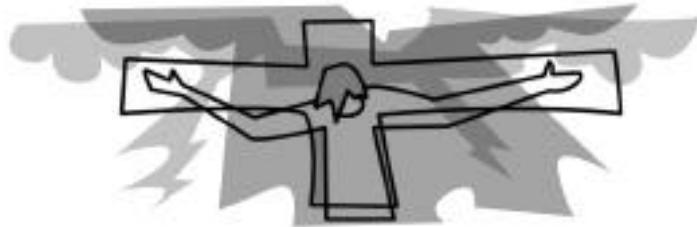


Darkness at Noon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 27:42, 45; Mark 5:33; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:44.

Memory Text: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

For those who will listen, nature speaks eloquently about the character of God. It's a loudspeaker, suffusing our senses with sublime messages about the One who created it all. But even in their fullness and beauty, nature's words are often muted, and, sometimes, because of *static*, the signals can be grossly misread.

In contrast, the Cross is the ultimate revelation to humanity about our Creator. Only as we grasp the incredible reality that the Man hanging on the cross was also God—the One through whom all things in both heaven and earth were created—can we begin to understand truths about this God that the most vibrant sunset or exotic plant could never reveal. As we grasp, too, what kind of death He in His humanity died, and why He agreed to do it, we learn lessons about our God that surpass what anything growing out of the ground or floating in the heavens ever could teach us.

The Week at a Glance: What irony is found in the leaders' taunts against Jesus? What caused the darkness that surrounded Him? What was the meaning of His cry “Why hast thou forsaken me?” What does the Cross teach us about the nature of sin?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 19.

“He Saved Others!”

From the bogus trials, Jesus was led down the Via Dolorosa (“the Way of Pain”) to Golgotha, “the place of the skull,” where He was crucified. Little did His murderers know what they were doing. No doubt, His awareness of their ignorance was partly why Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*Luke 23:34*). Their ignorance, though, will not excuse them on the day of judgment, not when they had so many opportunities to know the truth. If those who, having never seen Jesus, will be condemned for disbelief (*John 3:18*), imagine the fate of those who rejected Him while He lived among them.

As Jesus hung on the cross, He faced numerous taunts, such as those depicted in Matthew 27:42, Mark 15:31, and Luke 23:35. Though meant as an insult, what great truth were these men uttering in their ignorance?

He saved others, but He couldn’t save Himself. That’s true: He couldn’t save others and Himself at the same time. It had to be one or the other but not both.

Jesus could have chosen *not* to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world (*see Matt. 26:39; John 10:17, 18; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 7:27*), but then the world would have been lost. Only by offering Himself could He save *others*. There was no other way.

Though uttered in derision and hate, those words captured the greatest truth of all time: If Christ wanted to save the world, He could do it only at the Cross.

In Matthew 26:39, Jesus asked that if it were possible, let this cup pass. Obviously, it wasn’t possible, not in the sense that He had no choice in this matter (If He had no choice, why even bother to utter the prayer?) but in the sense that it was not possible for Him to be spared if the world were to be saved. With this idea in mind, read also Mark 8:31, Luke 24:7, John 3:14. What are these texts telling us about the necessity of Christ’s death for our salvation?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Hebrews 10:19-22.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To underscore that Jesus bore our sins so we might experience the fullness of life in Him.
2. To recognize the enormity of the price paid for our salvation, even though it is impossible to comprehend the fullness of the act itself.
3. To understand that grace is sufficient to save us, apart from our works.
4. To find in Jesus' death on the cross complete assurance of salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Darkness—a Tangible Parable of Sin (*Matt. 27:45, 46*).

- A. God, who is Light, hung on the cross in darkness.
- B. In order that we might be saved, He would not save Himself.
- C. Will we choose eternal separation from God when we have been freed from the penalty of sin?

II. The Full Impact of Humanity's Sin (*2 Cor. 5:21*).

- A. "The Father and I are one" (*John 10:30, NLT*).
- B. Sin mandated eternal separation.
- C. Until Jesus' death on the cross, we could not fully understand God's wrath against sin.

III. Jesus Stands in the Sinner's Place (*1 Pet. 2:24*).

- A. The Hebrew sacrificial system pointed to a remedy for sin.
- B. The seriousness of the remedy is an indication of the seriousness of the offense.
- C. The thought that we can somehow earn salvation degrades the gift given on the cross.

Summary: At the sixth hour (see *Matt. 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44*), darkness separated Jesus from the Father. The God who is Light became the Sin Bearer and endured the darkness of separation from His Father. He who was able to save others did not save Himself, in order that we might be saved. When we ponder the seriousness of the sin remedy, we cannot help recognizing the magnitude of the gift Jesus gave. Our feeble efforts at self-rescue give way to profound joy in the assurance of hope given through His sacrifice for us.

COMMENTARY

Darkness at Noon.

Introduction. In accordance with every feature of prophecy concerning this event, Jesus was crucified as our Sin Bearer. His suf-

Darkness at Noon

Read Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44. What do all three say happened? What is the spiritual significance of this event?

In the Bible, darkness is a symbol of evil, of separation from God, who is Light and in whom “is no darkness at all” (*1 John 1:5*). In fact, Jesus talked of “outer darkness” (*Matt. 8:12, 22:13*) as an expression for hell. In a sense, Jesus at the cross went to hell for us; that is, He suffered the penalty of sin that those in hell will have to face themselves.

Look up these few texts. What do they say happened at the cross that could help explain the meaning of this supernatural darkness that appeared during the crucifixion of Christ? *Isa. 59:2, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13*.

The darkness, then, is an outward symbol of the spiritual darkness that was surrounding the Son of God as He bore the full brunt of God’s righteous wrath against sin. With the accumulated sin of the world not only falling on Him but being punished in Him there at the cross, with the Father, who is light, hiding His presence from Jesus—it’s not hard to see why the darkness would sweep over the land as a powerful manifestation to the world and to the universe of what was happening at the cross, of the great punishment that Jesus was taking upon Himself in order to save humanity from the condemnation that sin would otherwise have brought. “The dense blackness,” wrote Ellen White, “was an emblem of the soul-agony and horror that encompassed the Son of God.”—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 164.

At times, who hasn’t felt oppressed by spiritual darkness? What caused it? How did it go away? And what advice would you give to someone who says that he or she feels enveloped in spiritual darkness?

ferings borne on Calvary, though beyond our comprehension, are the means by which the gates of everlasting life are opened to us, if only we accept His sacrifice and our need for it. For love's sake, Jesus willingly endured the Cross. As illuminated by the Holy Spirit, the Cross lays bare our inner depravity and reveals God's absolute hatred of sin, His uncompromising justice, as well as His infinite mercy and grace to redeem us from evil.

I. "He Saved Others!"

Every utterance and action of the ungodly on Golgotha was calculated to shame and discourage Christ. Behind it all was Satan's frantic effort to provoke Jesus into descending from the cross, thus aborting the plan of salvation. But Christ was riveted to His purpose to redeem us. Had He so chosen, He could have freed Himself from the cross as easily as He freed His hands to heal Malchus's severed ear. But the raging storm of repudiation that howled about His exposed body could not strip from His soul the love He bore to a lost world whose only hope lay in the sacrifice that they now scorned. "[He] gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (*Gal. 1:4; cf. John 10:17, 18*). Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 746, 749.

II. Darkness at Noon.

Christ endured the horror of great darkness so that we could walk in the wonders of His great light. He suffered burning thirst so that we could drink from springs of living water. He suffered blood-stained nakedness so that we could be clothed in His spotless righteousness. He suffered the hiding of His Father's face so that we could someday see His face with no darkening veil between (*see Rev. 22:4*). He bore the epithets of scorn and blasphemy so that He could give us a new name in glory. He suffered the pain of thorns so that death for the Christian would lose its sting. He let His face stream with the foul spittle of rejection so that we might have our blood-guiltiness and tears wiped away by the hand of God. He bore vile blows so that we might receive His healing touch in the depths of our being. He accepted abandonment so that we might receive the glorious adoption of sons and daughters of God. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (*Isa. 53:5*). "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all."—Watts.

III. The Father Hidden.

It was as painful for the Father to separate from Christ as it was for the Son to endure His Father's withdrawal. Jesus did not cry, "O God, O God, why have You forsaken me?" but "My God, My God . . .";

The Father Hidden

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? What could Jesus—who had said “I and my Father are one” (*John 10:30*) and that “Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (*John 16:32*)—have meant by those words? Was not this the same Jesus who stood on the banks of the Jordan when the Father uttered, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (*Matt. 3:17*)? Was not this the same Jesus who had prayed “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee” (*John 17:21*)? Was not this the same Jesus who had prayed to the Father, “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (*vs. 24*)?

Of course, it was. What, then, could He have meant by that cry?

Go back over the texts from yesterday’s section (*Isa. 59:2, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13*); read them in the context of Christ’s lament. How do they help explain what is happening here and why He uttered what He did?

However difficult for us to understand, Jesus—who had been One with the Father since eternity—now felt the complete separation from God caused by sin. God’s wrath, which would otherwise fall on us, fell on Him so that none of us would ever have to face it ourselves.

“It was necessary for the awful darkness to gather about His soul because of the withdrawal of the Father’s love and favor; for He was standing in the sinner’s place, and this darkness every sinner must experience. The righteous One must suffer the condemnation and wrath of God, not in vindictiveness; for the heart of God yearned with greatest sorrow when His Son, the guiltless, was suffering the penalty of sin. This sundering of the divine powers will never again occur throughout the eternal ages.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

Have you ever met someone who felt forsaken by God (or perhaps you have felt that way yourself)? What happened to Jesus on the cross that offers you, or anyone, a way out of the seemingly bottomless pit? Why, because of the Cross, should no one ever feel that God has abandoned him or her?

thus expressing His invincible faith in the Father, a faith that, at that time, could receive no comforting reward.

We can hardly overemphasize that the reason the Father forsook Him was to allow His Son to experience in our stead the full punishment for our sins. The essential pain of that punishment is the spiritual anguish of total separation from God. Even the most rebellious of sinners still is surrounded at present with an atmosphere of wooing

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 59:2, Romans 1:16-19, Hebrews 7:27, 1 Peter 2:24.*

① In our homes and offices, we do everything we can to dispel darkness. Jesus came to this earth to confront spiritual darkness. He who was Light (*see 1 John 1:5*) bore the full accumulation of the world's sin. This sin was made visible in the darkness that surrounded the cross and separated Him from His Father. How do you feel when you recognize that your sin was part of Jesus' burden? Describe how Jesus' sacrifice has freed you from spiritual darkness.

② Take a moment to remember a major project you have accepted and successfully completed. How did you feel when it was done? When Jesus cried out "It is finished" (*John 19:30*), He did not die in defeat. His death signaled the consummation of the Hebrew sanctuary parable. He conquered sin and its consequences for us. How would you explain the joy of the Cross? Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear your testimony?

③ Jesus' sacrifice for sin (*see Heb. 7:27*) was sufficient to pay the price for our sins. Why, then, do we work so hard at our salvation when Jesus has provided the perfect remedy for our horrendous offense? Discuss how we might learn to be comfortable with our hope in Jesus. How can we give up working for our salvation and, instead, allow Jesus to "will and to act according to his good purpose" (*Phil. 2:13, NIV*) for our lives?

④ Maybe we do not understand how despicable sin really is. The debt the world owed God because of sin was so great only God Himself could pay for it. How does the price Jesus paid for your rescue affect how you see yourself? How valuable is your neighbor, friend, or work associate to Jesus?

⑤ Think about the best news you ever have had to share. How does the good news of salvation compare? Why and when should we involve our lives in letting everyone know?

“It Is Finished!”

Christ did not die in defeat but as a conqueror over sin—a spotless sacrifice of perfect innocence and virtue, infinite in moral power and love. His words “It is finished” signified not merely the termination of His human life but the consummation of His sacrifice and assurance of its success. Nothing could negate the completeness of the provision thus made. That which had so long been prophesied was now an accomplished fact of history. Henceforth His paramount task, and that of all heaven, would be to apply the saving merits of His sacrifice to the sin-stricken inhabitants of earth till the close of probationary time.

Those words, “It is finished,” uttered by the One who created all things by His word, echoed throughout the universe, ensured that the stability of its moral order and the joyous harmony of its fellowship are forever guaranteed.

How does Christ’s cry “It is finished” shed light on what happened to the veil of the temple at His death? *Matt. 27:51.*

Every animal sacrifice—from the one offered by Abel (*Gen. 4:4*), up through the beasts slain in the temple precincts on the day of Golgotha—pointed to Christ’s death. The rending of the temple veil, then, betokened the accomplishment of that death. It symbolized the end of the old Hebrew system and pointed to the inauguration of a new and living way into God’s presence through His torn body (*Heb. 10:19-21*), once and for all ending the need for any other animal sacrifices (*Heb. 9:26*).

What do the following texts say that relate to the veil being torn at Christ’s death? *Pss. 49:7, 15; 51:16-19; Heb. 10:1-5.*

No animal could ever atone for sin. Just look at the havoc that sin has wreaked upon our world—the suffering, the misery, the loss, the disappointment, the death. And to think that all it would take to atone, or to pay, for all this suffering would be the death of a goat, or even of a thousands goats?

No wonder the veil was torn. In the end, it was a symbol, a picture, and thus in and of itself it couldn’t save one soul any more than staring at a picture of a salad could fill an empty stomach.

grace (*see Ps. 68:18, Rom. 10:21, Rev. 22:17*). When that drawing influence ceases, how great a chill of darkness and isolation shall descend upon the rejectors of mercy. Christ felt this, and more. He felt in our place the wrath of God against sin and recalcitrant sinners, so we could benefit from His reconciling mercy and grace. May God spare us from a languid, perfunctory response to this greatest of vicarious interventions dared and done for our everlasting good.

IV. "It Is Finished" (John 19:30).

What a word of irrevocable assurance! In Greek Scripture it is one word: *Tetelesmai!* Christ, whose wisdom is unsearchable, whose resources are boundless, whose grace is inexhaustible, declares that the most significant transaction of time and eternity is finished. It was His meat and drink to do His Father's will and finish the work He had given Him to do (*see John 4:34, 5:36, 17:4*).

Witnessing

Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine you have been informed you would never again see, speak to, or come into contact with your closest loved ones. Focus solely on this news. Suppose you are now told you will experience complete and absolute separation from Jesus. Let the terrible finality of this sink in. Now share with the group your *honest* reaction—physical, emotional, spiritual, mental—to such news. Did you experience any of the following: shock, disbelief, grief, anger, fear, abandonment, pain, horror, agony, displeasure, or loss?

If so, you have gained a glimmer of what our Savior experienced as He hung on the cross and the full weight of humanity's sins fell on His shoulders. He cried out to His Father, from whom He felt totally alienated. He could not see past the terrible present. Yet, He refused to save Himself. He knew that if He gave in to the taunts slung at Him to save Himself, humanity would be lost to eternity.

His example of self-sacrificing love can never be duplicated. Yet, we are able to hold up Christ's example before others when we minister to those in great physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. While volunteering at your local hospital, you will find more than ample opportunity to share Christ's plan of salvation with those coping with physical pain. Share the story of the Cross with them; remind them the pain they are experiencing is short-lived; they will pass through it. Perhaps they *will* fall asleep as a result of sin, but you can help them prepare to meet Jesus when He comes again.

Whatever the circumstances you encounter, your witness to others in uplifting the story of Christ and His victory on the cross over pain, despair, and sin provides peace and hope to those in greatest need of it.

“God Was in Christ”

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19).

We can look at the world all around us and see the cost of sin. Every one of us, to one degree or another, faces its sad results.

In what ways has sin (not just your own but sin in general) impacted your life and brought you sorrow?

Yet, it is only at the Cross that we can see just how terrible sin really is, because it took something as extreme, something as incredible, as the Cross to atone for it. The seriousness of the remedy is a way to judge the seriousness of the offense. If someone had to do five hours of community service as a punishment for a crime, you could guess that whatever that crime was, it wasn’t too bad. In contrast, if that person faced death, you’d assume that whatever he or she did, it was deemed serious. Thus, nothing has revealed the horror and gravity of sin like the Cross, where God, “in Christ,” suffered the ultimate consequences of sin so that we don’t have to ourselves.

Read prayerfully and carefully 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 in the context of Philippians 2:6. How do they help us understand how bad sin is?

The gulf caused by sin between humankind and God was so serious that it took God’s inflicting the punishment of sin upon Himself in order to save us from sin, in order to reconcile us to Him. Whatever the mysteries of the Godhead, we must never forget that “God was in Christ” on the cross, bearing in Himself the penalty of sin. Sin is so bad that it took this, the Cross, in order to save us from it. The debt that the world owed God because of sin was so great that only God Himself could pay for it.

How have you experienced personally the reconciliation talked about in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that has come through “God . . . in Christ”? What does this reconciliation mean on a practical level? How does it impact your view of yourself and others? How should it impact every relationship you have?

On Calvary He left nothing wanting to complete the provisions for the salvation of the whole world, thus making possible the salvation of all who are willing to believe and receive Christ as Redeemer. Provision to save all who desire life in Him—that's authority; that's love universal; that's grace in its fully effective application.

V. God Was in Christ.

Calvary was the pivotal point of suffering and sacrifice, where “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other” (*Ps. 85:10*). Without compromising the integrity of His law or the stability of the divine government, Jesus took all our sin so we would be filled with all His righteousness. In the glorious ocean of this grace Paul bathed his mind and fashioned his understanding of salvation that ploughs through every wave of doubt, denial, and disputation. For him and every true believer the accomplishments of Christ on Calvary are the Everlasting Yea. Though He hid His face from His Son for several eternity-freighted hours at the junction of Deliverance and Doom, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (*2 Cor. 5:19*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Were you afraid of the dark when you were a child? If so, why? How do you handle the dark during a bad storm? When you hear a strange noise? When you are alone?

Verses for Group Focus: *Matthew 27:41-46.*

Thought Questions:

- ① What do you think was the intent of the words spoken by the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders in verses 42 and 43? What were they trying to accomplish when they spoke this way? Imagine the effect these words must have had on Jesus.
- ② Do you think Jesus' words in Matthew 27:46 were a cry of doubt or an earnest appeal to God? Explain your answer.

Application Questions:

- ① Did God forsake Jesus? Does God ever forsake us?
- ② What is the difference between discouragement and despair?
- ③ How does Jesus' experience with literal and spiritual darkness impact your life and your feelings?
- ④ What difference does the Cross make in your life as you deal with literal and spiritual darkness?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 741–764; *Early Writings*, pp. 177, 180, 209, 253; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 348, 503; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 304.

“When our Redeemer consented to take the cup of suffering in order to save sinners, His capacity for suffering was the only limitation to His suffering. . . . By dying in our behalf, He gave an equivalent for our debt. Thus He removed from God all charge of lessening the guilt of sin. By virtue of My oneness with the Father, He says, My suffering and death enable Me to pay the penalty of sin. By My death . . . His grace can act with unbounded efficiency.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 69.

“Christ felt much as sinners will feel when the vials of God’s wrath shall be poured out upon them. Black despair, like the pall of death, will gather about their guilty souls, and then they will realize to the fullest extent the sinfulness of sin. Salvation has been purchased for them by the suffering and death of the Son of God. It might be theirs, if they would accept of it willingly, gladly; but none are compelled to yield obedience to the law of God. If they refuse the heavenly benefit and choose the pleasures and deceitfulness of sin, they have their choice, and at the end receive their wages, which is the wrath of God and eternal death. They will be forever separated from the presence of Jesus, whose sacrifice they had despised. They will have lost a life of happiness and sacrificed eternal glory for the pleasures of sin for a season.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 210.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In our place Christ experienced His Father’s wrath against sin. Explain how divine wrath against sin is perfectly consistent with God’s character of love. If God had no wrath against sin, what moral climate would that create for the perpetuation of rebellion? *John 3:16-21, 36; Rom. 1:16-19; Eph. 5:1-8.*

- ❷ Why is the idea that we can somehow earn our salvation an idea that subtly degrades the Cross? How does the Cross prove the futility of our works to save us?