

The Story (23) – Hour of Darkness

By Ashby Camp

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I. Introduction

A. The topic for this morning is "Hour of Darkness," referring to Jesus' death by crucifixion and the events leading up to it. I want to sketch for you what took place during those days in early April A.D. 30 (or perhaps A.D. 33). I have been helped in this regard by the recent book by Andreas Kostenberger and Justin Taylor titled *The Final Days of Jesus*.

B. Jesus' public ministry following his baptism by John the Baptist lasted only a few years. His crucifixion was simply a murder under the guise of law, but as evil as it was it was, in God's wisdom, a central aspect of Jesus' ministry, the work he had come to perform.

C. Jesus came into this world as God's Messiah, as the ultimate servant of God who would usher in God's kingdom, God's final solution for the healing of this sin-sick, broken, and fragmented creation. Jesus is the center of the Godhead's rescue effort, the Great Reconciliation Project, because he took on himself the penalty that all human sin deserved. This allows God to forgive sinners without trivializing sin, to forgive in a way that is consistent with his nature, a way that expresses his love without neglecting his holiness and justice.

D. Christ's sacrifice is therefore the key to healing all the consequences of sin, even the damage it caused to the nonhuman creation. Thus Paul in Col. 1:19-20 speaks of Jesus as the one through whom God the Father reconciled *all things* to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. He says in Eph. 1:9-10 that the mystery of God's will for the administration of the fullness of the times is to bring *all things* together in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20, ESV).

E. So whereas Jesus was murdered, killed by the hands of lawless men, God in his foresight incorporated that work of evil into his plan to redeem creation. You see that perhaps most clearly in Acts 2:23. Evil men did not overpower Jesus in taking his life; he laid it down, submitted himself to their brutality that God's wrath might be justly or righteously averted.

II. Christ's Death and the Week Preceding

INTRODUCTION

A. We see in John 11 that after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany, which is only about two miles from Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders made plans to put him to death. Jesus then withdrew with his disciples to a town called Ephraim, which was near the wilderness.

B. As the time grew near for the annual Feast of Passover, which marked the beginning of the weeklong Feast of Unleavened bread, Jewish pilgrims from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem. Many would come a week early to allow time for any ritual purification that may have been necessary, and they were talking about Jesus and wondering if he was going to attend the Feast. Excitement, tension, and wonder filled the air.

FRIDAY SUNDOWN THROUGH SATURDAY NIGHT

Jesus arrived in Bethany on Friday evening, just as the Sabbath began. The next evening, after the Sabbath had ended, a crowd of Jews from Jerusalem went to Bethany to see both Jesus and Lazarus, the man he earlier had raised from the dead.

SUNDAY DURING THE DAY

A. The following day, meaning the daylight hours of Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives riding on a young male donkey that had never before been ridden and being accompanied by a mature donkey, presumably the young donkey's mother.

1. This was a deliberate fulfillment of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's future king would come riding on a young donkey. The crowds understand the symbolism. The people threw palm branches in his path to create a kind of royal red carpet and proclaimed him the Davidic king, the Son of David.

2. This is where the Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke the crowds for their dangerous and inappropriate words. But Jesus quotes Ps. 8:2 from the LXX which refers to children praising God himself (Mat.21:16) and declares that if they were silent the very stones would cry out (Lk. 19:40).

B. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem as he approaches the city. In response to a request by some Greeks who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Feast, Jesus predicted his death by crucifixion, made clear that was the purpose for which he had come into the world, and hinted that it would be the means of Satan's ultimate defeat.

C. Jesus visited the temple complex and checked it all out. Because it was already late in the day, he then returned with the disciples to Bethany.

MONDAY DURING THE DAY

A. As Jesus and his disciples return to Jerusalem on Monday morning, Jesus curses a fig tree that did not have the edible buds that appeared prior to fig season. He did so as a kind of acted out parable of judgment on Israel for its refusal to give him what he had a right to expect. A fig tree was often used in the O.T. as a symbol of Israel.

B. Inside the city, Jesus goes straight for the temple, knowing full well from his prior visit what he would find there. Consumed with holy zeal and righteous indignation, he overturns the tables of the moneychangers – those who for a fee were exchanging currency into the Tyrian shekels needed to pay the temple tax – and chasing out the merchants who were selling sacrificial animals in the court of the Gentiles. This was a stunning rebuke to the Jewish religious leaders who had accepted this corruption of worship into a means of financial gain, no doubt at the expense of the poor. This only further seals his death sentence. When evening comes, Jesus and his disciples again leave the city.

TUESDAY DURING THE DAY AND EVENING

A. On Tuesday morning Jesus returned to the temple where crowds had gathered to hear him. The chief priests, scribes, and elders immediately confronted him demanding to know by what authority he had ejected people from the temple the day before. They had authority over the temple and its activities, so how dare he do what he did. This is when Jesus tells them he'll answer their question if they'll answer his: John's baptism – was it from heaven or from man?

B. Jesus stayed on the offensive with a series of parables. In the parable of the two sons he condemns the religious authorities for not accepting John's message; in the parable of the tenants, they are represented as disobedient, thieving, and murdering tenants; and in the parable of the wedding feast they are those who reject God's invitation to the messianic banquet.

C. There is more back and forth where they try to trap Jesus in various ways. He parries all their attempts and challenges their assumption about the Messiah by asking how he could be both David's son and David's Lord. He then launches a lengthy and scathing criticism of the scribes and Pharisees which left no doubt that he was not going to ally himself with the Jewish leadership. Rather, his aim was to overthrow their authority and replace it with his own.

D. As they are leaving the temple at the end of the day on Tuesday, the disciples are marveling at the temple structure and Jesus tells them that not one stone will be left upon another. As they continue out of the city, they stop on the Mount of Olives where Jesus speaks to them about the future in response to their question about his comments regarding the temple.

E. That evening (the beginning of Wednesday) Jesus attended a dinner in Bethany in his honor with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at the home of Simon the (former) leper. Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and head and wiped his feet with her hair. (John 12:1 says Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover, but he does not specify that the dinner noted in 12:2-8 took place on that same day. It seems better to locate it two days before the Passover as indicated by Mat. 26:2 and Mk. 14:1.)

WEDNESDAY DURING THE DAY

A. On Wednesday morning Jesus returned to teach the people waiting in the temple to hear him. The average people were drawn to and excited by him, but the religious leaders were working overtime to figure out how to kill him.

B. The chief priests, scribes, and elders – representatives of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body – met with the high priest Caiaphas in his home. They concluded that they would need to wait until the Feast of Unleavened Bread was over because at that time the crowds would disperse and they would run a much lower risk of inciting a riot by arresting Jesus.

THURSDAY DURING THE DAY AND EVENING

A. Thursday (from Wednesday evening to Thursday evening) was the day of Passover preparation, the day when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. On the morning of that day, Jesus sent Peter and John to secure a large upper room in a house in Jerusalem and to prepare for the Passover meal. Jesus arranged for them to make contact with a man who would direct them to the appropriate place, and part of what they were to say was that "the Teacher says, 'My time is at hand.'"

B. Thursday evening, which was the beginning of the next day, was the time of the Passover meal. This is the famous "Last Supper."

1. During the Supper, Jesus washes the disciples' feet. When Peter balked at allowing Jesus to perform such menial service on him, Jesus told him that unless he is willing to accept such service from him he would have no part with him. In other words, Jesus is going to stoop even lower than washing feet – he's going to stoop to the disgrace of the cross – and one must accept that humiliating service from him in order to have the life that only he offers.

2. Jesus informs the disciples of his coming betrayal by one of them and then institutes the Lord's Supper by transforming the symbolic meal of the Passover into a symbolic representation of his body and blood offered as an atoning sacrifice. When pressed, he identifies the betrayer as Judas by handing him a morsel he had dipped in some kind of juice. Judas then leaves the gathering.

3. After some teaching, they sang a hymn and then went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus taught that they would abandon him and predicted Peter's three-time denial of him, and then they went into the Garden of Gethsemane which was located on the Mount of Olives.

C. In the Garden Jesus continues to teach his disciples and prays to God in agony over his impending suffering. He knows he is about to bear God's judgment for sin as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world. If there could be another way, he wants it; but if there cannot he is fully submissive to the Father's will. And as Jesus agonizes, the disciples sleep.

FRIDAY FROM AFTER MIDNIGHT TO LATE AFTERNOON

A. In the wee small hours of Friday, Judas, the betraying Apostle, leads an armed crowd sent by the Sanhedrin to the Garden where he knew or suspected Jesus and the disciples would be. He presumably convinced the authorities that they need not wait to have Jesus killed because he could help them take him covertly under cover of darkness. When Jesus is arrested, the disciples all flee.

B. Jesus first is taken for an informal hearing before Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Perhaps Annas had masterminded Jesus' arrest after Judas had approached the chief priests offering to betray him. He questions Jesus about his teaching, and Jesus, knowing that Annas was just looking for a way to trap him, tells him he could consult those he had taught because he made no effort to conceal his teaching. This is where Jesus is struck for allegedly being disrespectful, a charge he denies and calls them to prove.

C. Jesus was then sent bound for a trial before Caiaphas and part of the Sanhedrin, a quorum (at least 23 members) being referred to as the "whole council," who had quickly gathered at Caiaphas's house for a hurried trial. Jesus is silent in the face of false accusations but confesses he is the Christ, the Son of God, when put under oath to do so. Caiaphas and company now felt they could spin that to Pilate as a death penalty case of insurrection and treason, but of course, their own objections were theological – they claimed he was a blasphemer. They all condemned him as worthy of death, and the beatings and mocking began. And as predicted, Peter denied the Lord and the rooster crowed.

D. The formal verdict could only be delivered after sunrise, which was done, no doubt with the remaining members of the Sanhedrin who had filtered in over the hours. Jesus is condemned to death and sent to Pilate for final say on and administration of their desired death penalty. This is when Judas hangs himself.

E. The Jews press Pilate to execute Jesus by casting him as a political threat, but when Pilate learns that Jesus is from Galilee he tries to sidestep the issue by sending him to Herod Antipas, who had jurisdiction over that region. This was one of Herod the Great's sons, the one who had John the Baptist beheaded and who Jesus called "that fox." Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him, but when Jesus would not perform miracles for him, he sent him back to Pilate.

F. Pilate tries to appease the Jewish leaders by punishing Jesus, but they would have none of it. He then offered to let the crowd choose whether to release Jesus or a violent insurrectionist named Barabbas, but the people were persuaded to choose Barabbas. Pilate has Jesus flogged (something less severe than scourging) – where he was also mocked, given a crown of thorns, and abused (Jn. 19:2-3) – and presents him as having been sufficiently punished, but the Jews cry for his crucifixion. He questions Jesus again but finally relents and sentences him to be crucified.

G. Jesus is scourged by Roman soldiers, which was the brutal prelude to crucifixion. It involved being beaten severely with a whip that had pieces of bone and metal woven into it. They repeated the mocking and abuse they had engaged in during the previous flogging and then marched Jesus to Golgotha to be crucified. At some point, a man named Simon of Cyrene is grabbed to carry Jesus' cross, meaning the crossbeam, presumably because Jesus was too weak to carry it. It would have weighed 30 to 40 pounds.

H. Jesus is crucified between two robbers or insurrectionists, traditionally called thieves, under the charge: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. The mocking continues by leaders and others passing by. The robbers revile Jesus, but one has a change of heart, and Jesus tells him "Today you will be with me in Paradise." The crucifying soldiers divided up his clothes in fulfillment of prophecy.

I. A darkness falls on the land for about 3 hours, and Jesus declares "It is finished" and then gives up his life on Friday afternoon. There was an earthquake and some other supernatural occurrences, and then the soldiers pierce Jesus' side with a spear releasing a flow of water and blood. Joseph of Arimathea is given permission to bury Jesus, and with the assistance of Nicodemus puts him in a nearby newly cut tomb. To all the world, it looks like Rome has crushed another pretender. But Sunday's coming.