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The Work Of Christ and Travailing

Our family can never forget labour day holiday, for it was on that day my son was born. Then years passed and on that same day one of his daughters was born. Labour day tells of the hard work of the working man, and in our family a day of travail when new life entered the world. To me, this day has a spiritual dimension for it brings to mind the workings of God, the Holy Spirit and the travail the Lord experienced (Isa. 53:11). Added to this it reminds me of Paul who wrote to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). He wrote to the Thessalonians in a similar vein: "For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you" (1 Thess. 2:9).

While there are many verses which indicate that which God did to Christ at Calvary, and many pre-picturing His dark experience, there are very few which tell of it from His perspective. Indeed, I can think of only one: "He shall see of the travail of His soul" (Isa. 53:11). This is a word which indicates deep anguish and unspeakable agony. When we speak or think about the blood and death of our Lord for our sins, it is so easy to think on the physical level. Here the prophet is permitted to delve into the sacred, and seek to plumb the depths of the laboring and grief of the soul of the Lord in the three hours of darkness. It makes me realize that the work of the Lord on Calvary was not a passive work when God punished Him for my transgressions. It was much more than a physical work, for it was wrought in the depths of His soul. Concerning that indescribable experience, it was prophetically written of Him:

- a) "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing" (Psa. 69:2)
- b) "I have a baptism to be baptized with"
- c) "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me" (Psa. 88:18)
- d) "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Psa. 102:7)
- e) "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Psa. 42:7)
- f) "Thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" (Psa. 88:7)

This was such a travail as no words could ever perfectly describe, sorrows so profound as to be indescribable; pain so intense as to be beyond human comprehension. Well might I sing:

Give me a sight, O Savior, Of Thy wondrous love to me,
Of the love that brought Thee down to earth, To die on Calvary.

Was it the nails, O Savior, That bound Thee to the tree?
Nay, 'twas Thine everlasting love, Thy love for me, for me.

Oh, wonder of all wonders, That through Thy death for me,
My open sins, my secret sins, Can all forgiven be.

Oh, make me understand it, Help me to take it in,
What it meant to Thee, the Holy One, To bear away my sin.

Without question, there is no person, absolutely no one, who is more precious to God than His beloved Son. Further, it could be said that there is no place so sacred, and no event more cherished by the heart of God, than the place and that which happened at Calvary. In the recording of the events of Calvary, it is clear that every emphasis by God is important, and nothing is superfluous. This being so, it is remarkable that of all the wonders that occurred then, only the "darkness" is mentioned in triplicate in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Why? I believe that John understood the true significance of the Lord's statement: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5).

At the time of the sufferings of our Lord there was disquieting and unexplainable phenomena in four realms:

- a) In the celestial sphere there was a supernatural darkness and the sun was darkened
- b) In the spiritual sphere the veil was rent in two
- c) In the mystical sphere tombs were opened, and after the Lord's resurrection many of the dead arose
- d) In terrestrial sphere the rocks were rent.

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As these were occurring in nature, our Lord spoke seven times from the cross.

The following chronological table shows the sequence of the phenomena and the corresponding cries from the cross:

Cry / Event	Time frame	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
“Father, forgive them . . .”	Pre darkness			ch. 23:34	
“Today shalt thou be with me . . .”	Pre darkness			ch. 23:42-43	
“Woman, behold thy Son! . . . Behold thy mother!”	Pre darkness				ch. 19:26
Darkness	Darkness	ch. 27:45	ch. 15:33	ch. 23:44	
Sun was darkened	Darkness			ch. 23:45	
“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani”	Darkness	ch. 27:46	ch. 15:34		
“I thirst”	Post darkness				ch. 19:28
“It is finished”	Post darkness				ch. 19:30
“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit”	Post darkness			ch. 23:46	
Veil rent	Post darkness	ch. 27:51	ch. 15:38		
Earthquake	Post darkness	ch. 27:51	ch. 15:38		

In this darkness we move onto intensely holy ground and, while with cautious awe we approach and contemplate this wonder, several observations can be made.

[This Darkness Was So Strange It Would Have Caused An Unsettling Astonishment](#)

The Holy Spirit caused Luke alone to state: “There was a darkness over all the earth . . . and the sun was darkened” (Lk. 23:44-45). From this divinely ordered statement, two things are clear. The earth was not darkened by an eclipse of the sun, but rather there was such a complete darkness that even the sun’s light was blotted out. When this supernatural darkness occurred it pointed to two things even more astonishing:

- a) God forsaking Christ and doing so in His hour of need.
- b) God’s awesome or deafening silence.

[This Darkness Is The Manifestation That With God The Impossible Is Possible](#)

How comforting to know that when God is brought into any equation then nothing is impossible. God is the God of the impossible. It was impossible for man to calm the seas, raise the dead, give sight to the blind, but it was not impossible with God. The darkness envelopes a work that was impossible for a man but possible for God.

- a) Can any man redeem his brother? Yet in the darkness, the Lord provided the way for the rebellious to be redeemed.
- b) It is an impossibility for any man to release himself, or another, from the punishment of his sin, but this God made possible.

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- c) It is an impossibility for man to be righteously cleared from personal guiltiness by the chastisement of an innocent person, but God did it when Christ died.
- d) It is impossible for any man to qualify himself to approach God, be acceptable with God, enjoy God, live in fellowship with God, and dwell eternally in unbroken fellowship with God, but God can make this possible.
- e) It is impossible for any individual to live godly, yet with God's power men now can. By a simple belief of the truth, and acceptance of a Person who died, it can eternally affect a human being's personality, attitudes, and destiny, God has made all this possible.
- f) It is impossible for God to die, yet the man who died was God. It was impossible with man but possible with God. Yet, all these impossibilities for man are possible for God because of that which the Lord Jesus suffered in the darkness.

[This Darkness Is a Shroud That Covers](#)

How sadistic and distorted man is. We see an accident and we slow down to have a look. Man gaped in morbid curiosity on Christ during and after His beating, when the beard was plucked off His face, when the stripes were long on His back, and when He was crucified. Although God would allow men to see all this, He would not allow men to see His Son in the throes of such unspeakable agony as He drank the cup full of the wrath of God. They were permitted to see so much, and then no more. Calvary was so sacred, so profound, that it was not permissible for human eyes to gaze upon the sight. What happened there is a truth to be received by faith, not by the words of eyewitnesses.

Lingering at the outer edge of that darkness we are made aware that it tells of infinities into which we can never enter. It is here that I learn that God loved a world of lost sinners, and that the Son of God loved me. The measuring of these truths is far beyond my heart and mind. At Calvary I see a Man more devoted to God than anyone. In the darkness I learn the horror of the penalty for my sins, the all encompassing cost of its removal, and it is more than I can fathom.

[This Darkness Is a Sign That Illustrates](#)

A consideration of this darkness illustrates at least four truths:

- a) The overwhelming deeper darkness that Christ was experiencing.
- b) The darkness of those who will be under the judgment of God during the day of wrath.
- c) The darkness of those who will be banished in hell for all eternity.
- d) The present spiritual condition of those who are unsaved.

The remarks of this article only concern the sufferings of the Saviour.

To those who muse on this physical darkness it is but an insight to the overwhelming darkness that the Lord was experiencing.

- a) "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps." (Psa. 88:6)
- b) "He hath led me, and brought me into darkness." (Lam. 3:2)

The Lord had known dark days in His earthly sojourn. This was darker and deeper than the time they sought to stone Him, darker and deeper than when He wept over Jerusalem, and even darker and deeper than Gethsemane. This was a darkness that went beyond the external. It was a darkness that penetrated into the depths in His soul. His fourth cry of: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34) evidences this, and we are humbled. None can ever enter into, nor convey, the depths of utter loneliness He experienced.

[This Darkness Is The Supreme Demonstration Of Divine Love And Ultimate Compassion](#)

When contemplating the words:

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“The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 Jn. 4:14), or “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10), we struggle to reconcile the foregoing with the glories of the truth: “The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Here we stand at the edge of a fathomless wonder peering up at heights that are inconceivable, and walk through the scope of profoundness where every concept of human intelligence fails. Yet, at the same time, we thank God that this is but the beginning of insights into the wonder of Calvary’s darkness.

. . . . Rowan Jennings

To God be the glory!

For God so Loved
the world that he