

The Dark Light of the Cross

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Matthew 27:41-54

Mockery

⁴¹ So also the chief priests mocked, along with the scribes and elders, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself." "He's **King of Israel!** Now, let him come down from the cross, and we'll believe in him." ⁴³ "He puts his **trust in God!** Let God **deliver** him now, **if he wants him.** For he said, 'I am **God's Son!**'"

⁴⁴ The insurrectionists who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Darkness, Abandon, Death

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour (noon) there was **darkness** over all the land until the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.). ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, **"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"** that is, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This fellow's calling **Elijah.**" ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and **yielded up his spirit.**

Wonder

⁵¹ And behold, the **curtain of the temple** was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the **earth shook**, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The **tombs also were opened.** And many bodies of the **saints** who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

⁵⁴ When the **centurion** and those with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and what happened, they were filled with fear and said, **"Truly this was the Son of God!"**

Psalm 22:1-8

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? | Why are you so far from saving me, | from my words of groaning? | ² My God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; | and by night, but find no rest. | ³ Yet you are holy, | enthroned on the praises of Israel. | ⁴ In you our ancestors trusted; | they trusted, and you delivered them. | ⁵ To you they cried, and were rescued; | in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. | ⁶ But I am a worm, and not a man; | scorned by humanity, | and despised by the people. | ⁷ All who see me mock me; | they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; | ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; | let him save him because he wants him!" ...

Amos 8:9

⁹ "On that day," declares the Lord Yahweh, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."

Ezekiel 37:11-13

¹¹ And the Lord spoke to me, saying: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel, and they say, 'Our bones have become dry; our hope has perished; we are lost.' " ¹² Therefore, prophesy, and say, This is what the Lord says: Behold, I am opening your tombs and will bring you up out of your tombs and bring you into the land of Israel, ¹³ and you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves so that I might bring my people up out of their graves."

Matthew 26:39

³⁹ And going a little farther Jesus fell on his face as he prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will."

Matthew 17:2-3

² And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might embody God's faithful righteousness (in fulfilling his promises).

Matthew 20:27-28

²⁷ "Whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Into the Darkness

Everything in Mt come together to this point. The scripture anticipation, the teaching, ministry, healing, temple confrontation. It come to this moment, this event. Mt puts it before us with brevity and mystery, challenging us to look deeply. Here is the heart of God.

Jesus has moved from celebrated prophet, king to one abandoned by all, disciples, leaders, crowds. We watch it happen: betrayal, denial, mocking. But we know who Jesus is. We've seen his birth, baptism, transfiguration, authority, power. He's the very embodiment of God.

We know the mocking is wrong: "Saving ... king ... trust in God ... God's Son." The darkness that descends seems God's sign of judgment. But then in that darkness comes the mysterious cry. Foreign! What does it mean? "Thank you Father for judging them"? No. Mt translates and it's far more horrific. The Son of God forsaken by God!? What can it possible mean?

Mt trusts us to recognize that it's from scripture: Ps 22:1. But he shows us that the darkness extends to those around the cross. Elijah? Something's happening. Nobody knows what. Mt refuses to explain. He wants us to look deeply into an event not discuss a doctrine. But he helps us by pointing us, as Jesus did, to scriptures that focus and expand our thoughts.

The Death of God and Humanity

This is the moment the world changes (not Augustus, Constantine, Genghis, Luther, Galileo).

Mt has shown us human Jesus as the very embodiment of God – able to show any glory.

But what a God! Not simple, static perfection. Complex, dynamic, mysterious ... loving.

Here is God, fully human, crying the cry of human pain, physical, emotional, spiritual: Ps 22.

He lives out and cries out the alienation, grief and suffering of one who truly trusts God but experiences the deep horror human life can have, betrayal, injustice, torture, abandonment.

Here are God and humanity, united in one person, in one cry, as God dies a human death.

The Messiah Died for Our Sins

Jesus is drinking the cup he prayed about. This is not God pouring out anger intended for us on innocent Jesus. All the horrors of sin, betrayal, injustice, torture that engulf Jesus flow from us humans pushing God out of our lives and substituting our own gods of power, self-aggrandizement, money, violence, sexual manipulation, racism, control, etc. Our little gods are not God. We force the absence of God, and destroy ourselves with every kind of sin and brokenness (the wrath). Alienated from God, we can't free ourselves. On the cross God in Jesus drinks that cup. This amazing God takes our alienation from God into God's own self and opens the door to new life, real forgiveness, reconciliation, union of God and humans.

All the signs that Mt describes point to this. The darkness, earthquake, temple veil all point to a change of the ages, a new relationship with God. The strange resurrections point to the aim: the defeat of death, creation of new life. But, for this moment, there is only dark mystery.