

The Memoirs of Peter
The Death of God's Only Son, Part 1

Mark 15:33-39

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Well, I encourage you to take your Bibles and open to Mark, chapter 15. We're coming to the end of Mark's gospel, really the memoirs of Peter as Mark wrote his gospel under Peter's direction. But we're coming, not merely to the end, but to the zenith, to the apex, to the point to which Mark has been driving. And that is the death of God's only Son. If you really want to grasp God's love for you, contemplate what happened at the cross. Set aside some time, find yourself alone with the scripture, read and meditate on the account of the death of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "God demonstrated," He put on display, in an unimaginable way, His love for us when Christ died for us when we were still God's enemies. The cross, as Ian Murray titles his book, was the pulpit of God's love. Ken Hughes writes, "We must, therefore, invite the cross's raw horror to assault us, its blood, its water, and glistening bone, ought to go to our hearts, and our hearts out to repeatedly respond, 'This is how I am loved.'"

Let's read together the record of the death of God's only Son. Mark 15:33:

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACTHANI," which is translated "My God, My God, why have You forsaken, Me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

As we've made our way through the crucifixion account, since Jesus's arrest we have heard from a lot of different people about the death of Jesus. The Jewish leaders accused Him of blasphemy and condemned Him to be deserving of death. They said to Pilate, "He stirs up the people," He incites them to rebellion. We have a law and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God. He's deserving of death for his sedition against Rome and for his blasphemy against God.

The Jewish people that were gathered in that marketplace that morning at the inciting of the Jewish leaders, they had their voice as well, they said “Away with this man, release for us Barabbas!” “Crucify Him!” And again, and again, and again they shouted, “Crucify Him!” The gentile leaders spoke about Jesus that morning as well. Pilate said, Herod found no guilt in this man, I have found no guilt in Him, and nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. But the text says, “Wishing to satisfy the crowd,” Pilate delivered Him to be crucified.

Then there was the crowd gathered around the cross. They have certainly made their voices heard, voices of mockery and ridicule and blasphemy. They were hurling abuse at Him, saying, “He saved others, let Him save Himself, if this is the Messiah of God, His chosen One, for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” We’ve heard from a lot of voices. Now it’s time to hear from someone who had not yet weighed in that morning, God Himself. It’s time to hear from God.

Now perhaps you have heard all your life what the death of Jesus means and meant. Or, maybe you have few ideas of your own. But this evening, it’s God’s turn. It’s His turn to explain His perspective of the death of His Son. It’s His turn to explain the meaning of it all. I want you to listen this evening to God’s commentary on the cross. You see, through a series of divine miracles that occurred that afternoon, God the Father made His voice heard, and He made it heard above the taunting and the ridiculing and the mockery of the crowd.

I want us to look at the cross from the perspective of God Himself. That’s what these verses reveal. From twelve noon until three p.m., God made His perspective about Jesus’s death crystal clear. You can’t miss it. During Jesus’s final three hours on the cross, through a series of divine miracles, God the Father provided us with a divine commentary on the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

The first in this series of miracles by which God made His perspective known is a miraculous darkness. John tells us, John the apostle, tells us that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, or about nine o’clock in the morning. During the three hours from nine a.m. until noon, Calvary had been a very busy place. A lot had been going on. The soldiers, of course, who had been assigned to the crucifixion detail, carried out their grisly task. They attached Jesus to that cross-member that He Himself had carried until He’d stumbled and fallen, and then that Simon of Cyrene had carried the rest of the way to Golgotha. They attached Him to that cross-member with spikes. Then, they lifted Jesus and His body, attached to that member, they hoisted it up, probably by rope, to the free-standing post to which they commonly mounted the implement of crucifixion.

Then, the taunting began. After the soldiers had divided His garments, everybody began to have their fun. Those passing by ridiculed Jesus. The Scribes and Pharisees, along with the chief priest, ridiculed them not so much openly, that would be lacking in nobility and dignity, but, instead, they did it among themselves – to one another. There was the crass crowd who had gathered for this spectacle. They taunted Jesus. These spectacles of public execution had

become a crude form of entertainment in the Roman Empire. And there were those there who just enjoyed a little blood and a little gore.

Jesus remained silent for those three hours, nine to noon. Except for three brief statements, which we'll look at in a moment. But after those three hours, something dramatic occurs. Look at verse 33: "When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour." By the Roman clock this is twelve noon to three in the afternoon. At noon the sky became dark and it stayed like that for three hours. In Luke 23:45, Luke says it's "because the sun was obscured." The Greek word for obscured is the standard way to describe a solar eclipse. So some people have supposed that this must have been a solar eclipse.

But we know that it was not. It was not a normal solar eclipse for several reasons. Because it lasted for three hours. Also, because it happened at Passover. Passover always happened at full moon, and a solar eclipse can only occur at new moon. So the moon was in the wrong position for an eclipse. And dust storms, that's another explanation for this darkness, dust storms don't occur during the wet spring season when Passover occurs.

So, according to Luke, apparently whatever happened was like a solar eclipse, but not an eclipse. We don't know the degree of darkness. It's simply described as dark. It may have been pitch-black as midnight or it might have been the eerie cast of a solar eclipse, although it was not. But it says there was darkness that "fell over the whole land." That Greek expression that's translated "over the whole land" can mean the whole earth; that's certainly possible. The God who created all of this is more than capable of making that happen. It can also mean the entire land of Israel. We can't be absolutely certain but I lean toward the second, the entire land of Israel. However widely this darkness was felt, it can't be naturally explained. That's what I want you to see. God miraculously covered the sun for three hours as His Son hung naked on the cross.

You know, think about the irony in all of this. Thirty-three years before, during the darkest of night, God made it bright as midday with the angels singing. And now, 33 years later, at His death, there is darkness at noon. Why did God send the darkness? What was the message that God intended to send? Well, there have been a variety of explanations that have been offered. Some have said that it's because the creation itself was showing its respect for the Son of God. This is probably captured most famously in Isaac Watts's classic hymn, he wrote "Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut his glories in, when Christ the mighty Maker died, for man the creature's sin."

Others say, no, it wasn't that. It was a sign, it was a sign of God's disgust with the blackest of all crimes. The Babylonian Talmud taught that the darkening of the sun was God's judgment for an especially wicked sin. So maybe this was God's judgment, the display of His anger, about the wickedness of killing His righteous Son. Some say that it was meant to picture the spiritual blindness of God's people, Israel, who crucified their own Messiah, the Prince of Life.

But I think the most clearly biblical reason that God brought the darkness was to show His own judgment against sin. This has always been true, hasn't it? I mean, think back to the darkness in Egypt. One of the great plagues with which God brought His people out of Egypt, what did that darkness represent? It represented His judgment on Egypt before the first Passover. There are some passages that describe this as well. Just turn to one of them; turn with me to Amos. The prophet Amos, chapter 8. Listen as God describes one of the displays of his judgment. "It will come about," this is Amos 8:9:

"It will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon And make the earth dark in broad daylight. Then I will turn your festivals into mourning And all your songs into lamentation; And I will bring sackcloth on everyone's loins And baldness on every head."

In other words, everybody is going to mark themselves as mourning, "And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son and the end of it will be like a bitter day." God says, I'm going to bring darkness, and that darkness will be a sign of My judgment against sin, and it will bring about a time of mourning as if for an only son. This is what was going on at Calvary. The darkness was a picture alright, it was a sign, it was a sign of God's judgment against the sins for which Jesus was dying.

Think about it for a moment. In the New Testament Jesus often refers to the place of the ultimate destiny of those who reject Him as what? Outer darkness. Outer darkness. D.A. Carson writes, "The cosmic blackness hints at the deep judgment that was taking place." In other words, Jesus was truly taking our place. He was experiencing the judgment of God, and that judgment is always pictured in darkness. Hell itself is described as a place of unending darkness. And God was picturing the reality that was happening as He judged our sins on Jesus. Jesus got the darkness that you and I would have gotten for all eternity.

William Hendrickson writes, "The darkness meant judgment, judgment of God upon our sins. His wrath, as it were, burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus. So that He, as our substitute, suffered more intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation and forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior bore its horrors in our place." That's what the darkness represented. Hell came to Calvary that day.

How do we know that's true? Because Jesus Himself explained His death in what way? He said He was going to give His life as a ransom in the place of many. He was suffering as you and I deserve to suffer forever in the pitch blackness of God's judgment. John Calvin writes, "It was an astonishing display of the wrath of God that He did not spare even His only begotten Son and was not appeased in any other way than by that price." If God's wrath and judgment against our sin could not be appeased in any other way than in punishing His Son in darkness, what a terrifying statement that is about how God views our sin.

From twelve to three it was dark in Israel, in Jerusalem, and it wasn't a solar eclipse. It was a miracle. It was a supernatural darkness. God the Father was making a profound commentary on the cross. His Son was dying in the darkness that we would have suffered forever.

There was a second divine miracle that day. Not only a miraculous darkness, but secondly, a miraculous desertion. Look at verse 34. "At the ninth hour," stop there for a moment. When you put the record of the crucifixion from all four gospels together, it is clear that Jesus spoke only seven times from the cross. Those are called "the seven last sayings of Jesus."

Jesus spoke the first three of these seven last sayings between nine a.m. and noon. The first one was when He prayed out loud, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing," according to Luke 23:34. The second time He spoke during those three hours, He spoke to the repentant thief, and He said, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise," Luke 23:43.

The third time Jesus spoke before the noon hour, and we don't know how far before the noon hour, is when Jesus said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son." There at the foot of the cross was John the Apostle and Jesus's mother. Jesus knew that his brothers had not believed in Him, and I believe that the Holy Spirit did not allow Him to exercise His omniscience and to know that His brothers would come to faith in Him, and so He's taking care of His mother. And He says, "Woman, behold your son!" And then he said to John the Apostle, "Behold, your mother!" John 19:26 and 27. That was all before the darkness, that was all before the noon hour.

The next time Jesus spoke was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was at that time, at three o'clock, that the other four statements came out of His mouth. And we'll see them unfold in the next few minutes. So, understand this, as far as we know from the biblical record, Jesus had been completely silent for at least three hours, maybe four or more hours. At noon an eerie darkness had covered the whole land. And we're told of nothing that transpired during those three hours of darkness.

But suddenly, around three p.m., out of that strange darkness, Jesus's voice was heard. Notice verse 34, "At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice." Out of the darkness Jesus shouted a prayer to God. Normally, crucifixions were punctuated by the screams of those who suffered, sometimes in rage and curses against those who had nailed them there. Other times, in pain and agony and despair. But Jesus's demeanor was different. The text says, and this is fascinating, the text literally says, Jesus shouted with a mega voice. That's exactly what the text says. Jesus shouted, or screamed, with a mega voice.

And notice what He cried out with a mega voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACTHANI." Jesus apparently spoke those words in Aramaic, which was the common language of Israel in the first century. Jesus knew and spoke three different languages. He spoke Greek, and He spoke Hebrew, but here, in His first language, the language of His home, the language of Aramaic, He

shouts the words of Psalm 22:1. Why Psalm 22:1? It's the cry, Psalm 22, understand this, Psalm 22, is the cry of a righteous person who suffers without cause.

This is really an amazing thing. It shows Jesus's familiarity with the scripture. In the greatest moment of His pain and suffering, He instinctively expressed His feelings in the language of scripture. He knew the text that best captured what He was facing at that moment. It also shows us that Jesus, as the perfect human being, drew His strength from the scripture. But beyond that, this expresses the great anguish of His heart.

Now, think about this for a moment. Jesus didn't have to say this out loud. He could have expressed this from His heart to His Father. And there's a certain sense in which, if you or I were in that situation, we would have done so silently because to have done so out loud would have merely to invite further ridicule and further harassment from the crowd. But Jesus doesn't do that. Because He meant this to be a testimony to us of what was happening between Him and His Father during those dark three hours.

Notice verse 34, after the Aramaic is quoted, we're told what it means. Mark translates for his Roman readers, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" There's a lot in these words. Jesus addresses God as "My God." This is the only time during Jesus's earthly life which addressed the Father as anything other than "My Father." But as He's bearing our sins, He addresses Him not as Father, but as God. And yet, at the same time, it shows that the suffering He's enduring hasn't broken His loyalty to God. He still refers to Him as "MY GOD, MY GOD."

But, at the same time, these words show us that Jesus was personally and painfully aware that during those hours, God the Father had forsaken Him. The word "forsaken" means to desert, or to abandon. To completely leave alone, to turn one's back on. This is really impossible for us to plumb the depths. Martin Luther once set himself to contemplate and to study this statement of our Lord on the cross. It's recorded that, "For a long time he continued without food in deepest meditation, and in one position on his chair. When at length he rose from his thoughts, he was heard to exclaim with amazement, 'God forsaken of God, who can understand that.'"

We can never plumb the depths of all that this means. I mean, if Jesus cried out "Why?," then who are we to think we can fully understand? But there are truths that are communicated in this. First of all, the gospel writers want us to know that Jesus, at this point, at three o'clock in the afternoon, minutes before His death, still has a full reservoir of physical strength. He cried out, He shouted, with a mega voice. We also need to understand that this was the deepest, most soul-shattering cry of misery that we could ever hear or ever imagine. And Jesus intended to be heard. Not merely by His Father, but also by those who were gathered that day.

There is a message from God in Jesus's cry. A message from God about why Jesus died forsaken. Think about that for a moment. We refer to a place that is utterly barren and

undeserving of human occupation as “godforsaken.” That day, Calvary was godforsaken. Jesus was godforsaken. Perhaps you understand something of that. Maybe, maybe you know what it is to be abandoned. To be abandoned by a spouse, or by a child, or by a friend. And try to imagine for a moment how deep the sense of isolation was that must have belonged to Jesus Christ. From eternity past, God the Father and Jesus had known the most intimate of relationships, and even during His earthly ministry, think about it, three years before as His ministry began, Matthew 3:17 says that “a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’” You just sense the love in that statement, in that communication.

At the transfiguration, just a few months before the crucifixion, in Matthew 17:5 “While he was still speaking a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’” Just a few hours before, during the last supper the previous night, Jesus had expressed His own confidence in the Father. In John 16:32, He told His disciples, “Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”

But in a miracle of divine love for us, for the six hours that Jesus hung on that cross, the fellowship and the communion that He had experienced with the Father as a man throughout His earthly life, was severed. Jesus was separated from the Father, separated from the Father’s love. The Father abandoned His Son’s human nature. D. Edmond Hiebert writes, “The barrier which Jesus felt between Himself and God was the barrier of the world’s sin laid upon Him. As the world’s sin-bearer He endured the divine wrath against sin. The burden of the world’s sin, His complete self-identification with sinners, involved not merely a felt, but a real abandonment by His Father.” This wasn’t simply something Jesus objectively felt. This was the reality. He was godforsaken, as you and I deserve to be godforsaken forever.

Why? Why was He forsaken by God? “Why,” He says, “have You forsaken Me?” The answer comes in a number of texts of scripture. The words that Jesus uses in this cry, comes from Psalm 22:1, “Why have You forsaken me?” I think one of the answers comes just two verses later in Psalm 22:3, for “You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.” Isaiah 59:2 says “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” This is what happens when we, as sinful human beings, sin; it creates a separation. Jesus didn’t sin, but the guilt for our sins were imputed to Him, and He was treated as though He had sinned, although He had not.

Scripture goes on, in Romans chapter 3, Paul gives His own divine commentary on the cross. Listen to Romans 3:25, God publicly displayed Christ “as a propitiation.” That is, as a satisfaction of His wrath. On the cross, God publicly displayed Jesus as the satisfaction of His wrath in His death through faith. This is what was happening. At the cross, God abandoned His

Son because He publicly displayed Him as the object of His wrath. The wrath you deserved, Christian. The wrath I deserved. He was godforsaken because we deserved to be godforsaken forever, suffering God's wrath.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, those familiar words that are some of my favorite in all of scripture, God "made Him," that is Jesus, "who knew no sin," He was not a sinner, He made Him "to be sin on our behalf." In other words, He credited our sins to Jesus. He took the sins out of your ledger, every sin you have ever or will ever commit, He took every single sin of thought and attitude and word and action, and He credited them to Jesus's account, and He poured out His anger against your sin on Him so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. So that we get credited to us, Jesus's perfect righteousness.

Galatians puts it this way, Galatians 3:13, He became "a curse for us." "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" the law says in Deuteronomy, and He became a curse for us. He took God's curse that we deserved. 1 Peter 2:24: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." What I want you to see is that God the Father turned His back on His own Son for you. That day God treated Jesus as you deserved to be treated in the darkness of judgment in the forsakenness of His presence. Because you see, the essence of eternal judgment is that sinners deserve separation from God. And that day Jesus was completely alone, as you and I would be in hell forever. In fact, listen to how Paul puts it in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, of those who are unbelievers, he says "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord." They will be godforsaken forever, and Jesus was godforsaken on the cross. On the cross He endured the separation from God that you deserved to experience for all eternity.

Notice the crowd's response to this deeply disturbing cry of our Lord's. Verse 35, "When some of the bystanders heard it," this is Mark 15:35, "When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, 'Behold, He is calling for Elijah.'" Now, it is possible that these people misunderstood Jesus and really thought that He was calling for Elijah, but it's not likely, because Jesus spoke in Aramaic, the language that was the most common language in the nation. He also shouted loudly, with a mega voice. He still had full physical strength at this point. He was not in the typical state of those who were about to die by crucifixion. And so it's more likely here that the crowd is simply continuing to mock Jesus, even though He is shrouded in the darkness.

You see, the Old Testament records that Elijah didn't die and was taken directly into heaven, so Jewish tradition taught that Elijah would respond to the cry of the righteous in the time of their need. So these men turned the infinite suffering of the Son of God into a cheap joke. They basically say, "Heh, this poor, deluded Messiah thinks Elijah will come to His rescue." When, in fact, they knew that He was calling out to God.

At some point right after His cry to God, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME," John the Apostle tells us that Jesus spoke what was the fifth word from the cross, "I am thirsty." In response to that cry, "I am thirsty," someone in the crowd is moved with sympathy and

compassion, we aren't told who it was, but it is probably one of the soldiers. Notice verse 36, "Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink." According to John's gospel, near the cross that day was a jar of cheap sour wine or vinegar diluted with water. It was the common beverage of soldiers and day laborers because it quenched their thirst better than water alone.

This compassionate person fills a sponge with this beverage and puts the sponge on a short reed. The reed of a hyssop plant, according to the gospels, and extends it up toward Jesus's mouth. By the way, this tells us something about the position in which Jesus was crucified. This hyssop reed would have been no longer than 18 inches, so Jesus wasn't suspended very high above the earth. Essentially what a full grown man could reach with his arm extended and 18 inches on top of it would reach the mouth of Jesus.

So he's giving Jesus a drink, but the rest of the people around aren't happy about this intervention. Listen to what Matthew writes, Matthew 27:49, "But the rest of them said," literally the Greek text says, "Let Him alone." It's addressed to an individual. Again the Greek is very specific, and here, it's clear that the crowd is addressing one person. And they say to this individual who's giving Jesus the drink, "Let Him alone," "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."

In other words, the crowd was saying, to this person who was showing some compassion to Jesus, "Stop giving Him something to drink and let's see if Elijah shows up to help Him." Now look back at Mark's version, Mark 15:36, "Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.'" Here, the man who is giving Jesus the drink is responding to the crowd. Again the nature of the word's here in plural, he's talking to the crowd and he essentially says to them, "Let me alone. Allow me to give Him this drink so that we can see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

You know, the amazing thing to me about this is God, through the cry of Jesus, has shown them that the death of His Son was about the divine separation from sin and sinners and yet they were too busy mocking Him to listen. The Father gave His commentary on the cross and it was crystal clear. In the cry of Jesus, He made it very clear what was really going on that day, Jesus was personally aware that He was godforsaken in our place.

The Father gave his commentary through a third miracle that happened that day. Not only a miraculous darkness and a miraculous desertion, but thirdly, a miraculous death. Verse 37, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry." Now, again, you have to understand what crucifixion was normally like. Usually, the death of crucifixion was the death of slow, gradual suffocation. Essentially, the person was propped in such a way with their arms extended so that they could gradually, when they needed air, push up on the weight of their feet, and pull up on the nails against the wrist. And they would then begin to push up and pull up to get air, and as soon as they got a

gasp of air, the pain would be too great in all of their extremities, they would again drop back down into a hanging position which collapsed the lungs and made it impossible to get sufficient air. So they would bear with that for a time until the pain of encroaching suffocation became too great, and then they would pull up against those wounds and again take in a great gasp of air and let themselves back down.

This process would go on hour after hour as the person slowly lost their strength. With each hour closer to death, the victim became weaker and weaker. And before death mercifully came, eventually unable even to speak, or even whisper, the victim would sometimes even become unconscious. So when Jesus cried out with a loud voice, understand this, it was a sign to everyone who understood crucifixion, that He was nowhere near death.

Now, He “uttered a loud cry,” verse 37 says. We can’t be absolutely sure which of the seven sayings of the cross He spoke here in verse 37, but I think probably it’s the sixth saying. It’s recorded in John’s gospel. In John 19:30, “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’” Tetelestai, it’s done. It’s a great word, a classic Greek word. When a sculptor finished a great piece of his work and he stood back to look at it, he would cry, “Tetelestai!” When an artist finished his masterpiece of a painting and he looked back to enjoy his work, again he would say “Tetelestai!” Sometimes when a bill was completely paid, a massive debt that had been paid over long periods of time and was eventually paid off in full, sometimes across the bill they would put the single word, “tetelestai.” Jesus uttered a loud cry, “Tetelestai!” The work which the Father had given Him, He had fully accomplished. He had given His life as a ransom for many.

Then, according to Luke, Jesus immediately spoke the seventh and final word. Luke 23:46, “And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.’” Again, I want you to see that in each case the gospel writers want us to understand that Jesus shouted these things, with a loud voice. Why? Because there’s a point being made. Mark describes the actual death of Jesus in these words, look at verse 37, “And He uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.”

Matthew, in his version, Matthew 27:50, says, “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.” The Greek word translated “yielded up” in Matthew’s account literally means to send away. It’s even translated in the gospels as “divorce.” Mark says, “Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.” John puts it this way in his version, John 19:30, “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” You see the common thread here? The point of the gospel accounts of the death of Jesus is crystal clear. Jesus was sovereign over the exact time of his own death. No one took Jesus’s life from Him. He gave it up when He chose. Jesus didn’t die because He’d been crucified. He could have endured for many more hours. He died because He chose, at that moment, to lay down His life for you and for me.

During His ministry, Jesus made this point very clear. Turn to John chapter 10. John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” He comes back to this in verse 17, “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.” Notice the active nature of this, “I lay down My life.” Verse 18, “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

In one sense, Jesus was murdered that day, but in another sense, He wasn't killed at all. He laid down His life for us. Think about it, when Pilate heard that Jesus was dead, He was very surprised to learn of it. Why? Because it was much too soon for the death of crucifixion. In fact, to hurry the process for the two thieves on each side of Jesus so that they could be taken down from the cross before the Sabbath began at sunset, the soldiers had taken a heavy wooden mallet or an iron bar and had shattered the bones of the lower legs of the thieves. Why? That kept them from pushing themselves up to get air and very quickly they would have died of suffocation. But when they came to Jesus, He was already dead. It's because His was a miraculous death. He had sent away His spirit. He had laid down His life. Listen to how John the apostle puts it in 1 John 3:16: “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.”

Listen, God wanted everyone to know that Jesus's life wasn't taken. It was laid down willingly for us, and Jesus chose to lay it down, to yield up His spirit, at three o'clock in the afternoon on that Friday. That's highly significant because it was Passover and the time of the afternoon sacrifices in the Temple were exactly three o'clock, according to Josephus. He is the Passover lamb. But unlike those lambs, His life was not taken from Him. He willingly laid it down. He gave it up. He bowed His head and yielded up His spirit. He sent it away. He died intentionally.

His was a miraculous death. Miraculous in how He died, it was voluntary. Miraculous in what it accomplished, it was efficacious. Remember, He died shouting, “It is finished!” Something was completed in His death, and that is the purchase of sinners. And it was a miraculous death in why He died, because it was substitutionary. But what I want you to see is, Jesus really died, and He did so when He chose, because He wanted us to know that nobody took His life, He gave it for you. Jesus really died.

Now, there's one other question to answer, and that is, where did He go? Where did Jesus go at the moment of His death? It wasn't to hell. That was a late addition to the Apostles' Creed. So where did He go? Well, His divine nature, remember He had two natures, divine and human natures. His divine nature continued to fill the universe and beyond. But His human nature was in two parts, like your human nature. He had a body and a human soul. His body, of course, stayed on the cross and was soon taken down before sunset, and was buried in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. But He also had a human soul. What happened to that human

soul? Well, listen to His own words, He said to the thief, “Today, you will be with Me in paradise.” And He ended His life by saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.”

You see here’s the amazing thing, in His death Jesus became the pattern of what happens to all those who are His followers when we die. To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. That’s where Jesus was. There’s one other miracle that happened that day, and Lord willing, we’ll look at it the next time we study Mark together.

But I want to end by reminding you that the Father was making a statement. He was making a statement about why Jesus was dying, and every one of these miracles was the Father saying, “Look, here’s what I’m doing. Here’s what I’m accomplishing.” Let me finish where I started. If you want to understand how much God the Father loves you, contemplate what He did to His own Son at the cross to rescue you.

Let’s pray together. Father, we are amazed that You would offer the Perfect One for us who were Your enemies. That You would demonstrate Your own love for us, in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, while we were rebels against You, while we hated You, while we took all of Your good gifts, all of the good things of life and we prostituted them for our own sinful ends. We refused to glorify You. We refused to give You thanks. And yet, Father, in eternity past, for reasons that we will never fully comprehend, You set Your eternal electing love upon us. And You sent Your Son into the world and You demonstrated what You were accomplishing that day through these divine miracles.

We thank You, O God, that Jesus endured the darkness that day that we deserved to endure forever. We thank You, O God, that He was godforsaken so that we never would be. You will never leave us. You will never forsake us. And we thank You, O God, that He died willingly. That he laid He laid down His life at a moment in time to become our Passover. The sacrifice that would satisfy Your justice against our sins. We bless You. We praise You. We love You, O God. May we live our lives as an expression of our love. May our mouths and our hearts be filled with praise, and may we look forward to the day when we can fall before You and thank You for Your Son, and sing “Worthy is the lamb that was slain.” We pray in Jesus name, amen.