

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.  
Interim President  
Executive Vice President & Provost  
Criswell College

## **The Miracles of Calvary**

### **Miracle #2 - The Miracle of Darkness**

**Matthew 27:45-50**

#### **Introduction**

The morning hours of Jesus on the cross were full to activity. According to Mark 15:25, the crucifixion began at the third hour of the day, which is 9:00 a.m. During those first three hours from 9:00 a.m. to noon crowds came by to see the spectacle. Some mocked as did the soldiers. It was during this time that Jesus prayed for His executioners, prayer for believers, and commended the care of His mother, Mary, to John the Apostle. Following this activity at high noon, darkness and silence fell across the land. The sixth to the ninth hour would be 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. There was no logical explanation of why the darkness came at what would have been the brightest part of the day. While some suggest this was simple coincidence, it defies logical explanation. It was not an eclipse of the sun, a total eclipse does not last three hours. It was not a storm as it began abruptly at 12:00 noon and ended abruptly at 3:00 p.m. When God performs a miracle it is not just a display of His power, it also is an event that is filled with meaning and purpose. So it was and is with this first miracle of Calvary.

#### **What Was This Miracle?**

Why don't we hear more about this miracle? There is really a great deal of external evidence about this miracle. Satan, the prince of darkness, does not want you to think about this event. The miracle described is the account of the three hours of darkness while Jesus was on the cross found in Matthew 27:45-50; in Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45. In addition to biblical accounts of this miracle, Pontius Pilate along with several other ancient historians provide extra-biblical confirmation of this miracle as follows:

**Pontius Pilate**, Governor of Judea sent a letter to Emperor Tiberius Caesar in Rome that reads as follows:

Now when he was crucified darkness came over all the world; the sun was altogether hidden, and the sky appeared dark while it was yet day, so that the stars were seen, though still they had their luster obscured, wherefore, I suppose your Excellency is not unaware that in all the world they lighted their lamps from the sixth hour until evening. And the moon, which was like blood, did

not shine all night long, although it was at the full, and the stars and Orion made lamentation over the Jews because of the transgression committed by them.

**Thallus** - About A.D. 52 the Samaritan historian, Thallus, wrote his *Histories*. Though no copies survive, we do have quotes of it from others. Thus Julius Africanus, writing about A.D. 220, refers to the *Histories* and says:

Thallus, in the third book of his *Histories*, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun — unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died.

**Phlegon** - Philo and Origen draw from Phlegon's *Olympiads* (written A.D. 138) an account of the darkness of the crucifixion. Phlegon was a Greek astronomer. Origen's quote is the best documented and quite similar to Philo's:

That heathen author, in treating of the fourth year of the two hundred second Olympiad, which is supposed to be the year in which our Lord was crucified, tells us "That the greatest eclipse of the sun which was ever known to happened then; for the day was so turned into night that the stars in the heavens were seen."

To this account, Philo adds that "this is shown by the historical account itself of Tiberius Caesar," suggesting that a Roman account exists.

**Tertullian** - In his *Apologeticus*, written about A.D. 197, Tertullian wrote:

... at that same moment, about noontide, the day was withdrawn; and they, who knew not that this was foretold concerning Christ, thought it was an eclipse. But this you have in your archives; you can read it there. The foretelling is found in Amos 8:9 where it says: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day." There is really no suggestion in any of these accounts that the sun set at noon, but the darkness does apply. The sun going down at noon has yet a future fulfillment, as required not only by the context in which the passage is found, but also by the words of the Lord Jesus himself in Matthew 24:29 and in Mark 13:24.

**Eusebius** - Writing about the year Ad 315, in his *Chronicle*, volume II, the historian and friend of the emperor Constantine, Eusebius, writes about the eighteenth year of Tiberius Caesar that:

Christ suffered this year, in which time we find in other commentaries of the heathen these words: "There was a defection of the sun: Bithynia was shaken with an earthquake, and many houses fell down in the city of Nicea."

This collection of objective historical information leaves no doubt about the event that occurred at the very moment of the death of Jesus. Therefore we will turn to the meaning and significance of the even in light of Scripture. This miracle served at least three important purposes.

**I. A Confirmation of the Character and Ministry of Jesus.**

1. God sent his Son as the "Light of the World," see Isaiah 9:2. Here, as in John 1:45, darkness was trying to overthrow the light, but it could not erase the magnitude of what Christ did on the cross in paying the debt for our sins. Philipp Bliss said it best in the great hymn, "The Light of the World is Jesus."
2. This darkness was the picture book version of the fact that human beings love darkness rather than light, as John 3:19 declares. In Scripture this concept is called the depravity of human nature. The human will, left to its own devices will fall prey to the influence and power of the adversary, Jer 17:9. This is not a cynical view of human nature, but a realistic one. It does not mean that every person left to their own initiative will become an ax murderer. Even good people who leave God of their lives are under the influence of the adversary, see the Rich Young Ruler, Mark 10:17-22. Jesus came to deliver us from darkness and call us to live in the light, John 8:12; 12:35-36.
3. On the cross of Calvary human adversaries acting as agents of the arch Adversary, were trying to exterminate the light of God. The darkness that came for noon to 3 p.m. did not remain. After three hours light returned just as Jesus commended His Spirit to God and cried, "It is finished," meaning He had completed His mission of redemption, John 1:4-5; Eph 1:7. God was saying again ". . . this is my Beloved Son - He is the light that you are trying to extinguish, which the darkness could not overthrow."

**II. A Commentary on the Depth of Jesus' Suffering.**

1. The darkness was a commentary on the consequences of sin. On the cross it was your sin and mine that Jesus bore. Jesus paid the wages for our sins so clearly described in Romans 3:23 and 6:23. If you ever have the notion that your sin is not a real problem, look at Calvary! Look at Jesus on that cross! It is your sins that he bore! It was for YOU that he died!

Jesus was scorned, scourged (with a *flagrum*, or leather straps with lead, and sheep bones to tear the flesh) tormented, a crown of thorns placed on His head, then his hands and feet nailed to the cross. Many were upset by the depiction by Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, but it accurately portrayed the magnitude of Jesus' suffering --- all of it for our sins. The darkness veiled His beaten, torn, and bloodied body so no one could further torment or mock his pitiable condition, see and carefully, reverently read Isaiah 53:1-12. This is the love of God, for a lost humanity, that while we were sinners Christ died for us, Rom 5:8.

2. From the darkness Jesus uttered one of His seven last words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? This is a hard saying. Martin Luther spent a long time contemplating and meditating on this cry from the lips of the Savior. Luther stated, "God forsaken by God, who can comprehend that!" Out of the darkness came this cry of hopelessness, and lostness; it is the cry of a sinner who dies without God and without hope, see Lk 16:19-31. This is the second death described in Revelation 20:14-15. Death and the grave will be cast into the lake of fire that gives off no light, along with all those not found in the Book of Life. This is the death of the spirit of those who are judged they will be totally isolated forever from contact with God and his spiritual kingdom. Part of its pain is its eternal, total darkness and total isolation from God forever.
3. The darkness was a picture of the suffering and darkness that sin has brought upon the world and a preview of the destination of all those who choose to leave God out of their lives. It is the final destination of those who live under judgment in the darkness of sin, condemned and without hope, Matt 8:11-12. 9check the number of time darkness is used to warn of this coming judgment. Darkness of Egypt was so intense that it could be felt Ex 10:21. In the fifth bowl judgment of Revelation 16:10-11 the darkness that will fall on the kingdom of the beast will be so intense and filled with pain that people gnawed their tongues because of the pain.

### **III. A Cancellation of the Power of Sin**

1. Miraculous darkness appears three other times in Scripture. The first miraculous darkness was at the dawn of creation described in Genesis 1:2-3. Darkness enveloped the creation. There was no sunrise, no beauty, no color, no clarity - only darkness. Then God said, "Let there be light, and there was light," Gen 1:3. John in his Gospel picks up on this contrast to describe the struggle between the forces of evil (darkness) and the forces of goodness and godliness (light). In

John 1:1-5 we read that the darkness could not overcome the light. This passage is the first exercise in translation for students just beginning to learn the Greek language. Bill Gaither's soliloquy on the "song" or "music". In Exodus 10:21-23; Revelation 16:10-11, the plague of darkness demonstrated what the world would be like without the light of God.

2. 1 John 1:5-7 God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all. Jesus' death on the cross was all about delivering us from the darkness of sin and death to the light of redemption and life. At Calvary God delivered us from the bondage of sin. 1 Peter 2:24 says Jesus bore our sins that we who are dead in trespasses and sins might be healed by His stripes. It is an amazing act of grace that God would take His son, our Lord Jesus, who was sinless, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," 2 Cor 5:21.
3. Only in John's Gospel do we have the report that at the end of the three hours of darkness Jesus declared, "It is finished," John 19:30. The word translated "finished" is the Greek *tetelestai*, which means "it is completed," or "it is perfected." This word comes from a noun, *telios*, which means "complete," "perfect," and describes something that has reached maturity having attained the end or purpose for its creation. Redemption was brought to its perfection.

All of the sacrifices were complete in Him. All of the redemptive works that Jesus came to perform were complete in Him. All the offerings of the Old Testament were complete in Him. All of the feast days were complete in Him. All of the Old Testament types were complete in Him. All of the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament were complete in Him. All of the demonstrations of God's love for humankind were complete in Him. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "All the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us," 2 Cor 1:20.

**Hymn:** The Light of the world is Jesus!

### **Lessons**

1. While darkness is the symbol of evil and Satan is known as the Ruler of the Power of Darkness, Eph 6:12; Col 1:13, this passage shows us the God overrules the powers of darkness.
2. Jesus faced the darkness of sin and rescued us from the power of darkness, 1 Pet 2:9.

3. Jesus is the antithesis of darkness. He is light and there is no darkness in Him at all, 1 Jn 1:5.
4. Jesus entered the darkness for us on the cross that we might receive from Him the light of salvation, 1 Jn 1:5-9.
5. The darkness that enshrouded the cross prevented Jesus' tormenters from further shameful deeds and comments, 2 Cor 4:1-6.
6. The rulers of the darkness will be cast out of God's presence forever, Matt 8:10-13.
7. When Jesus overthrows the kingdom of darkness in a person's life, nothing can ever separate them from the love of God, Rom 8:35-39.
8. At the last Satan and all his demons will be cast into the lake of fire consigned to everlasting punishment, Jude 12-15.