



# SHADOWLANDS

## The Hour of Darkness The Storyline (Part 26)

Texts: Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14,  
18-19

### I

How would you describe the message of the Bible to someone who asked you to summarize it? How would you frame the big ideas, the crucial moments, the needed response?

When we began our study of the biblical Storyline many months ago, it was with a picture of that great circle of life once created by God, in which a heart of love lived and reigned at the center. Genesis chapter 1 teaches that for one brief, shining moment, human beings enjoyed a perfect communion with God and neighbor and life was **“very good”** (Gen 1:31). But, then – as you may recall -- *sin* changed everything. Seduced by the illusion that they would be better off if they were gods themselves, our ancestors chose to turn their backs on the one true God and his commandments. The multiplier effect of that choice produced a world of increasing pain, hardship, and alienation from God and neighbor.

What had once been a life in the sunshine of God's brilliance, increasingly became a life filled with the cold, dark shadows of sin and death. The rest of the Old Testament paints the story of that devolution through the lens of the history of the people of Israel – though what was happening in Israel also happened everywhere in the human race. Throughout this history, God seeks to call people back to himself through the voice of prophets, the message of calamitous judgments, and the offering of common grace. None of these efforts produce, however, a lasting change in humanity's heart.

Finally, the God of the Universe – the one who is the holy light of love Himself – returns to Earth himself. Just as He had walked long ago in the Garden of Eden, now God walks the Wilderness of Earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In stunning parables and searing proclamations, in acts of healing grace and redeeming power, Jesus declares the brilliant glory of the heavenly king and kingdom for which human beings were made. But, by now, sin has so blinded humanity that even the most religious people – the ones whose education and experience should have prepared them to receive the Christ – neither recognize nor receive Him.

And, then, in the space of a few days, the whole great story of man's profound need and God's pursuing love rushes toward a climax. In the five days following Palm Sunday, all of the shadows of the human condition reveal themselves and converge on Jesus. As Luke 22:53 puts it, it is the **“hour when darkness**



# SHADOWLANDS

## The Hour of Darkness The Storyline (Part 26)

**Texts: Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14, 18-19**

**reigns.”** And it is this tiny segment of the Storyline and its massive significance for you and me that I invite you to consider with me today. Before we do that, please join me in PRAYER... [*Prayer of Illumination*]

### II

When we join the Storyline today, it is now Tuesday, just two days before the Passover Feast when all of Israel will gather in Jerusalem to recall how God once delivered them from bondage in Egypt through the sacrifice of a spotless lamb and the death of the son of the King of Egypt. No one yet gets, however, that that ancient event simply foreshadowed the far greater sacrifice and liberation about to be accomplished.

It is here on Tuesday that the first of the great shadows that will take Jesus to the cross is becoming darkly visible. It is the Shadow of ENVY. The chief priests and teachers of the law want the allegiance of the people, but Jesus has it. They want to define who God is and what He expects of people, but Jesus has assumed this authority. Their envy has become a jealous hatred and they are now conspiring to do away with Jesus once and for all.

On Tuesday night, Jesus dines in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany, when a woman comes in and anoints him with some expensive oil. Jesus sees it as a beautiful sign of devotion to him and a preparation for his burial to come. The disciples fume indignantly, claiming that she should never have wasted such expensive material since it could have been sold to help the poor. But Jesus recognizes their response for what it is. It is the Shadow of DECEIT -- of false piety they are expressing. They have rarely ever shown much concern for the poor before. They are simply embarrassed that this woman is demonstrating a love and devotion for Jesus that is greater than theirs.

It was likely Judas who spoke most indignantly about this use of money, since the gospels report that Judas had actually taken to stealing from the disciples' common purse. Like other members of the Zealot party, Judas had seen Jesus as a gravy train. He'd believed that Jesus was going to help overthrow the Romans and usher in a new era of prosperity and power for him. But now Jesus was talking about surrendering and dying. How could that make anybody rich? So, for Judas, the Shadow of GREED completely took over. We see him going secretly to the chief priests and striking up a deal to turn Jesus over to them for thirty silver pieces.



# SHADOWLANDS

## The Hour of Darkness The Storyline (Part 26)

**Texts: Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14, 18-19**

With the die now cast, the story picks up speed. Jesus gives his disciples instructions to go to a certain place in Jerusalem and secure a room where they can celebrate the Passover meal together. There Christ gives them an absolutely luminous lesson on the humility of love by stooping to wash the crusty, toe-jammed, stinking feet of his disciples – feet that had walked in sandals for three years with Jesus. Jesus washes even the feet of Judas. He then calls them to love one another in the same way he had loved them. People will know you are my disciples, says Jesus, by how willing you are to stoop and meet one another with cleansing grace in the lowest and dirtiest places of each other's lives. Jesus tells them not to be afraid of the troubles to come – that He is the way, the truth, and the life – and has prepared a way for them to follow him. He declares that he will send the Holy Spirit upon them to guide them in his way.

And then Jesus breaks the unleavened bread of the Passover meal and lifts the cup of redemption that is part of the liturgy and suddenly changes the words of this most ancient Jewish feast. He transforms the Jewish Passover Feast into the sacrament of the Kingdom of God towards which it had always been pointing. He makes it a sign of the costly but redeeming love that will shortly be revealed fully upon the cross.

The necessity of that cross is then confirmed in the cascade of shadows that now fall with increasing speed and darkness. Jesus predicts that his disciples will all fall away as the pressure on them mounts. We see the Shadow of PRIDE as Peter claims he'll never forsake Jesus. We watch as Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray for strength to face the Cross, asking only that his disciples stay awake and keep watch with him. But the Shadow of SLOTH falls over the disciples as, again and again, they cannot seem to rise to Christ's request.

Suddenly, Judas arrives with a party of armed guards to arrest Jesus, and the Shadow of self-protecting FEAR overtakes the disciples who flee from the garden to save their own skin. Jesus is hauled in chains before the Jewish ruling council and tried by Annas and Caiaphas who display the Shadow of self-righteous WRATH, ironically condemning Christ for blasphemy against God, when it was actually them who were guilty of blasphemy. We then watch as the Shadow of DENIAL falls over Peter who, for all his previous claims to loyalty, now disavows Jesus three times.



# SHADOWLANDS

## The Hour of Darkness The Storyline (Part 26)

Texts: Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14,  
18-19

And we see the darkness of bitter DESPAIR so overtake Judas that he hangs himself in remorse for what he's done. That shadow still lingers over many people today. There may be some here right now who, when you think of the dark things you've done, you are filled with such remorse that you despair of ever being forgiven for this sin. But, I tell you, because of what Jesus has done, that forgiveness IS possible.

Because only Rome can execute a death sentence, the Jewish leaders drag Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate. Although warned by his wife (who has had a dream about Jesus) that he should not do evil to this man, Pilate displays the Shadow of stubborn IGNORANCE and trifles with Jesus anyway. We see the same shadow over the crowd a little while later as they demand the release of a murderer and the death of their savior. Seeing a possible way of avoiding further conflict, however, Pilate sends Jesus to King Herod, who betrays his GLUTTONY for entertainment. Herod stands in the presence of the King above all Kings, yet Herod's only interest is whether or not Jesus can perform a miracle for him. "Prove to me that you're no fool; walk across my swimming pool."

Back goes Jesus to Pilate who this time demonstrates a colossally blind ARROGANCE in the face of Christ. "Don't you realize that I can have you killed?" he says, as he goes on to order that Jesus be flogged thirty-nine times. It never occurs to Pilate just what Jesus was capable of having done to him. In the end, however, it is the Shadow of APATHY that darkens Pilate most, as he orders a bowl to be brought so that he can wash his hands of responsibility for Jesus.

From there, the Storyline moves into the final hours of darkness. We see the Roman soldiers displaying the terrible Shadow of CRUELTY that has far too often darkened the lives of people in power. We see their brazen MANIPULATION of a man in the crowd named Simon of Cyrene, forcing him to help them continue their parade of death. We watch as the soldiers strip Jesus, pound nails into his flesh, and raise him up on a cross to die. And, in a callous act of material LUST, these men who have taken everything else from Jesus, now throw lots to see who gets to walk away with his clothes.

Finally, we watch the Shadow of CYNICISM blackening the heart of the crowd who now gather around the cross, mocking and jeering at Jesus, daring him to come down from his cross. We hear one of the thieves on the cross next to Jesus taunting the carpenter and, in words of supremely blind VANITY,



# SHADOWLANDS

## The Hour of Darkness The Storyline (Part 26)

Texts: Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14,  
18-19

demanding that Jesus save him – as if it is the job of any true Messiah to bail us out of trouble, whether we are repentant or not.

### III

To put it bluntly, almost every shadow of the sin that darkens the human heart, and still casts its pall across the Shadowlands of life today, displays itself in these last hours of Holy Week. All of the envy, greed, and gluttony that drives human beings to serve self above God and others... All of the cruelty, manipulation, wrath, and lust with which we too often treat the people closest to us... All of the pride, arrogance, and ignorance that goes into justifying these behaviors... All of the sloth, apathy, and denial with which we refuse responsibility for making things better... All of the vanity, cynicism, and despair that mark too much of human life... All of these shadows reveal themselves in the last hours of Holy Week and converge upon the beating heart of Jesus.

Thus, the Bible records that **“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land”** (Matt 27:45) as Jesus drew into himself all the sin and death of the world – absorbing it, paying for it, destroying its power to separate man from God. And, as Jesus cried out: “It is finished!” and “Into thy hands I commit my spirit, Father,” Jesus breathed his last. The Bible says that at that moment, the earth shook and rocks split, and the huge veil that separated the place of sinful man from the place of the holy God in the great temple at Jerusalem was torn in two. In dying on the cross, Jesus opened up a way for any of us – if we choose to – to walk again into the arms of God, as it once was at the beginning.

The Bible says that, then, the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross. As evening fell, a disciple of Jesus, named Joseph of Arimathea, procured the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb in a garden nearby. Rolling a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb, Joseph went away. At the behest of the Jewish leaders, who feared that the disciples might try to come and steal the body, Pilate ordered that the tomb be sealed and a guard be posted.

Yet there in the depths of that tomb, where **“the hour of darkness”** seems to reign completely, the most important chapter of the Storyline was just about to begin. But that’s a story for another day – one we’ll return to next week.



# SHADOWLANDS

---

## The Hour of Darkness The Storyline (Part 26)

**Texts: Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14,  
18-19**

Please pray with me...

*O God, our heavenly Father, centuries have come and gone since the events we have remembered today. The cross has become, for many, just an icon on a wall, a piece of jewelry to be worn, a symbol of an institution hated, mocked, or dismissed. But it was there on that cross that your precious Son died in love for each one of us here. It was the shadow of my sin, of our sin, that fell upon Jesus. It was upon that one pure heart that you laid the iniquity of us all. It was by his stripes and scars that you unleashed the forgiveness that can heal us all.*

*O God, how this troubled world of ours still needs to find redemption in your arms. Give us fresh eyes to see the particular shadows in our heart that required Christ's cross. Receive our humble confession of that sin. Strengthen our resolve to repent of our dark ways and to start walking in the light of yours. Through Jesus Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.*

---

*This message was provided by Christ Church of Oak Brook and Love Changes Life, the broadcast ministry at Christ Church of Oak Brook.*



Christ Church of Oak Brook  
Thirty-First & York Road  
Oak Brook, Illinois 60523  
(630) 654-1882  
[www.cc-ob.org](http://www.cc-ob.org)



Broadcast Ministry  
at Christ Church of Oak Brook