

The Cross: The Hour of Darkness

The Story: part 26

April 9, 2017

DAY 1: The cross

Matthew 27:41 (RSV) So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, "I am the Son of God."

⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

1. How did the religious leader treat Jesus? (v. 41)
2. How did the robbers treat Jesus? (v. 44)
3. If you had been Jesus, how would you have likely responded? (Resist giving the "Sunday School" response. Think back when someone or people reviled or mocked you. How DID you respond?)
4. What was the assessment of Jesus' death on the cross by the religious leaders? (v. 42)
5. Were they correct? Why or why not?
6. Jesus could not both save himself and save us also.
7. He could save himself and leave us in eternal jeopardy.
8. He could save us and lose his own life on the cross.
9. The algorithm of God is that God restores life to the world by the death of his Son.
10. What strikes you most from today's passage?

DAY 2: The holiness of God

1. The cross reveals both the stunning holiness of God and the severity of sin.

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

2. After the Hebrews crossed the Red Sea, and watched the destruction of the Egyptian army, this is what was sung ...

Exodus 15:11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

3. The holiness of God is contrasted with our lack of holiness. The irony is that our human nature tells us "we're doing just fine, thank you." In the book of Revelation, the church in Laodicea is about to receive a shocking letter!

Revelation 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

4. How did the people view themselves?

5. On what were they basing their flattering evaluation of themselves? (v. 17)

6. What was God's evaluation of them? (v. 16-17).

7. What was the need prescription? (v. 18)

8. It is impossible to change our human nature, from unholiness to holiness without humility and dependence on God, and the power of God to change us. When we see Jesus on the cross for our sin and repent and believe in what He accomplished for us, the process of becoming holy begins. But all through our lives the process continues!

DAY 3: God's holiness AND love

1. Two seemingly contradictory qualities of God exist simultaneously: He is both merciful and just. He is holy and loving. He deals with sin as it ought to be dealt with, by the blood of sacrifice, and at the same time invites us into intimate relationship with Him as our “papa.”

Romans 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

There is no difference,

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

2. What does Paul say about our condition of sin?

3. How is sin justly dealt with? What is the penalty for sin? (v. 25-26)

4. How does an unrighteous people become righteous in God's sight? (v. 21-22)

5. If God was only holy, and not loving, what would happen to us?

6. If God was only loving and did not care about holiness, what would happen to us?

7. Sin, if left unchecked and unforgiven will destroy us, and all we hold dear. It's only a matter of time.

DAY 4: God as human...

1. The gospel is the unimaginable solution to the human problem of sin. It is a solution that:

- a. Is divine in planning (from before the beginning of time)
- b. is divine in operation (God will supply the solution to the problem of sin, not man)
- c. is divine in execution (Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God takes our place to pay the just punishment for sin. The justice of God and the love of God, combined in one event!

2. We pick up the crucifixion event three hours in ...

Matthew 27:45 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.

⁴⁶ *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

⁴⁷ *When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."*

⁴⁸ *Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.*

⁴⁹ *The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."*

⁵⁰ *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*

3. What strikes you about the humanity of Jesus, here?

4. At the same time, Jesus as Son of God (deity) dies in the sinners' place.

5. We can now be received by a holy God! Sin has been justly punished and paid for!

6. We are GIVEN the righteousness of God as a gift!

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

7. How does the idea of God, not only thinking up the solution for sin, providing the sacrifice for our sin, but also substituting Himself in our place strike you?

DAY 5: Made right with God!

1. At the death of Jesus several phenomenal things happened!

Matthew 27:51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

2. The curtain of the temple separated the Holy of Holies from everyone else. Only the high priest could go in to the Holy of Holies, once a year. When the curtain split it symbolized that the complete atonement for sin had once and for all been accomplished! It was a stunning visual aid of the wonder of the gospel!

3. Here's the second phenomenal event immediately following the death of Jesus:

Matthew 27:52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

4. What was symbolized here was the power of the death of Christ to provide real life for people, even dead ones! It also illustrates the resurrection power of God over death!

5. The third phenomenal event occurred at the foot of the cross:

Matthew 27:54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

6. The earthquake is reminiscent of the ground shaking when Moses received the ten commandments and the law of God. The Roman guards sense the divine in the event in two ways:

- a. Jesus Christ was no mere mortal man. He was divine!
- b. They sensed the justice of God in the death of Christ, the darkening of the skies in mid-afternoon, and the earthquake.

7. Which one of these events strikes you the most? Why?

8. As we come to the end of our week, we have looked at some of the theology of holiness and sin, righteousness and punishment for sin, the person and work of Christ. What has stuck with you, looking back on the cross?