



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Mark Newman

Luke 23: 44-49

Spring 2026

"Darkness At Noon: The Death of Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Warren. Good morning, everybody. We've got a very significant passage to look at this morning, so I would ask you to turn to Luke chapter 23, and we're going to read verses 44 through 49.

The theme of the Gospels as a whole, if we were to identify one theme, is the accomplishment of the Son of God in coming into the world to seek and to save lost sinners who had been given to Him by his Father. And today, through chapter upon chapter of signals and preparation, we have come to the defining act of the salvation Christ accomplished—His death on the cross.

He has now been horridly scourged,
marched to Calvary,
mounted upon that cruel instrument of death to suffer there from its inflictions,
prayed forgiveness for the unwitting soldiers,
warned the women of Jerusalem who had come out to mourn for Him,
provided care for His mother,
promised paradise to the repentant thief next to Him,
and now enters the darkness of His deepest suffering.

Luke writes, beginning in verse 44,

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." ⁴⁸ And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, *began* to return, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

Luke 23: 44-49

(Message) I'm not going to talk much about those women. You know who they are; it is His mother, Mary, the other Mary, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna...we find their names listed in other places, but they were there as well.

When I was in college, I was privileged to get to take part in an interdisciplinary study, a seminar that included several weeks of study about the early 20th century rise of communism in Russia. We were required to read several books...[remember that, college?]...and only later would I read *The Gulag Archipelago*.

But one of the books that I was required to read was Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. The novel was set during Stalin's 1930s purges and followed a certain Nicholas Rubashov, an old-guard Bolshevik arrested for treason by the regime he had helped create. That was 'the figurative darkness' depicted in the book, which took place during the also, 'figurative noon' of the high expectations progressive people had had about the establishment of a 'workers' state' in Russia. 'Noon time' signals 'light and brightness'...and when *darkness* should be naturally excluded.

The period, as historians have recorded, was a horrible chapter in human history, which is why Koestler entitled the novel as he did—making an allusion between the inhumanity of the Bolsheviks and their collectivist enterprise, (their collectivist delusion), and the experience of Christ on the cross when darkness veiled His deepest and merciless suffering.

It is an effective but drastically insufficient illustration of the earthly end of the Light of the world, when the eternal Son of God, knowingly and purposefully gave Himself up in history's greatest act of sacrifice.

Borrowing the Apostle Paul's language, 'He did not regard His equality with God a thing to be desperately clung to, but He emptied Himself by becoming a human, like one of us'. (*Phi 2:6-7*). The Creator became as one of His creatures—but not only that He served the will of His Father by 'being obedient to the point of death, even a sacrificial death on the dreaded, cursed cross', (*Phi 2:8*), God, "...made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
(*2Cor 5:21*)

Our text today is Luke's account of that noontime afternoon on Passover Friday, when darkness enveloped the land as our Lord suffered under the righteous judgment of God in our place—and having suffered as no man ever has, committed Himself again to His Father's hands, dying as no man ever has.

Luke records that it was by then, "about the sixth hour", (*vs44*), meaning, since Luke was using the Jewish method of keeping time, that it was sometime around noon. What he meant by "now", which is how my text reads, what he meant by "now", (or "already" or "by then"), was that, 'all those other cruel indignities had occupied the hours before...and now', by the time it got around to that sixth hour, things abruptly changed.

The commentators all note that time was less precisely kept at the time. They had no clocks or watches, of course, and that would explain some apparent differences between the Gospel writers. [I mention this only because some of you are particular

about these things, and you know that Matthew expressed it much the same as Luke. Mark said it was 'the third hour', which may have meant for him 'late morning, pushing up against noon', and John indicating it was 'after Pilate pronounced judgment around noon'.] But they're all in agreement that from about that time until the ninth hour, (or 3:00), darkness fell over the land.

There has been much speculation about what caused the darkness. The idea that it was the darkness of an eclipse has been dismissed, (even though Luke might be seeming to be implying that in the next verse, verse 45, that "the sun was obscured.") The verb is *ekleipó*, which sounds to our ears like 'eclipse', and it was used to describe eclipses. But it also meant, on a more basic level, 'blotting out' or 'failing'. Besides, it was Passover, so the moon was full...which meant an eclipse was not possible. So it simply means that, 'the sun failed to give its light.'

Some have conjectured that it could have been caused by one of the Sirocco Winds that occasionally arose in the region, blowing in from the deserts of Libya. (And I assume they still do today.)

I'm reading a history of west Texas now – actually, a history of the High Plains – and the author has come to the period of the Depression in the early 1930s, and the dust bowls that resulted from over-farming and from terrible drought that came upon the lands. Fierce winds would pick up the loose dirt and dust and drive it miles into the air and across the land, turning the sky black for hours on end.

So such things are not unheard of...but it's not necessary to find a solution like that. When we consider the circumstances, it is enough to say that God Himself, who created and controls and sustains the sun, commanded that, 'the sun be obscured'. It was His supernatural act representing, (if we can say it this way), His feelings at the time.

"Darkness" in the Scriptures is often a symbol of judgment. Amos' condemning words in Amos 5:18 reflect that: "Alas," the prophet announces, "you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light;"

And here at Calvary, the darkness that fell over the land symbolized the Divine displeasure. There was 'The judgment of God' in the air and it was communicating His Holy Wrath—wrath certainly at those who had treated His Son so cruelly and pitilessly... and in doing so, blaspheming the name of God.

But more directly, it was the very personal withholding of light from the Person of His own Son as He poured the judgment of Holy God against the sins that Christ, even then, was taking upon Himself.

Hell had come to the mount that day...and only Jesus could feel the sharp barb of its terrible sting.

Jesus uttered seven sayings as you know the Gospel writers recorded while He hung on the cross. No one Gospel gives them all to us—and Luke omits one that Mark, (15:34), and Matthew, (27:46), included when Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (*Psa 22:1*)

And it was at that moment that Jesus expressed, (in the words of that Messianic Psalm 22), what He was then experiencing...the **forsaking** of Him by His own Father!

Therefore He would not muster a beloved Son's appeal to His Father—but rather was compelled by the vicarious punishment He endured to recognize Him only as "GOD", though One who is Holy and judges sin according to His holiness.

Many have attempted to explore Jesus' consciousness during those three hours. It's a compelling pursuit...'What was He enduring inside?' We endure things as we go through difficulties, and they can be very painful...What was Jesus enduring?

Mark's Gospel informs us that when the Lord arrived at Golgotha, He was offered wine mixed with myrrh, (and the Romans made an allowance for that kind of thing for

victims of crucifixion in order to help numb them for the pain they were about to go through).

Jesus refused it, determined to face the ordeal in full consciousness. That did not mean He was a masochist. We saw in the agony in that garden in Gethsemane of how He prayed...that if it was in the will of His Father for Him to forego the bitter sufferings to come, that He would let the cup pass Him by. Nevertheless, He said, "...not My will, but Yours be done." (*Luk 22:42*).

And so now, fully knowing the Father's will for Him, He would not obey halfway... He determined to drain the cup of God's wrath at full strength. As Kent Hughes put it, "Jesus did not come to suffer as little as He could."

And as the God-man, He was what we may say, 'Specially and ideally fitted to bear the full misery of hell'—able to feel pain and rejection, the ignominy of shameful guilt and the complete revulsion of the grossest depths of sin.

As one writer put it, "With a keenness and intensity, and with a unity of perception which none of us can possibly fathom or compass, because His soul was so absolutely in His power, so simply free from the influence of distractions, that He may truly be said to have suffered the whole of His passion and every moment of it—suffering spiritual agony unnumbered."

In other words, 'Because He is infinite in every dimension, in just three hours He was able to absorb all the punishment of eternal hell for all who will ever believe.'
Hallelujah!

On the cross, from the sixth hour to the ninth, He truly bore your sin and my sin, exhausting God's wrath against us and opening the way of full access to His throne of grace.

Using the expressions of 'The Suffering Servant Song' of Isaiah, (*chapter 53, verse 4-5*), on the cross, Jesus was,

'Stricken, smitten of God, afflicted.

He was pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.'

(The LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him so that),

'The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him.

And by His scourging we are healed.

Surely our griefs He Himself, bore,

And our sorrows He carried.'

As the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:24;

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

Now we notice, look there in verse 45, that not only did the sun's light fail so that darkness fell over the land, but also the veil of the temple was torn in two...and only afterward, in Luke's account, did Jesus seem to have breathed His last. Now Luke was a historian, (I haven't talked about this a whole lot in our series, but he has certain themes that he emphasizes), and he was a historian who was interested in some of these themes. And he occasionally suspends chronological exactness in order to emphasize a point he wants to make. So, he was interested in the phenomena that accompanied the whole of Jesus' experience on the cross.

Whereas Matthew and Mark, (you can look it up), placed this great opening in the curtain of the temple immediately following Christ's actual death, Luke wishes to draw it to his readers' attention immediately, as a profound consequence of the suffering of our Lord. The rending of the veil symbolized the new access into the presence of God opened up by Jesus' death. The way into the heavenly sanctuary was immediately opened for all those for whom Christ died.

You've been taught the design of the temple – all of you have, I know – there were actually two veils, (or curtains). One separating the larger Holy Place, from the court that surrounded it, and containing, within the Holy Place, the golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense.

The other curtain separated that more accessible sanctuary, the Holy Place, from the more sacred Holy of Holies, (in which originally the Ark of the Testimony was placed with the Mercy Seat upon it). And it was entered only by the High Priest, and that, once a year on the Day of Atonement—and was separated from the Holy Place by this elaborately embroidered and heavy veil in order to symbolize the separateness and remoteness of Almighty God.

This is the veil, (the inner veil), that was torn in two just as the priests, (the darkness perhaps now having dissipated), and the priests are resuming their work of sacrificing the Passover lambs. (How ironic, for they would have been stunningly startled by the sound of God ripping it from top to bottom.)

It is said that that veil was as thick as a man's hand, and when it was suddenly torn in two, it gave symbolic expression to the truth that, 'The death of Christ had made the way open into the very presence of God.' (And as we know, He opened it up for you and I, as well.)

The Atonement was complete, the New Covenant ratified, and as the author of Hebrews would later explain in Hebrew 9, verse 12, that Christ our Savior had entered the Holy Place once for all, "...the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands...having obtained eternal redemption."

As Mr. Spurgeon later expressed, "There was an entrance made for the greatest sinners. If there had only been a small hole cut through it..." Spurgeon said, "...the lesser offenders might have crept through; but what an abounding act of mercy this is, that the veil is rent in the middle, top to bottom, so that the chief of sinners may find ample passage."

Well, there were other spiritual phenomena that occurred in the moment which Matthew records in Matthew 27, verses 51 through 53. He records how, "...the earth shook and the rocks were split." That, "...tombs were opened, and many bodies of the

saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." (ibid.)

That certainly would have been remarkable and gave evidence to Jerusalem and its environs that something profound and strangely unexplainable had taken place the moment Jesus died. [Various attempts have been made to explain the significance of these dead saints emerging from their graves and appearing to people in the city, (which only Matthew, again, relates).]

We're not going to take time to review them here, but it's worth remarking that such unusual occurrences would have underscored what all his readers understood by the time Matthew wrote, that the resurrection of Jesus was, 'an earnest paid'...that all of His people would one day be resurrected in Him and with Him.

Well, unlike the other Gospels, Luke withholds his account of Jesus' actual death until the end, utilizing only the one verse. He writes in verse 46, "And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last."

Jesus had already said, "I am thirsty." (*Jn 19:28b*), though not with a loud voice, as here. Then, according to John 19, verse 30, He said, "It is finished!" ...an utterance meant to express His fulfillment and completion of the work He had set out to accomplish from the very beginning, 'It's finished!' Luke contributes the final saying of the Lord in his 46th verse before reporting His death.

But that word "finished" from John 19, (*vs30*), is a translation of a Greek word *teleó*, that fundamentally means, 'completed', 'done', or 'paid up'. It's at that point our Lord knew He had paid the price for our redemption. He had accomplished all that His eternal covenant of salvation had entailed for Him...and there was nothing more needed for Him to do.

Dr. Johnson did a study many years ago, (and you can find it in our Media Ministry), and he entitled the study *The Suffering Savior*. In his message out of that series labeled "The Last Words: The Finished Work of Christ", he went into great detail

about Christ's use, and the Apostle John's usage of that word *teleó* as it related to His finished work.

We've looked at it before, (I know some of you are familiar with it), but it's worth reminding ourselves that in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, and verse 4, the Lord prayed to His Father, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given me to do." And that's, that root, Greek, idea, *teleo*, uttered in the participial form, *teleiōsās*, 'accomplished'. And then, several hours later, now in chapter 19 of the Gospel of John in verse 28, the apostle tells us that, "...Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished...", (*tetelestai*), "...to fulfill the Scripture...", (*teleiōthēi*), "...said, 'I am thirsty' ."

And then, finally, after He had received the sour wine, Jesus said, "It is finished!" *tetelestai*. The price for our redemption had been paid. The holy wrath of God against our sin had been propitiated.

All of your sins and mine, all the sins of those for whom Jesus died were forgiven by God in the person of His Son as He bore the penalty for them on the cross. All the envy, all the preening pride and immodesty, the ungratefulness, the cruelty, the discontent, the impurities of our lives and the worthless idols that we have pursued, the poor stewardship, the avarice, the sloth, the hypocrisy...(we don't have time to plumb the depths of our depravity), but add them all up together and they were all poured out upon Jesus our Savior on the cross, where He bore them in infinite agony. Estranged from His Father, He bore them alone—for only He could accomplish it.

And when it was finished, (back to our passage, *Luke 23:46*), when it was finished the beleaguered, dying Jesus mustered up the confidence and strength to shout out, "Father!", (*not, 'My God, My God.'*), "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." (*ibid.*)

It was a cry of victory! 'I have accomplished everything, and now I gladly and confidently yield My future to You with no reservations.'

Jesus was quoting Scripture before He breathed His last. He was quoting Scripture. You see that, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit', it's a loose translation of the final verse of Psalm 22, but an essentially verbatim quotation of Psalm 31, verse 5.

Psalm 31, (I don't assume you... 'Oh yeah, Psalm 31, I know Psalm 31!')...but Psalm 31 is a Psalm of David in which he finds strength in difficult times by remembering what had happened earlier in his life—the adventures he had, the escapes that God provided for him, and how God was his only sure help during those difficult times.

Of course, we can't take time to dwell on the Psalm in detail, but note the expressions in it of great confidence in God, which lead to that 5th verse of Psalm 31:

'In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;

In Your righteousness deliver me.

Incline Your ear to me.

You are my rock and my fortress;

You will lead me and guide me.

You will pull me out of the net.

You are my strength.

(and then)

⁵ Into Your hand I commit my spirit.'

When Christ had completed His mission, He remembered and took confidence and assurance in that Psalm...because it follows that God will deliver Him from this death.

From the words of another Psalm, 'He will not abandon His soul to Hades, nor allow His Holy One to undergo decay.' (*Psa 16:10*). Everything is in His Father's hands, He knows it and therefore He faces death as no man ever has. (*Now we could say a lot about that, but we don't have all the time.*)

It was the practice of the Romans at crucifixions to have a centurion overseeing, supervising the execution. And now, here in verse 47, Luke introduces this special centurion who was at the foot of Christ's cross; "Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' " (or "righteous"). So the noble centurion added to the attestations of Jesus' innocence that had been previously expressed by Herod, by Pilate, by Pilate's wife, and by the thief on the cross...and in doing so, Luke understands he was giving praise to God for this.

That's not all he said. Mark reports that the centurion was standing right in front of Jesus and saw the way that He breathed His last...and he confessed, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" (*Mark 15:39b*).

He had overseen the scourging of the Lord, and observed the mocking and the taunts that He had silently endured. He saw Him reach out to warn the mourning women, heard Him ask forgiveness for the cruel soldiers, and witnessed His tenderness to the dying thief. Finally, he watched in amazement as Jesus boldly gave up Himself to death with a prayer on His tongue.

Was he converted that day? I would like to think so. Roman centurions are, without exception, presented in the New Testament as even-tempered men, prone to kindness—and this one appears in the same vein, but that's no guarantee of saving faith.

What we can say is his confession of Jesus as the Son of God is an indicator, at least, that he may have been under the Spirit's conviction. We can also see in him a hint of the Gospels' later penetration into Gentile communities—and that he is mentioned by all three Synoptic Gospels perhaps indicates that he may have come to be a member of one of their churches, known to the Gospel writers.

Well, Luke goes on in verses 48 and 49 to conclude his account of the crucifixion by mentioning the onlookers and friends who were in attendance. Public executions tended to be a spectacle, drawing crowds who came out like voyeurs to witness the gruesome event. But these, Luke reports, left in a different mood, walking away "beating their breasts", as if to say they had instead witnessed a great injustice,

and rather than being entertained, they were saddened. Many have seen in the reactions, something of a prelude to the coming of the Day of Pentecost when Peter preached and 3,000 were converted.

Also, there were many of Jesus' acquaintances and the women, (I mentioned them earlier), who had accompanied Him from Galilee standing there. It's enough for Luke simply to mention this; they, "were standing at a distance" he says...and as they watched what had transpired, perhaps they stood in stunned silence and were paralyzed by grief.

But we are not paralyzed by grief. It's because our Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself up to death on the cross that we have hope. That's why the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian Church that when he came to them, 'He determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' (1Cor 2:2). He didn't want their hope, he didn't want their faith to rest on some flimsy teaching that some new teacher was bringing. He didn't want their faith to rest on anything but on the power of God in the cross of Christ.

It's why Jesus Himself left instructions for His disciples on the night He was betrayed, to remember Him in the days ahead with the bread and the wine—so that they would contemplate again and again, and never forget that He gave Himself up to death, shedding His blood that they might have life in His sacrifice.

There was an article in *The Wall Street Journal* yesterday about Ben Sasse. If you don't know Ben Sasse, he was the senator from the state of Nebraska for two terms but stepped down to spend more time with his family. He is a thoughtful follower of Christ, deeply intelligent, well-spoken, who consistently stood for Godly principles during his service in the Senate. He was everything you would want in a senator, Ben Sasse.

He has been diagnosed with metastatic stage-four pancreatic cancer and is very frank about his diagnosis. When he announced his condition, he said, "I'm going to die."

But he is living his life now in confident hope. He said in the interview in the paper yesterday, *(and I love this)*, he said this – "I'm in need of the grace that only Jesus Christ's historical death and resurrection can provide." What a smart guy.

That's the condition we're all in. We're all going to die, but the Lord Jesus has gone before us and died the only death that really matters. He has opened up heaven for us so that when we do pass from this earthly existence, we have the same confident hope that Ben Sasse has, and that our Lord Jesus displayed, "Into Your hands, I commit My Spirit." *(vs46)*.

And we will enter into Light and not darkness, for God, who said, *(in 2Cor 4:6)*, "Light shall shine out of darkness is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." ... Amen.

(Closing prayer) LORD, thank You for Your love, Your brilliant plan of salvation, Your awesome sacrificing Spirit...and how You would condescend and allow Your own Son to endure such a terrible affliction to bear the penalty for our sins.

May we wear His honor upon our bodies,
May we bear it upon our hearts daily wherever we go,
And always be eager to give testimony to it,
To always remember it as we endure the inevitable afflictions and trials and difficulties of our lives.

We have a glorious future,
A future of Light ahead in Your presence.
And we give You thanks,
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

(End of Audio)