

Easter Changes Everything
From Darkness to Light
Matthew 27:45-46; Matthew 28:1-7
4/16/17

(Make note of sermon outline on back of bulletin)

- Making decisions in the dark can lead to some regrettable consequences. Back in the days before electricity, a tightfisted, cheap old farmer was ridiculing his hired man for carrying a lighted lantern when the hired man went to visit his girlfriend at her parents house.
 - o The farmer exclaimed, "Why, it's a waste of money for oil in that lantern! When I went a-courtin' my wife I never carried one of them things. I always went in the dark." "Yes," the hired man said wryly, "and look what you got!"
 - o This silly little story shows us that when we see something in the light that we have only seen before in the dark, it changes everything! We can make better decisions when we see things in the light rather than in the dark. That is true for many decisions, including who you might end up with!
 - o Now, the light and dark that we refer to can be literal light and dark or it can be figurative. For instance, light can also mean that we have all of the information about something so we can make an informed decision. To make a decision in the dark means that we don't have all of the information.

- This morning, I want us to have all of the information. I want us to be people making decisions in the light. I believe God wants us to make decisions in the light. God is all about light.
 - o Today we are here to celebrate Easter - an event that brought so much light that it changed everything. In the midst of humanity's darkness, God brought light. It was an event that changed everything for us.
 - o Let's read what happened in two different passages – one that describes darkness and another that describes light.
 - o **Read Matthew 27:45-46; Matthew 28:1-10**

- Did you see the shift that happened here? In chapter 27, Jesus was being crucified. He was dying on the cross in excruciating pain for the sins of you and me and all of humanity. And, what is consuming the earth? Darkness.
 - o It reminds me of another story in the Bible. It's the story of creation. In the Creation account we read in Genesis that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light."

- See, God is not like the cheapskate farmer. God is all about light. In him there is no darkness. And, when God did a big thing, a new thing, a new life thing - things went from dark to light. And, that light changed everything.
 - When we read the crucifixion and resurrection account from Matthew's Gospel we see darkness on the face of the earth while Jesus was on the cross, and we then read about the light of the early morning as the ladies went to the tomb and found that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead.
 - For on that first Easter morning, something big, something new had happened as things moved from darkness to light.

- But, sometimes when darkness abounds, that darkness can be so overwhelming and so thick and deep dark that it can seem like it is impossible for anything to make any difference. It can seem that even light will have a hard time breaking through.
 - It seemed that way during Jesus' crucifixion. We read a little bit, but there was much more darkness than the literal darkness that covered the earth for three hours. So, let's back up and talk about the darkness at the cross of Calvary.
 - If we were to look in the book of Mark in the Bible, it tells us the crucifixion began around 9a. For three hours, the enemies of Jesus mocked him. They made fun of him by hanging a sign over His head that said, "This is Jesus, King of the Jews." They gambled for His clothes. Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, telling Him to save Himself. Other passages of Scripture confirm this.
 - One of the most shocking passages to me is verses 41-43 in Matthew 27 where the chief priests and teachers of the religious law and the elders mocked him. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the leaders of the church, laughing at and belittling Jesus? What dark hearts they must have had to do that to any one! What kind of religious leader were they? It shows the depth of the darkness in human heart.
 - If you read the texts carefully, you will see this kind of thing went on for three hours, from nine to noon.

- So, what happened at noon, when the earth went dark, is definitely symbolic of what had been going on from 9-noon as Jesus received brutal attacks, the worst kind of bullying, and humiliating treatment from others. It was also symbolic of what was happening to Jesus internally as he was suffering excruciating pain.
 - It was also symbolic of what was happening spiritually. It was symbolic of the world's condition. Without Jesus, there is only darkness.
 - Jesus, the Son of God, was being put to death. Jesus, the Creator of all things, was dying a slow and torturous death. His creation, the earth that he helped form and he brought light to, responded by going dark because without Jesus, there is no light.

- What we read in verse 45 tells us that for three hours, from noon to three o'clock, darkness fell upon all the land. Darkness descended on the entire earth in the middle of the day.
 - Now, could it have been a coincidence? Hmm...total darkness in the middle of the day? Maybe it was a solar eclipse? Those don't last very long.

- You could dismiss the whole deal about darkness descending if you were suspicious of Scripture's accuracy, I guess. Many people have. After all, it's just one verse of Scripture. And yet there are tons of extra historical writings about this "day of darkness." From the historian and theologian, Tertullian to the Greek writer, Phlegon, who wrote about the event, and others, they documented the day the sun was hidden for three hours in the middle of the day. Oh, it happened alright. It was the day that light was trying to be snuffed out.

- And, there is another reason for the darkness at the cross. It is another spiritual reason. During those hours, Jesus was under God's judgment as He hung on the cross of Calvary. For Jesus it was the judgment of God for the whole world's sin, leveled on Him.
 - It was a darkness that could be felt. Imagine with me what that kind of darkness feels like? Maybe you've been in a room or place where there is total darkness and it is so thick that you can feel it. If so, you can imagine what this darkness felt like.
 - Now, imagine that the judgment of God is leveled against you. Can you even imagine? That's what Jesus did for us. And, suffocating darkness fell.

- If you've ever done any research or heard any teaching about crucifixion, you know that crucifixion is actually death by suffocation. Eventually, your body loses strength to pull yourself up to breathe and you end up suffocating.
 - Jesus died before either of the two criminals who were crucified on either side of him. But, I don't believe that he died of the suffocation of the crucifixion. I believe he died of the suffocation of the darkness that all targeted on him.
 - You know, we don't read about any insults being flung at Jesus when night fell in the middle of the day. At that point, people were probably experiencing the gravity of what was happening and it shut them right up. But Jesus broke the silence with the words in Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
 - Darkness was painful for Jesus. It was emotionally debilitating. It was a pain unlike He had yet experienced. The beatings and pounding of nails into His flesh were nothing compared to the heaviness and despair of being forsaken by God the Father. Three hours of darkness. It may as well have been an eternity.
 - The suffocating darkness was the result of the sin of all people, past, present, and future, being placed on Jesus. There was darkness at the cross of Calvary because God the Father turned away. He couldn't stand the sight of sin. The punishment that was yours and mine because our individual sin was piled on Jesus. God looked away, and there was deafening silence and overwhelming darkness.

- When it is dark, fear can overtake us. When it is dark, the way isn't clear. When it is dark we lose our sense of direction. When it is dark we have a sense of "lostness," a sense of "aloneness." What would those at the cross have felt or understood during that day of darkness?
 - Well, we know what some of them felt. We know Jesus' disciples were scared to death. We know that almost all of his disciples had fled and were hiding fearful that they were next to be put to death because of their affiliation with Jesus. We know

that the women, including his mother, who were at the cross, were deeply hurting. Can you imagine watching someone you love dying like that?

- It was suffocating darkness not just for Jesus, but for everyone. It was overwhelming. The darkness of sin always is.
- For me, September this year will mark 20 years in full-time ministry. Seven of them have been right here in this church. Before I went into the ministry, I was working in social work and criminal justice fields in Chicago. And, I didn't work in the suburbs or the north side where all the rich people are. I worked mostly on the southside. I worked in the inner city. I worked in the projects.
 - Believe me when I say that I saw a lot of darkness. I've seen shootings. I've seen drug deals going down. I've had to run outside with other staff to get kids to safety because of gang shootings or drive-bys.
 - There was a woman in our program who attended a parent seminar that I led. It was all about choosing to be violence free household and how violence affects children. This woman had been in a relationship for years where she got beat on a consistent basis by her boyfriend. Something clicked for her during that seminar and she came to me and said she was going to leave her boyfriend.
 - I offered to get her set up in a shelter. She didn't think it was necessary. She was so wrong. A few weeks later, her boyfriend came to her apartment, climbed up on the porch roof and made some noise until she came out. He then jumped on her with a hatchet in hand and started hitting her with the hatchet. Someone heard her screaming and ran to her aid. She survived – thank God. He went to jail.
- There were two teenage brothers who were in our program – Cecilio and Basilio. Cecilio decided to get out of the programs in our center and got involved in the gang in the projects. Basilio, however, decided to stay away from the gang and continued to be involved in the programs of the center.
 - The projects were located on a city block and were ruled by one gang, but the other side of the street on the west side, the territory of a rival gang started. On that corner, we saw a lot of gang conflict.
 - One day, some members of the rival gang actually somehow made it into the projects. They walked right up to a group of teen boys. Basilio was one of them. Mistaking Basilio for his gang banger brother, a member of the rival gang pulled out a gun and shot Basilio at near point blank range in the head. At 15 years old, Basilio was gone.
- Darkness. Darkness so overwhelming that you wonder if you can ever make any difference. That's one of the biggest reason that I went from social work to ministry. The darkness was so overwhelming and it's the kind of darkness that social programs can't fully fix. I felt like all of our programs were trying to put a bandaid on a heart wound that is gushing out blood. It's the kind of darkness that can only be changed to light through Jesus Christ.
 - But, here is what I know as well. Darkness doesn't just exist in the inner city. It exists even right here in a community that is fairly safe and quiet and family oriented. It exists even in the hearts of good, hard-working people.

- Maybe it exists in your homes right now. Maybe it exists in your relationships. Maybe it exists in your job. Maybe it is a darkness that keeps you up at night worrying or in fear, a fear that never seems to leave you. Maybe it's a darkness that keeps you from really living and instead you are just existing, just surviving. Maybe it's a darkness that keeps you from really trusting God and that keeps you from experiencing a life of light.
- See, in the 20 years that I've been in ministry, I've seen that there are two lines of questioning that seem to trip people up.
 - The first line of questioning asks, Is this all real? Is there really a God? Is everything about Jesus real? Did it really happen? Could it have really happened? Did Easter really happen? It is questioning of the existence of God, Jesus and if the Bible is true.
 - The second line of questioning asks If God is real, if he is so good and loving and he changes everything, why does he allow bad things to happen? Why is there so much darkness? How can a God of love allow such evil? These are questions about the goodness of God.
 - Has anyone here ever asked those very questions or ones similar? It's possible that most of us have.
- These are questions of darkness. They are questions that will keep us in darkness. They will keep us from experiencing the light of Easter, the light that changes everything!
 - I know that full-well because I have questioned the goodness of God and it led me right down the path to walking away from God during a period of time in my own life.
 - At the same time, they are questions that God wants us to ask. But, we aren't just to ask them, but to seek answers for them. See, what often happens is that people ask these questions and struggle with these questions, but they don't do anything to get the questions answered for themselves! They don't seek answers. They just ask questions and think that because they have to ask the questions at all, God must not be the answer.
 - See, I don't believe for an instant that God wants robot people worshipping him. People who have just heard something preached and they blindly follow what they have heard or what they have been taught. No! That's not faith. He wants us to follow him into his light that changes everything because we have come to know for ourselves that he is the real deal. He wants to shed light on our questions as we seek the answers.
- That's what he did on Easter morning. His followers had just come through the events of the crucifixion. Some of them saw him die, they saw him be taken down and buried. They went through all day Saturday still in darkness.
 - And, they questioned, boy did they question! Did they just spend years of their lives following someone who was a farce? Had they given themselves to a lie? Was this really God's plan? It didn't make any sense. Sure, Jesus said different things than what we thought he would, but him dying...we thought he was coming to save us. How is he going to save us now? Instead, we are probably going to die because we followed him!

- But, something was about to happen. Because God is not a God of darkness! He is a God of Light! He was going to do something new, something that changed everything and it was going to start with light!
- So, on Easter morning, in Matthew 28, Mary Magdalene and Mary, Jesus' mother, went to the tomb to find that the stone over the tomb where Jesus had been laid had been rolled away. Matthew was sure to give us the detail about darkness during the crucifixion and he is sure enough going to give us even more details about the light that is coming during Jesus' resurrection!
 - He wanted us to know it was light enough for them to look into the tomb and see it empty. He wanted us to know it was light enough for them to know it was angels who were speaking to them giving them the news that Jesus had risen from the dead.
 - He wanted us to know that it was light enough for them to see the Resurrected Jesus when He appeared before them. He told them not to be afraid but to go tell the others the good news and to tell them to meet Him in Galilee where He would appear to the rest of them.
- After Jesus' crucifixion the disciples had gone into hiding. They were afraid of what might happen to them because they had been followers of Jesus. But, the book of John, chapter 20 tells us what happened.
 - Once they saw the Resurrected Lord, once they came in contact with the Light, they were given courage to come out of the shadows of hiding and to resume life, a new kind of life. They became dynamic witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ and the church of the Living God was born in and through their testimony.
 - They had a whole new lease on life and a whole new perspective for living that energized them and compelled them and fulfilled them and blessed their lives abundantly. They had gone from darkness to light.
 - And, when they experienced the light, their questions started to be answered. When they experienced the light of his resurrection, it changed everything! They busted out of hiding and they started to preach the good news of Jesus to everyone!
- See, in the light of the Resurrection that morning, hope RETURNED to their life! In the light of the Resurrection they were REASSURED and all fear about what they would do next or how they would live was gone. In the light of the Resurrection they were given the RESPONSIBILITY to witness to Jesus' being raised from the dead. in the light of the Resurrection they could see and experience the REALITY of life beyond the grave!
- In the light of the resurrection, they found not only something they could live for, but something they could die for. What are you willing to die for this morning? If you have children, hands down we would die for our children, right? Our family, our close friends? That which we are willing to die for are what we love completely. They are light in our lives.

- Every disciple of Jesus Christ was willing to die to preach about Jesus. Why? Because they saw him alive. They experienced his light. They experienced his truth. No one is willing to die for a lie.

- They knew that death no longer had the final say. Death no longer was the final darkness because of Jesus! That is why Paul could write in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” For sin is the sting that results in death and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us the victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.” They experienced enough light that they could face death and not be afraid! And, we can, too!
 - It is this reality that there is life beyond the grave in heaven with God for all who put their trust in Christ that separates Christianity from EVERY OTHER religion.
 - Mohammed’s bones are still where his body was buried. Confucius’s body is still resting below the earth’s surface. Bhudda’s remains are still buried below the ground. Joseph Smith is still where he was left after his funeral. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology is still six feet under.
 - But Jesus! But Jesus arose with power and a shout from Heaven to make Him the only person ever to defeat death, and because He beat it, we too can live forever in Heaven with Him by placing our trust in Him.

- Have you experienced the light of the Resurrection this morning? Have you experienced the light that can change everything? Are those things of the light things that you need this morning? Do you need something this morning that will expel the darkness of your life, the darkness of your situations, the darkness of your past, the darkness of your sin?
 - We can move from the darkness of sin to the light of a dynamic relationship with God that gives us new life and a new purpose for living.
 - Ephesians 5:8 says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Psalm 18:28 says, “You, Lord, keep my lamp burning. My God turns my darkness into light.”
 - When you believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and choose to turn from sin to follow Him, you move from darkness to light, from death to life, from confusion to clarity, from constantly pursuing happiness that always seems to evade you to actually having a purpose that satisfies for a lifetime. Who doesn’t want that?

- Maybe instead, you are walking in darkness you can feel? No one is immune from darkness no matter how good you are, how good your upbringing was – no one is immune. Has your way been enshrouded with heaviness? Is your darkness emotionally debilitating? Do you feel lost?
 - Do you sense things aren’t right between you and God? Are you living without hope? Are you afraid of what is going on in your life? Are you afraid to die? Are you trapped in the sin that is simply addiction to the things that break God’s heart? Do you need some light? Do you need some answers to your questions?

- Well, the light of the resurrection will also answer your questions. Over the next few months, we are going to start a couple of sermon series that will answer the questions that most people struggle with, the questions that will either keep us in darkness if all we do is question or the questions that will help us find answers if we seek them.
 - o Interestingly, these sermon series are based on books turned into movies. One has just stopped being shown in theaters. The other has just started. Using video clips from the movies and Scripture, we are going to begin to help answer some questions.
 - o Next week, we will begin the series on “The Shack.” The movie is now actually done showing in theaters. But, the book is still available. It is about a man who experienced the worst imaginable kind of loss and he was questioning how God would allow it. This series will help us answer the questions about God’s goodness. Where is God and how can he be loving if he allows such bad things to happen?
 - o This morning, I want to show us the trailer of the movie to give you an idea of what we might be discussing.... **Show trailer.**

- Then, we are going to start answering questions about God’s existence through “The Case for Christ.” The movie is now out in theaters. Actually, here in RI, it is only being shown at the Warwick theater. Apparently, movies about being fast and furious are more popular than movies about Jesus.
 - o The movie tells the story of a man, who was an atheist and research journalist and who was so sick and tired of hearing about Jesus that he set out to prove that none of it was real. Instead, he found the Light.
 - o This morning, in the back, we actually have booklet written by this man called “The Case for Easter.” If you want to know the proof that Easter is real, please pick one up. If you are a first time guest, there is one in the Welcome Packet you should have received. If you didn’t get a packet, please see a WOW Team member in the back to get one. If you aren’t a first time guest and would like a booklet, also see a WOW Team member.
 - o We also have five copies of his whole book, “The Case for Christ.” For those here this morning who are guests or who really, really want to find some answers to your questions about God, these books are available to you. Today, we only have five because some others were backordered. So, I would ask that if you want a book, that you fill out a connect card, give it to a WOW Team member who will give you a book and if they are all gone, we will get one to you.

- And, of course, I would encourage everyone here to keep coming every Sunday to hear answers to questions that most, if not all, people have struggled with. Even for those questions that maybe you haven’t struggled with, you know others who have.
 - o Don’t just ask questions – get some answers. It’s doesn’t mean you have to agree with all of the answers that I have or someone else has. That’s the nature of research – you don’t always agree with the research, but it informs you so you can formulate better answers.

- God is not a God who wants us to be ignorant. He wants us to experience light so we can see and know clearly.
- This Easter Sunday morning something big can happen and it can change everything in your life. If you're not ready just yet, because you have some questions. You are struggling with those questions we talked about. Will you join me in asking the questions and searching for the answers?
 - You will never get your questions answered without being open to learn and seek for yourself. This morning, will you at least join me in learning more about Jesus as light and if he is real, if his light is worth living for? If so, keep coming as we attempt to shed some light to those questions, get a Case for Easter booklet or a Case for Christ book in the back.
- But, maybe this morning, you are ready. You are ready for a change. You are sick and tired of the darkness. When I went through all of those questions, you were saying, "Yep, that's me and I hate it!" You are tired of feeling overwhelmed by all the bad. You are tired of living in a way that sucks life from you and you know that isn't life, that isn't light.
- Today, you can be made new! Today, everything can change about your life. Oh, it won't be instantaneous and it doesn't mean that all your problems just disappear. But, you can walk in the newness of the light of God's salvation with a new heart, a new mind and a new attitude as you depend on the One who can help you with your problems.
 - You can experience resurrection for yourself as you die to sin and are made alive in Christ! You can be free from the penalty of sin. You can live unafraid and with purpose and power.
 - Just as light burst on the scene in the darkness at creation, just as light burst on the scene on that first Easter morning and changed everything - light can burst into your heart and life that will change your life forever!
 - Will you join me this morning in moving from darkness to light? Will you join me in moving into the light that is worth living for and is worth it to have everything change.