right? Salvation is a gift of God, not of works. You can't work your way to heaven, lest anyone should boast. Salvation is a free gift. And if you haven't received that free gift this morning, I want to offer it to you.

A gift must be received and I want to offer you that gift. For God so loved the world. He gave his only-begotten son that whoever believes in him will never perish but have everlasting life. God wants to give you everlasting life. It doesn't mean you're just good to go to heaven when you die. It means right now, right here, you will have abundant life, you'll have spiritual life, you'll have the life of God in your soul. You go, what do I need to do to receive that? Number one, you need to admit you're a sinner. You need to believe what God says in the Bible. All have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God. No one's righteous. No, not one. You need to believe that Jesus died for your sins on the cross and that he was buried and three days later, he rose again from the dead and he lives to save you. And you must trust him. Trust him, believe on Him and receive Him are all synonyms for the same thing. They all mean the same thing.

They mean that you come to Jesus Christ and you say, "I can't save myself. I'm a sinner. Save me, Lord. Come into my heart. Forgive my sins. I believe in you. I receive you." So you turn from your sin to the Savior and you trust Christ to forgive you today. And you shouldn't really take communion until you've made that commitment, that step because eating a little piece of bread and drinking a little cup of juice is not going to save you. Communion saves no one. It's a symbol of what Jesus did on the cross. The bread is his body. The cup is his blood. Broken and bled for you, but you have to appropriate that by faith. You have to say, "Jesus, I'm sorry for my sins. Come into my heart and be my Savior." And if you haven't done that, I'm going to ask everyone to bow their heads in a word of prayer right now. I want to give you that opportunity.