

ASH WEDNESDAY
THE MIRACULOUS DARKNESS

Matthew 27:45

TEXT

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.”
(Matthew 27:45)

SERMON: THE MIRACULOUS DARKNESS (MATTHEW 27:45)

It goes without saying that the season of Lent is largely about the cross of Calvary. It is about our Savior’s innocent suffering and death for the sins of the world. It is about the blood shed for you and for me. It is about the heavenly Father’s offer of forgiveness of sins and salvation from sin, death, and hell. It is about God’s call to repentance and to turn from our sins to the Savior, Jesus Christ, in saving faith.

But as we turn to the Gospel accounts of our Savior’s death on Calvary’s cross, we find other things that can rightly draw our attention. There is, for example, the darkness from noon to 3 o’clock in the afternoon on that first Good Friday. And at the moment of our Savior’s death, a huge curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. There was an earthquake, splitting of rocks, graves being opened, and some of God’s people being raised to life.

This evening, I would like to direct your attention to the miraculous darkness.

Let’s think of what preceded the darkness. Jesus had been nailed to the cross about 9 o’clock in the morning. From 9 o’clock to noon there was a lot of activity.

Jesus had prayed that the heavenly Father would forgive those who had crucified Him. Jesus had heard the cry of the thief for mercy and had assured the thief that on that very day he would be with Him in paradise. Jesus had also placed His mother, Mary, into the care of His disciple John. The soldiers had divided His garments and cast lots for His robe. The chief priests and others were busy criticizing Pilate's inscription that said that Jesus was the King of the Jews. And scoffers were busy directing insults at Jesus.

And then noon arrived. Of it we read: *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness until the ninth hour"* (Matthew 27:45). St. Luke added in his Gospel: *"while the sun's light failed"* (Luke 23:45). From what we read, we receive the impression that this darkness brought a halt to all the activity; that silence fell over the crowd.

Then Jesus cried out: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46).

And again: *"It is finished"* (John 19:30).

And again: *"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit"* (Luke 23:46).

Then as quickly as the darkness came at noon, just as quickly did the light appear at 3 o'clock that afternoon.

This miracle is recorded in the annals of both Christian and heathen writings. Even early heathen opponents of Christianity acknowledged this miracle.

Tertullian, a second-century Church Father, boldly wrote the following words to his adversaries:

“At the moment of Christ’s death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your own archives to this day.” (See “Apologeticum,” book 1, chapter 21)

The best the heathen could do to explain this darkness was to speak of an eclipse. The early Christians did not explain it. They simply proclaimed it.

Now this darkness proclaims a message. Certainly one message of this darkness has to do with the identity of Jesus. During His life, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Deity was ascribed to Him while His opponents asked Him to “*show them a sign from heaven*” (Matthew 16:1). Well, they got their sign. Even the Roman centurion and those with him proclaimed, “*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Matthew 27:54).

Another message proclaimed by this darkness was God’s judgment directed toward the spiritual darkness that had led up to Jesus’ crucifixion. Read the Passion narrative, and you will find a combination of jealousy, unbelief, error, hypocrisy, sham, and hatred.

But this judgment was not only directed toward those who were directly responsible. This judgment was directed toward the whole world. Think of it: One half of the earth was in the darkness of night. The other half was covered by this miraculous darkness.

God was speaking a word of judgment against the spiritual darkness of this world, against the world's sin, unbelief, error, hypocrisy, sham, hatred, and the like.

Jesus said before that first Good Friday, *"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from this earth, will draw all people to Myself"* (John 12:31–32).

The darkness was also a word of judgment spoken against God's own Son, Jesus Christ, as He hung on the cross. For He willingly assumed unto Himself the sins of the world. He was hanging there in our place. Then Jesus cried out, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30).

Then He died. God's judgment upon the sins of the world had been carried out.

Then, at 3 o'clock, the sun began to shine again. Like Easter, the light, as well as the Resurrection, indicates that the price for sin, which had been paid by the Father's Son, Jesus Christ, on Calvary's cross, had been accepted in full. What follows is a message of forgiveness, salvation, hope, peace, joy, and light.

Today is Ash Wednesday. We stand on the brink of a season designed to prepare us to remember and receive again the great work God did for our salvation. As we prepare, let us rejoice at what God has done in and through Jesus, the Savior long foretold, who leads the believer out of spiritual darkness into God's light.

Part of our preparation for the solemn and awesome services and remembrances of Holy Week and Easter is to come to the worship services offered during this season. Why do we do this? So that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we might rededicate ourselves to a life of service and worship. It is our rightful response to the Gospel, the message of the cross, the shed blood, our Father's gracious gifts of forgiveness and salvation, the message of Easter, new life, hope, peace, joy, and light. It is a witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.