

Christ Dies on the Cross in the Darkness

Charles Herle (1598-1659)

John 19:30

I. The Text Opened

A. Christ Bows His Head and Dies

1. “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished:” and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost,” (John 19:30).
2. There is no way to comprehend everything Christ was experiencing in that moment when he breathed his last words, “It is finished.”
 - a) Taken at face value in this present situation, we can conclude he means that his suffering is complete and can now give way to death.
 - b) But considered in its greater context, Christ expounds on the meaning of this renowned phrase in his glorious prayer to the Father recorded in John 17 when he affirms, “I have finished the work which you gave me to do.”
3. That work, more comprehensively, would have encompassed certain other truths about his life.
 - a) For example, he fully glorified the Father, (John 17:4).
 - b) He perfectly exemplified God to man, (John 1).
 - c) He fulfilled the Law and the prophets to the letter, (Matt. 5:17-18).
 - d) He resisted Satan head-to-head, (Matt. 4:1-11).
 - e) And at this moment in time, most pointedly, he is actively “giving eternal life to as many as the Father has given him,” (John 17:2).

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: When Christ breathed these final words, it was because he was now ready to give his life over to death.

1. Despite how the situation appeared to all who were present that day, his enemies did not take his life from him.
 - a) “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father,” (John 10:18).
2. That he did not die little by little, fainting slowly away as others, is evidenced by the fact that immediately before his death he bowed his head and as Luke says, he cried out with a loud voice after which he presently gave up the ghost, (Luke 23:46).
 - a) Man did not give him his life, so it was not theirs to take.
 - b) He willingly chose to give it.
 - c) Without constraint, murmur, or regret, with no debt of his own nor desert of ours, he then bowed his head and died.
 - (1) *Judas betrayed him for gain, the Jews accused him through envy, Pilate condemned him for fear.*
 - (2) *Yet nothing caused his death apart from his love.*
 - (3) *For “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” (John 15:13).*
3. Christ even had Power Over Darkness on the Cross

- a) “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour,” (Matt. 27:45).
- b) Our Lord was crucified at about the third hour of the day, or nine in the morning.
- (1) *There he hung, in plain sight of all those who surrounded him, so there could be no mistaking it was really Christ that was nailed to that cross.*
- (2) *And for the next three hours he endured not only unbearable physical sufferings, but also the railings, mockings, dares, and blasphemies from his adversaries and onlookers.*
- c) But then at the point when the sun would normally be at its brightest, God covered the earth in a blanket of darkness blacker than the darkest night.
- d) The Almighty would not allow this most significant day in all of history to pass as all others before it.
- e) He would not have the mass of people go about their day-in-day-out activities without taking notice that the Son of the Most High was about to die to pay for the debt of sin his people owed him.
4. Such a strange and unnatural occurrence struck terror in the hearts of all the people, especially those who dared insult the character and mock the deity of our Lord.
- a) Luke described the scene in this way, “And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts...” (Luke 23:48).
- b) His enemies had stripped him naked, so it was most fitting that his Father cover him with this great blanket of darkness not only to conceal his nakedness, but also his broken, bleeding body from the wicked eyes of his jeering adversaries.
- c) It was most fitting that God should drape him in darkness because no human could appreciate the mighty burden of sin he bore nor the onslaught of the fullness of the wrath of God on him.
- d) And it was most fitting that the whole world be covered in darkness as the light of the world, the Sun of Righteousness, (Mal. 4:2), was dying.

III. The Text Applied

A. But

1. Reflecting on Christ's final moments, we are reminded of His divine trust in His Father.
 - a) Jesus willingly surrendered His spirit into the hands of the Father (Luke 23:46).
 - (1) *David and Stephen followed this example, and so should we.*
 - (2) *In John 17:24, Jesus expresses His desire for those who believe in Him to be with Him.*
 - (3) *This challenges us: if we are hesitant to trust God with our souls during our lifetime, how can we muster the courage to do so in our dying moments?*
 - (a) *Trusting God in life prepares us to trust Him in death.*
 - b) Life is a two-way street.
 - (1) *As we anticipate commending our spirit into God's hands upon death, we must recognize that Christ has already bestowed His Spirit upon us in life.*
 - (2) *We are recipients of the "Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15).*
 - (3) *It's an invitation to nurture a relationship with God.*
 - (4) *Christ knocks on the door of our hearts, desiring fellowship (Rev. 3:20).*
 - (5) *He offers us spiritual sustenance (John 4:34), and it's our duty to welcome Him.*

(6) *By doing so, we prepare ourselves for the heavenly banquet that awaits us in the afterlife (Rev. 19:7-9).*

c) Christ's work from heaven to earth speaks volumes about His love and humility.

(1) *He took the form of man, endured suffering, and was ultimately exalted (Phil. 2:8-9).*

(2) *As we ponder His sacrifice, our hearts are stirred to respond in kind.*

(3) *The image of Jesus bowing His head in death challenges us: are we willing to bow our knees in gratitude and reverence?*

(4) *He gave His all, pouring out His very lifeblood (Isa. 53:12).*

(5) *Such a monumental gift calls for an equally profound response from us.*

(a) *Let's endeavor to live our lives in a way that honors His sacrifice, offering ourselves fully and freely in service to Him.*

2. There is more mystery in this darkness at the cross than we can ever touch this side of heaven, for here divinity is intersecting humanity on a level we cannot grasp.

a) The darkness seems to indicate that it is not ours to know the full scope of everything that was accomplished in those final hours before our Blessed Redeemer bowed his head and gave up the ghost.

b) For while Jesus breathes his final breaths, God is reconciling himself to his people.

c) He is settling the accounts of the sin debt stacked against all believers by accepting this sacrifice of his Son as full payment.

d) These are truths well beyond our understanding.

(1) *And yet the beauty of it all is that whatever was accomplished in the silence of that darkness allows all those who sit in darkness to now come to the light of life.*

(2) *There is nothing left for us to do but realize this is holy blood-soaked ground on which we dare bow our knees and hearts in worship.*

3. The concept of Christ as the Lamb, predetermined to be sacrificed even before the world's foundation, challenges our understanding of divine love.

a) Christ's descent to Earth and His ultimate ascent back into the heavens are divine acts of love and sacrifice (Psa. 18:9, 144:5; John 14:2).

b) In the human realm, a person would give everything they have to save their own life (Job 2:4).

c) Yet, Christ turned this notion on its head, willingly giving up His life for our redemption.

(1) *This immense sacrifice prompts us to introspect: are we willing to reciprocate this love?*

(2) *We are called to dedicate our lives wholeheartedly to the testimony of His name, reflecting on the boundless love He showed us.*

4. Death is defeated by his death.

a) Death, the inevitable end that once held humanity in chains of fear, has been rendered powerless by Christ's victory.

b) With its sting removed, death is no more than a mere transition for believers (1 Cor. 15:56).

c) While it might still instill fear or uncertainty, its true power over us has been eradicated.

d) We can now face the end of our earthly journey with courage and hope, knowing that death's once menacing grip has been loosened by Christ's triumph.

(1) *This assurance should embolden us to live with purpose and fearlessness, knowing that in Christ, even death is but a doorway to eternal life.*