

The Death of Christ (7) Seeing What God Means

KSBC 04.05.09

Luke 23:44-56

INTRO Do you see what I mean? Seeing is used as a term for understanding. Seeing something is similar to 'getting something.' Jesus crucifixion includes significant events where God combines seeing with understanding. The key to understanding the death of Christ is watching with care the powerful cosmic actions of God that he sends to interpret and explain what is happening.

People's response to the death of Christ is both interesting and varied. Do you 'see' what happened? Do you 'get it?' The death of Christ has significance for many in that it draws a sense of respect for someone who would do such a selfless act. It also stirs sadness in a religious kind of way in the heart of many as they identify with the injustice of what happened to Jesus. Many bow their heads in temporary grief as they walk away from being reminded of the cross. For some the crucifixion prompts a curiosity that has the appearance of allegiance or belief but in fact is just a heightened awareness that God did something at the cross. These responses make it difficult to know whether people really see or understand.

In his classic book, *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott states that 'the essential background to the cross is a balanced understanding of the gravity of sin and the majesty of God.' The cross is the place where sin and God meet. It is where God's love and wrath meet our sin. Stott lists 5 biblical metaphors that are used to help us understand the magnitude of our sinfulness and the magnificence of God's holiness. The five he elaborates on are height, distance, light, fire and vomit. Each image describes in vivid ways the truth that sin cannot approach God and God cannot tolerate sin. To redefine sin as a mild and temporary lapse instead of complete rebellion will render the cross as impressive but not threatening. To view God as 'indulgent instead of indignant' will lead us to see the crucifixion as important but essentially overly dramatic.

Luke records two events that happened while Jesus was on the cross, just before he died that make use of the distance and light metaphors to explain the meaning of the cross. God in fact is saying, while his Son is hanging on the cross giving his life up for us, 'look, do you see what I mean?' God uses distance and darkness to help us understand how he brings together these irreconcilable parties – sinful people and a holy God.

Luke 23:44-56

See the cosmic signs at Jesus death.	44-45
Listen to Jesus words as he dies.	46
Notice the reactions of people to Jesus death.	47-56

Do you see what God means?

1. The darkness at the cross signifies that God forsook his Son while placing the judgment for our sins upon him. 44-46

Note the meaning of darkness as a metaphor in the scriptures, the comments of Jesus that interpret the darkness and the statements of scripture that describe the meaning of Jesus death.

Note the truth of 1John 1:5 that God is light; in him is no darkness at all.

- Darkness as a metaphor in scripture.

Absence of light; separation from God; the domain of evil; sign of judgment

L 1:79; 22:53 Cmp. Joel 2:10 ff 1Peter 2:9 1Cor.4:5

- Jesus speaks in the darkness to describe what is happening.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Mt.27:46; Psa.22:1

It is finished. John 19:30

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. L 23:46; Psa.31:5

- Scripture describes what happened between God, Jesus and our sin.

Isaiah 53:6 We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2Cor. 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.

Gal. 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'

1Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

The command to remember with bread and cup, the agony in the garden, the anguish on the cross are only explained by this moment of darkness when Jesus was abandoned by his Father as he bore the penalty and punishment of our sins. It is what made the cross excruciating for him more than anything else.

2. The tearing of the temple curtain signifies that God has opened a way into his presence through Jesus Christ. 44

Note the metaphor of height and distance used to help us understand who God is and who we are. Frequent references in scripture to God being the 'Most High God.' Cf Psa. 97:9; 99:2; Isa.6:1. Not only is God high above us but he is also far away from us. The Bible often warns people to keep their distance from God.

God is inaccessible to sinful people without a helper or go between. He is too high and too far away from sin. God opened the way for sinners into his presence at the cross.

- Note the necessity of distance in the following examples:

Gen.3:23-24 Ex.3:5 Ex. 19:12ff Joshua 3:4

- Note the problem of distance dealt with in OT worship:

Hebrews 9

- Note the scriptures teaching about the curtain being torn:

Hebrews 10:19-25 20,22 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, . . . let us draw near to God . . .

Eph.2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought through the blood of Christ.

It is hard to imagine a clearer message to the unbelieving religious leaders than at the very moment Jesus breathed his last, the most holy place was supernaturally opened for all to see. Jesus death makes it possible for those far from God to be brought into his presence.

Do you see what God means?

47-56

What is your response? Do you get it? The message and meaning of Jesus death – do you get it? Compare your response to those at the cross. Note the four responses of those around the cross to the cosmic signs, Jesus' words and his death.

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| 1. The Centurion's respect. | 47 | cmp Acts 10:39-43 |
| 2. The crowd's sadness. | 48 | cmp. Acts 2:14, 37ff |
| 3. The follower's active faith. | 49-56 | cmp. Acts 1:13-14 |

Joseph & Nicodemus – secret believers

Women – faithful believers

The disciples, the secret believing priests, the women . . . all changed and energized by the death of Christ. They saw what God meant by the darkness and the tearing of the curtain. They lived their faith in Christ focused ways.

Take Aways

1. Thank God for your forgiveness and nearness through the death of Christ.
2. Repent and receive the gift of forgiveness by faith in Christ.
3. Repent and renew your first love for Christ as your Savior and Lord.
4. Commit to tell and invite others to look hard at the meaning of Christ's death.