

Calvary's Astonishing Events

No Ordinary Death, part 1

Steve Berger, March 11, 2018

The miraculous events surrounding Christ's crucifixion on Calvary point us to the redemptive love, majesty, and salvation of Jesus...

We're going to unpack 6 events over the next 3 weeks. God uses natural events to show us spiritual implications...This is no ordinary death—this is no ordinary man. God is testifying to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

Before we look at the first astounding event, let's start with a picture with a reasonable timeline of the events of Jesus' life leading up to crucifixion...

- a) **Thursday sundown to midnight—We refer to it as the Last Supper, but Jesus was celebrating Passover.** Passover was when God had instructed the Jews to celebrate their freedom on the 14th day of the first month, known as Abib on the Hebrew lunar calendar. Learn more about Passover in Exodus 12. *Passover happens on a full moon, which is really important to remember as we look at the first event.*
- b) **Thursday midnight to Friday 1 a.m.—Jesus enters into the Garden of Gethsemane.** He is praying, sweating blood because he's under such duress.
- c) **Friday 1–1:30 a.m.— Garden Arrest.** Here comes Judas and they arrest the Son of God
- d) **Friday 1:30am–8:30am—Jesus' 6 Trials.** He was tried by Ananias (high priest), Caiaphas (high priest—Ananias' father in law), Sanhedrin (religious leaders, scribes), Pilot (Roman emperor), sent to Herod Antipas (person in charge of the region), then sent back to Pilot, who orders unspeakable torture like the world had never known. He would be so beaten that we wouldn't even recognize him.

Every trial was illegal under the law of the day.

The illegality further defines the injustice that Jesus went through.

7 reasons why the trials were illegal

- 1. No impartiality was given.
- 2. Witnesses were brought in after the trial started, which was not allowed.
- 3. False witnesses were used.
- 4. Capital trials (those that determine that a life can be taken) normally happen during the day. Jesus' trials happened at night, which wasn't permitted.

5. Capital trials were supposed to delay judgment so that there was ample time to consider the case. They pronounced Jesus guilty on the spot.
 6. Capital trials were not allowed to happen before the Sabbath or a holy day, because of the delay that was needed to consider the outcome.
 7. Jesus' own testimony wasn't considered.
- e. **Friday, 8:30–9 a.m.—Under Pilot, the Romans were playing the King's game, making Jesus a pawn and a mockery.** They put a robe on him, gave him a fake scepter in hand, placed the crown of thorns on his head. Even today, you can see the game board they used etched into the ground.
 - f. **Friday 9 a.m.—12 p.m.— Jesus is carrying the cross and crucifixion starts at Golgotha.** Referred to as skull hill, based on the appearance of the face in the rocks. At the bottom of Calvary Hill—instead of being a sacred place that no one can get to—is the dirtiest, stinky Arab bus stop. The stench and dirtiness of such a holy place seems offensive at first, but it is actually fitting that Jesus would die in such a foul place because Jesus Christ was crucified for the stench of humanity.
 - g. **Friday 12–3 p.m.—Astonishing Events begin to take place.**
 - h. **Friday 3 p.m.—Jesus' life on Earth ends as he dies on the cross.**

*Pray: God, enable us to see Jesus clearer and love Him more.
Open the eyes of our hearts and give us a spirit of revelation.*

Read Matthew 27:45, 50–54, a key passage for the series:

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

1. First Astonishing Event—Darkness covered the land, 12 to 3 p.m.

This darkness is a miracle! The darkness happened immediately, instantly, shaking in its quickness...It was not a solar eclipse as it has been thought. Solar eclipses only last 8 minutes at most—not three hours! Passover is at full moon and solar eclipses require a new moon, NOT FULL MOON! History has never encountered this darkness before!

This event is chronicled by Christians, Greeks and Romans all the way back to the 2nd century and throughout the middle ages.

- Dionysus the Aeropagite—a Convert of Paul, who served as Bishop of Athens and is mentioned in Acts 17:34, said, "Either the Creator of the world now suffers or this

visible world is coming to an end.”

- Paulus Orosius—a Christian Historian/Theologian, a close friend of St. Augustine said that the time of the crucifixion was “...an impious age feared an eternal night,” and said that the Roman soldiers “...feared greatly.”
- Tertullian—a 2nd Century Church Father addressing unbelieving historians, said: “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 archives to this day.”
- Eusebius— a 4th Century Church Father quoting Phlegon, a 2nd century Greek Historian, said: “Now, in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [32 AD], a great eclipse of the sun occurred at the sixth hour [noon] that excelled every other before it, turning the day into such darkness of night that the stars could be seen in heaven, and the earth moved in Bithynia, toppling many buildings in the city of Nicaea.”
Phlegon, an unbeliever, likely called it a solar eclipse because that was his only point of reference...he was writing down what happened. He not only mentioned the darkness, but an earthquake, confirming exactly what the Scripture says.

***All this evidence points to the historical fact—darkness covered the land
from 12–3 p.m. as Jesus hung on the cross!***

Q. What does the darkness mean? We could spend weeks asking this question. But here are a couple points to consider:

- 1. Darkness is a prophetic fulfillment of God’s sovereign plan—God is fully in control of every minute and miraculous detail. He is orchestrating everything!**

David isn’t just writing about himself, he is prophesying. Read the following passage thinking of what Jesus went through on the cross.

Psalms 18:4–9: The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; Coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet.

God, by bending, extending, reshaping the very habitation of Heaven, and by doing something unusual, personally shows up at the crucifixion of Jesus. He personally hears His Son on the cross. God sits there with darkness under His feet.

Personal application: God personally shows up in our darkness—and we know crisis is part of life. Darkness is under His feet when you feel like it is buried over your head! Look up! Cry out! Listen! Wait! He will come! He is

there. He's above the darkness. He says, it's dark, but I'm above it and I'm near. Darkness doesn't not have the final word over you! The Father of glory has the final word over us.

2. Darkness is God's answer to the Pharisees and Sadducees request for a sign from heaven.

- a. Matthew 16:1,4—Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him, asked that He would show them a sign from heaven...A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Jesus said they would get the sign of Jonah, meaning it will be dark like it was in the belly of the whale that Jonah experienced. The sign that was requested was given at the crucifixion of Jesus.

- b. Like Bethlehem's star shining light at Christ's birth, Calvary's darkness envelopes Christ's death. It was so awful and inhumane that God made it dark!

This darkness is a miracle—darkness overcame light, which never happens, except that day! The heavens—and all natural order of things—yield and bow before the Son of God at both His birth and His death!

All of Calvary's astounding events authenticate the Person and work of Jesus! They are the signature and thumbprint of God.

Q. What was happening that was so dark?

Isaiah 53:4–6

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

- a. **The incomprehensible judgement and suffering of Jesus for our sin**—The judgment of mankind's sin was being laid upon Jesus. He was being sacrificed and suffering. God drew miraculous attention to Jesus' suffering by having the universe itself bend in reverential respect through the darkening of the sun.

The judgment and suffering of Jesus was so awful, terrible, and dark that God shrouded the whole event in a miraculous darkness to conceal and yet display the horror of it all.

Application: The judgement, suffering, darkness must penetrate our ideas about sin! SIN IS NO SMALL THING, EVER! We don't even call sin, sin anymore, let alone be sobered by its horror.

Notice the contrast on the day of the crucifixion

For three hours, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., it is bright, loud and busy, with normal activity. Soldiers are watching Jesus, gambling for His clothes. Jewish leaders were raging against Pilot. The thieves being crucified on both sides of Jesus were mocking Him.

At 12 p.m., God-sent darkening silence. Jesus hangs, suffering, being judged for the sin of the world...A bewildering 3-hour hush sets in until Jesus pierces the silent darkness with, “It is finished, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Consider the contrasting responses

- The Roman Centurion had likely participated in hundreds of crucifixion and he had never seen anything like this. He said “truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).
- Luke 23:48 says that people “beat their breasts and went away.”

Application: We are going to either be like the centurion and give a testimony or go the other way. We have to decide how we are going to respond.

This week

Let's pray...

As we approach Good Friday, and Resurrection Sunday, that God would capture our hearts for everything that Jesus went through for us. May we affirm the words of the Roman centurion, saying Truly, Jesus is the Son of God. May understanding what Jesus went through change our outlook. May we have a newfound sobriety of the darkness of sin. May we confess it and run for it, may we remember that Jesus died to cover every single bit of it. Thank you for helping us believe. We commit our hearts to you now, in Jesus' mighty name, Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the historical evidence of the darkened sky deepen your belief about the great lengths that God went to in order to prove Jesus was the son of God?
2. Have you been like the centurion and testified that Jesus is truly the Son of God in the midst of mockers? Or, do you tend to turn away and be silent?
3. Does knowing what God and Jesus went through change your outlook about God's love for you?
4. How has God showed up in the darkness in your life?