

Miracle of Darkness

“ And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” Luke 23:44-45

This is the first of the six miracles of Calvary, the chain of events that all took place at the death of Jesus Christ. The second miracle was the rending of the veil of the Temple; the third, the earthquake and rending of the rocks; the fourth, the opening of the graves; the fifth, the condition of things existing inside the grave of the risen Christ; and the sixth, the coming out of their graves after Christ's resurrection, many bodies of the saints who had died previously.

These were the Calvary miracles -- all in direct connection to the death of Jesus Christ. Some of them were from the heavens, some from the earth and some from the underworld. Yet, all constituted a class of wonders in themselves. Each great sign in its own meaning and force, assembled in its place to give testimony of what was taking place here at Calvary.

1. The Scene Described

“It was about the sixth hour” (that is, noon) *“and there was darkness.”* Jesus had been hanging on the cross for three hours when this miraculous darkness came. The *darkness* was *“over all the earth.”* – or, as Matthew states, *“over all the land”* – lasting three hours. We can't say that the darkness extended over the whole of the daylight half of the globe, or not. But, if the phenomenon was only limited to Judea, it was sufficiently remarkable. It would mean a concentration of force, like that of the three days' darkness in Egypt, while there was light in Goshen (Exodus 21:22-23). Whatever – Scripture says, *“the darkness did extend over all the land.”*

However, it was not like darkness that often precedes an earthquake, for this darkness extended far beyond Calvary. Neither was it an eclipse. It was a darkness that *continued for three hours, over all the land!* Thus, it could not have been the result of an eclipse of the sun, for the longest eclipse can last by a few minutes. Besides, it occurred during the festival of Passover that is observed at the time of full moon, when an eclipse of the sun is impossible.

Yet, *“the sun was darkened”* – eclipsed in some strange miraculous manner. There was simply a failure of the sun's light. The darkness was not caused by the absence of the sun – that brings on night. But rather, it was a darkness at *noontime*, a darkness in very the presence of the sun. The sun was un-eclipsed by the intervention of another celestial body. It was a darkness that was the opponent of light, yet overpowered the sun. In the ordinary course of nature, darkness brings the cancellation of light. Light that is the rival of darkness, and always banishes it. However, the darkness of Calvary smothered the sun at high noon! How impressive is that? What a trembling notion of the Almightyness of God!

Did the darkness cover the land by a slow and gradual process? Scripture says that it was dark at the beginning of the three hours, as it was darkness at the close. All at once from out of the heavens, darkness closed down upon the scene. Scripture

indicates that the darkness departed suddenly, so it must have come suddenly. At the same time, it seems from the symbolism of the darkness as connected with the sufferings of the Cross, the blackness of it grew as the hours wore on. Why do we say this? Note the cry of Christ at about the close of these three hours. It appears that His endurance of silence could be no longer maintained, as His sufferings grew more and more intense.

How deep as the darkness? We are not expressly told, and yet, there is that in the narrative to show that it was not twilight. It was a frightful darkness.

A busy Three hours previous

Up until the instant of this darkness occurring, what a busy three hours had passed on Golgotha! The Crucified Himself was busy. We cannot help but note the interest He shows on what was taking place around Him. He audibly intercedes for His crucifiers, listened to the cry for mercy of the dying thief and answered him in that sublime assurance of salvation; recognized the presence of His mother and the beloved disciple and executing His last will and testament concerning her and him. The soldiers were busy watching and mocking Him, dividing His garments among them and casting lots for the seamless coat. The chief priests were busy criticizing Pilate's inscription on the cross and venting their indignation. The scoffers were busy – priests, rulers, and multitude passing by, wagging their heads, railing and reviling. All the currents of iniquity surged on unchecked around the cross.

Then Solemn Silence

At the instant of noon what? There was sudden, somber silence. The narrative speaks one word – “*darkness*,” and then it is silent. The time from twelve o'clock till three is a blank in Scripture, we are made to feel how hushed the scene was.

At the end of three hours, when the sun is again shining, all is action once more. Jesus speaks and the multitude moves about again. But during those three hours we see only darkness; we hear only silence. Jesus, Himself, is silent, as if underneath that darkness some huge horror hangs over His own soul. All else is silent. It seems that no taunt or insult was flung at Him during this time. The crowds appear transfixed with amazement. Is blood heard dropping? The suspense must have been frightful. As all hearts ponder the darkness and tremble at this mysterious fearfulness of the crucifixion.

The Gospels do not record all of this, they scarcely say anything – but so illustrative is their suggestiveness that they create this whole scene. The little that they say is placed like a parenthesis between the activities proceeding and subsequently following – is that one word, “*darkness*.” Darkness cast its shadow of silence during the whole three hours, until we begin to feel how terribly dreadful this dismal gloom was. And to this implication of scene the Gospels give both fixedness and fullness, by the remark that they close the account of the crucifixion and its wonders. They tell us that the Roman centurions, having witnessed the things that were done, “*feared greatly*” (Matthew 27:54). And many people “*smote their breasts*” (Luke 23:48). I would to God that we could imagine we could behold its impressiveness as if we were there ourselves, and feel how sinister and mysterious that darkness was.

How Can We Explain this Mystery?

A miracle is a visible suspension of the order of nature. So, that darkness was God, interfering with the regular course of His own established natural causes, stepped forth from the universe, displaying to man's view that He was the First Cause of creation – distinct from the universe – a living, interposing, personal God, standing with *“with all the power and control of darkness.”*

All the while, around Calvary there continued in all regards, the whole mighty machinery of natural causes. In spite of every law within creation at work, still it became the scene of this dreadful darkness. Creation had no cause within itself that was able to produce this darkness. It was not some shock of disturbance to make creation tremble. The Almighty Author of creation Himself put forth His hand and touched His own instrument, striking it in unison with His immediate purpose. Yet, no string of all the vast arrangement was snapped or strained and not a note in all the scale was left discordant.

God meant to bring Himself in contact with man's sensibilities by standing out apart from the whole framework of nature, yet, all the while His power was upholding.

As we consider how exclusively the darkness attached itself was coupled with the death of Christ, we have decisive proof of design on the part of God in displaying Himself to view. Jesus, the Son of God, was dying. God was appearing. There stood the cross, and there came the darkness. It was God's providential purpose to authenticate and to interpret the death of His Son.

What Does This Darkness Teach?

First, the darkness places God sealed the truth of Christ's character and mission. When Jesus said that He came to save those who would believe, disbelievers mocked Him. When Jesus said, *“I am the Son of God,”* they took up stones to stone Him. They cried, *“Show us a sign from heaven and we will believe.”* Now the precise formula of their willful rejection of Him came back upon them in tremendous demonstration of the truth that He, indeed, was the Son of God. The heavens did give forth a sign, and the whole universe bent in reverential bowed to the crucified sufferer on Calvary. The darkness even caused the Roman soldier to exclaim, *“Truly this was the Son of God.”*

Second, the darkness certainly magnified the death of Jesus Christ. God determined that His Son's death, though necessary for the redemption of mankind, would be supernaturally manifested and overwhelmingly impressive.

Jesus claimed on the night before He was crucified – and repeatedly before – His death was for the redemption of sinners from their sins. Our pardon, our peace, and our eternal life is secured only through His shed blood. There was never been, nor will there ever be anything with the importance as this. What can we compare with this experience? Take the whole universe, all the ages of all time, and all earthly interests -- put it all together and the comparison is as mere dust in the balance!

Third, Jesus claimed that by His death, He was being made answerable for all man's iniquities and as bearing man's grief and carrying his sorrows. He had said, *“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened – [hampered] – till it be accomplished”* (Luke 12:50). It was the prime purpose and inspiration of His life. And, although there was in it *“joy set before Him”* (Hebrews 12:2), and through He *“looked*

forward to being satisfied at seeing the travail of His soul," yet it was also His consuming zeal. It was a obliterating "the beauty of His countenance, a plowing into His face the lines of disfigurement," and the making of Him "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53)

Did Jesus overestimate the accomplishments of His death? Was His passionate concern in His death a over-enthusiastic self-deception? God give His answer from behind the veil of natural causes. He came upon Calvary with stupendous effect, His "sign-manual" was that miraculous darkness, declaring, "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!"

Fourth, the darkness of Calvary, symbolizing the inconceivable sufferings of Christ, indicated an even heavier agony bearing down upon Him. God's miraculous testimony bears out the fact of the redemption of all mankind in the death of Jesus Christ. That testimony took to form of darkness, because of the sufferings of that death being inflicted by God, the Father, Himself. It was God, the Father, Who laid upon Jesus the iniquities of us all, and it was He Who dropped out of the heavens that thick funeral pall about the cross of Christ. Isaiah 53: 4 says, "He was smitten of God" and the darkness attested to this. The Father's own Sin wounded, bruised, chastised, beaten with stripes, by His own Father allows it to take place. It was not merely the suffering of crucifixion; it was anguish of being separated from His Father, as He bore the sins of the world. The agony of Gethsemane as He "took the cup of man's iniquities" from His Father's hand imparted even greater and heavier agony than physical suffering.

As the hours of darkness were coming to a close, Jesus' ever-deepening agony in enduring the Father's wrath against man's sin had become no longer was He able to endure in silence, in a startling voice, and with an amazement of suffering that became uncontainable, He looked up into the darkened heavens above and cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

Oh, yes, God was here in the darkness, but for the time being, as far as the comfort of His communion -- He had forsaken His Son! That abandonment -- was a part of Christ's punishment as "the sin-bearer!" The darkness, so deep and so dread, was an image and a symbol of the separation. Christ was bearing our sins in His own body (1 Peter 2:24) was not make-believe, but rather a stern and experienced reality!

Darkness wrapped around Him. Just at His most excruciating sufferings the darkness enveloped Him from all spectators. The impenetrable secrecy of those last hours, gives our imagination the most appreciative idea of what is yet unimaginable. Throughout the previous hours, in whatever suffering He expressed, He was exposed to view. However, it was not for human eye to see Him in His unmatched agony. No man's sensibility could understand or do justice to that. If His life of suffering as the sin-bearer stamped itself on His very face, as Isaiah prophesies in his 53rd chapter; and caused Him to be recognized as having no beauty that men should desire Him, then those last hours in which His sufferings culminated, must have stamped themselves on His person in impressions proportionate to their unheard of brutality. Gethsemane, and the first hours of His suffering, is described to us in God's Word, but not these last hours of Calvary. At Calvary God drew the drapery of darkness around Him to hide Him from human gaze.

Oh, the mysteries of those last hours of Christ's sufferings! No eye would see them. Only now at the last would be heard the cry of unfathomable woe and uttermost desolation. In that cry, "*Why have You forsake Me*" -- was attached an assurance of victory, and a shout of confidence, "*My God, My God!*"

All the unimaginable sufferings of our Redeemer were symbolized by the darkness. However, while the darkness was the symbol of the Father's wrath, it was also a proof of the Son's righteousness. No one except a person of spotless righteousness, having no sins of his own, for which to answer, could be made responsible for the sins of all humanity. If He was the stricken of God, so also He was the beloved of God. To suffer for man's sin He was indeed appointed. But by that very appointment, as deep as were His sufferings, so deep was the Father's delight in His person and character.

All this reveals also the unspeakable evil and curse of man's sin, since only by such condemnation could Infinite Love save mankind. At the same time it shows that God's love is much stronger to save us, than our sin is to destroy us.

Great indeed is the joy and the glory of Christ's work -- but great to Him was the pain of it. At His birth, the night became light; but at His death,, the light became night.

Redemption Wrought

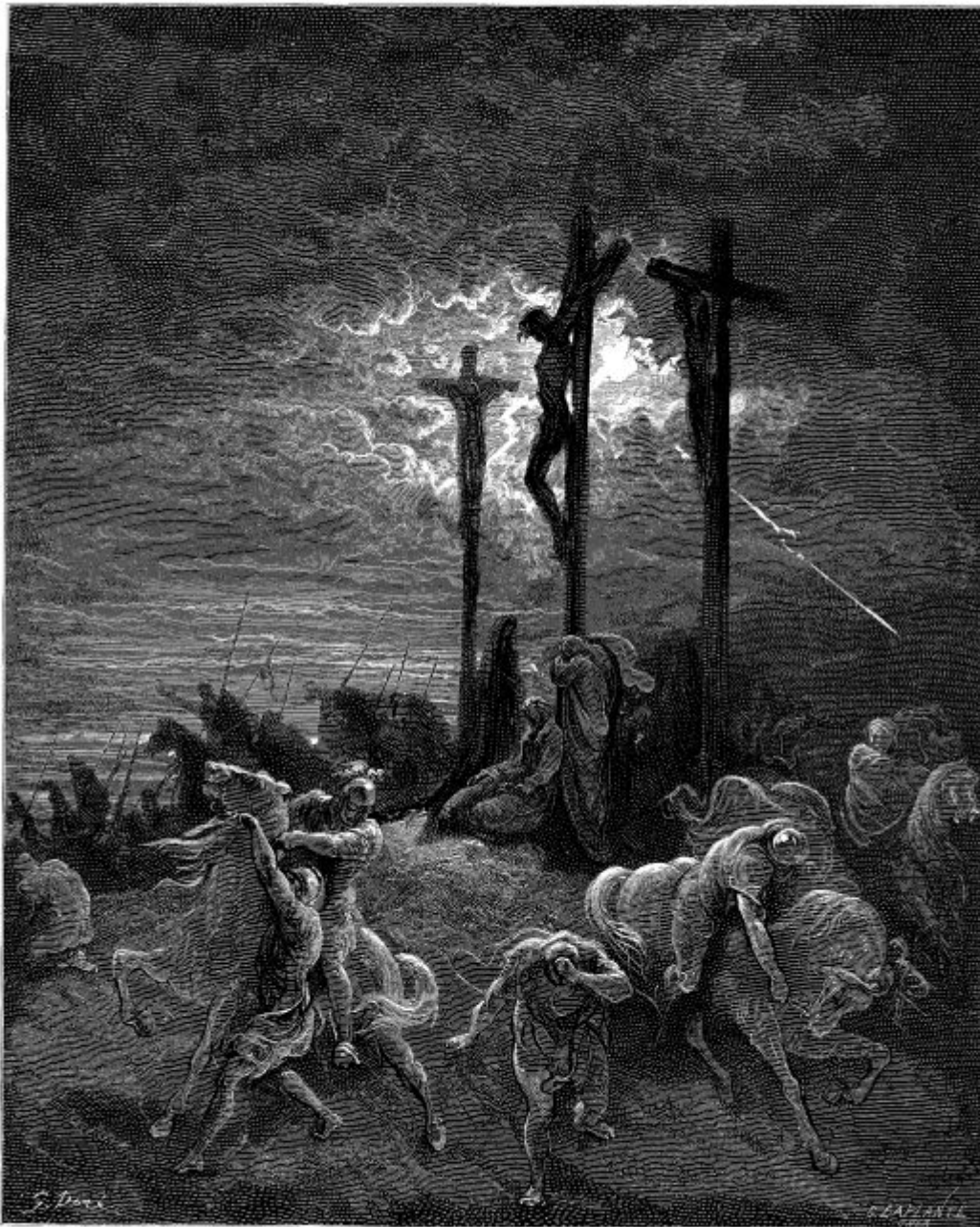
When the darkness was gone, because of His having passed through it, He was able to say, "*It is finished!*" Redemption is done! Then after once again crying aloud in trumpet notes of a conqueror with a voice that rent the rocks and opened the graves in prophecy of His own resurrection, He said, "*Father, into You hands I commend My spirit.*" As a Son's trust and satisfaction He, "*yielded up His spirit*" and gave Himself to His Father's arms.

Finally, the Calvary darkness imaged forth the doom of those who were no crucifying Christ. It was the Father who smote His Son -- Who was destined to die even if these had not crucified Him. It was prophesied God would smite Him for mankind's redemption -- He was the only "*righteous*" person who ever live -- still it was a wicked thing for them to do. "*They persecuted Him whom God had smitten, and gossip about the One whom God wounded*" (Psalm 69:26).

Amos gives a remarkable prophecy concerning the miseries of the Jewish people, He prophesies, "*It shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day*" (Amos 8:9). What an exact description of the scene at Calvary. That prophecy refers to a yet future time of misery for the Jews. The darkness of Calvary was a pledge and assurance of the darkness spoken of by the prophet. With this in mind, remember, as Jesus was being led to crucifixion, He said, "*The days are coming when they shall say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us;' for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done to the dry?'*" (Luke 23:30-31) That is, if they do these things to Him, the green tree, the fruitful-bearing vine, of whom His people are the branches, what shall become of them, the dry tree? What will God do to them?

The darkness of Calvary is gone, and the true light now shines. In that light, the path of the believer shines a light that shines more and more to the perfect day. Where the sun will never go down and the days of our mourning will be ended.

"The Darkness at the Crucifixion" by Gustave Doré



Doré Bible Illustrations • Free to Copy
www.creationism.org/images/

Luk 23:44-45 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.