

Waiting in the Dark

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[0:00] There are times in our lives when things happen that we just don't understand.! I imagine when Jesus was abruptly interrupted from his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane! and arrested that it was a confusing time for the disciples.

I mean, it's not like Jesus didn't warn them ahead of time, and it's not like he didn't prepare them for that. However, when the one that you thought was invincible suddenly becomes vulnerable, it's shocking.

Now, next week we're going to celebrate a living Lord who walked out of the tomb on his own and has given us the opportunity for eternal life in him. However, before we get there, I want to deal with the reality of the Friday and the Saturday before.

I don't really think you can truly understand the triumph of the empty tomb until we felt the weight of the cross and the silence of a sealed tomb.

They seized him in the midst of his prayer in the Garden. They dragged him through a kangaroo court system.

[1:24] They beat him all along the way, mocked him while they did it, then flogged him and made him carry his own cross, and then nailed him to it between two thieves.

Now, I want us to pick up that scene in Matthew chapter 27, beginning in verse 45. It says, Now for the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

That's six hours after the sun came up, about noon. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, that means my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, This man is calling Elijah. 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. But the others said, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

[2:32] And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn into from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

What a dark day for so many. The followers of Jesus that witnessed this horrific event had to be in dismay.

I also think about the mother of the thieves that were on each side of him if they were there to witness this. Because if they witnessed it, they were grieving about their loved one's lives before they were crucified.

And the deadly path that they had taken in their life, and now they would die for it. However, in the midst of those thieves was the darling Son of God.

He was completely innocent. He was doing all of this for other folks, and he was enduring all this shame for others. The flogging that ripped the flesh off his back.

[3:42] He did that for others. The cross that smothered out the air from his lungs. He did that for others. The nails that they drove in his hands and in his feet. And the crown of thorns that they shoved down on his already bleeding brow, as Scripture tells us.

The blood that he shed. The spirit inside. All of it was for others. And now he breathes his last.

What a dark day. The days when we experience a death are always dark days.

Funerals are dark days. They're tough. I mean, even when there's great Christian testimonies that have been lived out by the loved one that has died, sometimes that even makes it worse because

you love them that much more because you know what they've invested in you, and you've seen what they've invested in the Lord, and you've been impacted by their faith. And then even those who are suffering with strong Christian faith, the surviving sufferers, even with great faith, it's a dark, tough day.

[5:02] And sadly, oftentimes, people may miss this, that even the darker days are those that follow. When the funeral is over and the food's been eaten, and the family goes back home, and the friends go back to work, and the reality and the certainty of the death is so frank and so real and so confronting, it happens in our passage as well.

I want you to see this. In verse 57, it says this and following, when it was evening, when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, then Pilate ordered it to be given to him, and Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in a rock, and he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there sitting opposite the tomb. And then it goes on to say in verse 66, So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. Now you probably know the rest of this story. If you don't know it, I encourage you to come back next week. We can celebrate that together.

[6:34] However, how much thought have you put into the darkness that Mary and the disciples felt from noon on Friday to Sunday morning?

Because Saturday was a long, difficult day that had to feel like it had some finality. I mean, death has finality.

It is never easy at the time, and it weighs heavy in the days that follow, and it never really goes away when you lose someone you hold close. It never really does.

It don't even have to be death, quite honestly. I mean, a dark Saturday with a sealed tomb feels a lot like moments in our lives when it seems like everything is shut.

Every option that we can think of is shut, locked, locked. Man, it feels final. Years ago, I volunteered to be a chaplain for the Pickens County Sheriff's Office.

[7:49] At that time, they had regional chaplains, and they said, they told me, we can take care of the drunks and the drug addicts and the criminals.

It's the crying and grieving that we don't want to handle. We need some help with that. And so I got to go to death calls. Anytime the police came, a chaplain needed to be there.

And I saw all kinds of circumstances with that, but then one day they called me, and typically, I've done prison ministry as well.

When I was in South Mississippi, I was a chaplain at a prison down there and been cell to cell with solitary confinement guys and all that kind of stuff.

But I was told, when I worked for the sheriff's office, it was a volunteer for the sheriff's office, that it was those that dealt with those in the jail, it helped to just stay with the officers most of the time instead of let somebody else, line up somebody else to handle them because they still want the conflict.

[9:10] But they called me one day. They said, we've got a guy that we'd like for you to come talk to. He's locked up and his daddy's died.

And he can't go to the funeral. And he's upset about it. So I went down there, and if you've never been to jail, you don't have to admit it this morning, but if you've never been to jail, you've watched it on television where they have the little phones and the glass and you hold the phone up and you talk through the glass and those type things.

They took me to that area, and they said, we're going to put you on the other side with him. I said, okay. So they opened this steel door, and I went in, and then they brought this big old Tennessee mountain boy in.

tore up, and they shut that door behind him, steel on steel, and locked it and told me, when you're done, just knock on the door.

We'll let you out. We sat there about 30 minutes. I don't remember the details of the conversation. I tried to give him some comfort in a very difficult situation, surprising situation for him.

[10:30] He couldn't be there for his family. He was tore up about it. I prayed with him, got up to leave. I felt vulnerable.

I sensed that he may know that I was vulnerable. I knocked again. They opened the door, and I went out, and I guess you know the end of the story.

I made it out alive, but anyway, I don't know if he had aggressive bone in his body, but he was tore up and upset, and when I thought about the sealed tomb, and I thought about the sudden stops that come in people's lives, sometimes life stops behind closed doors.

At least it feels like it. It had to seem outside that sealed tomb as if nothing else was going to happen or nothing was happening, and this was it.

The hard spots in life feel like that. However, I want you to remember some things when you experience, when we experience hard spots in life.

[12:01] First thing is this. This is not the end of the story. When the tomb is sealed and the door is slammed, it feels like the end.

However, when times get tough and prayers don't seem to get past the ceiling and the answers don't come, we need to remember some words that we've heard before. The disciples during that Saturday went and locked themselves in a room, scared to death, puzzled about the future.

They needed to remember the words of Jesus that he said to them as he entered Jerusalem. In Matthew chapter 20, verse 18 and 19, he said, see, we're going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.

Everything that he said had come true. And then he said, and he will be raised on the third day. Sometimes it's hard to remember the things that we already know because our circumstances get so loud that we fail to hear the reminding whispers of the Holy Spirit and remember Christ in the upper room promised that the helper would come to help us remember the word of God that we had implanted into our lives.

Sometimes when the sudden stops come, it's hard to remember when the Holy Spirit says, as he did in Luke 24, verse 6, remember how he told you.

[13:47] What's he talking about? What is there to remember? Remember what he said in the upper room in John 14, 1, when he said, let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.

When he goes on later in that chapter in verse 18 and says, I will not leave you as orphans. I'm not going to leave you alone. I'll come to you. He goes on in verse 27 to say, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let it be afraid. Those are words that the disciples needed to remember that day and I'll tell you that it was not only spoken for them, it was also spoken for us.

We need to remember that we need not let our hearts be troubled, believe in God. You can believe also in Christ. He's faithful. He will not leave us alone.

He'll come to us. And the peace that he gives us is unlike anything else we can find in this life. We will not find that kind of peace, that kind of solace from the Lord.

[15:12] We will not find it in anybody else. We will not find it in the bottom of a bottle. We will not find it in the arms of someone else.

The peace that is beyond understanding only comes through Christ. And he promises us, not only the disciples, but he promises us that he'll come to us.

Christian, listen, I say it a lot, but I mean it every time I say it. We don't know what tomorrow holds, but thank God I know who holds tomorrow. And because I know who holds tomorrow, whatever tomorrow holds, I trust him with it.

He will guide us each step of the way, whether we sense it or not, if we'll look to him. And I mean, it may feel sealed today. It may feel locked.

It may feel done. But my friend, as far as I can tell, looking around this room, we still have breath. And if that's the case, this ain't the end of the story.

[16:19] By the way, if you lose your breath, it still ain't the end of the story, by the way. The reality is, we need to know that this is not the end of the story.

The other thing is, there's a lot more happening than we think. When somebody goes in for major surgery, no one suffers more, in my opinion, no one suffers more amidst that surgery than the

waiting family.

Now, the person who's having the surgery may do the suffering when they wake up, but when they're out, they don't know the difference. I hope the surgeon's not the one suffering more than anybody else.

I hope he's strong and robust after a good breakfast. That's what I hope. But that waiting family, that's tough.

Unaware of what's going on. They're on high alert, and if they're in a waiting room that's got a phone on a wall, they're going to jump every time it rings.

[17:31] Could be mine. When they get word an hour after they thought the surgery was going on that it just started, I've seen it time and time again, it's hard for them to understand.

And when the updates don't come as quickly as they said they were going to come, because they might be occupied doing their job instead of keeping us informed, it's tough.

And then they get a friend that calls and says, have you heard anything yet? And that makes it worse, by the way, you know. Or then one waiting with them has the audacity to say, shouldn't they be done by now?

Don't say that, okay? Just don't say it. You can thank it if you want to, but go get something, drink or something. Don't say it. It's nerve-wracking. Because it seems as if nothing is happening.

Here I'm waiting. But understand, the whole time we're waiting, the patient is rolled into place. The atmosphere is professionally set up for the procedure.

[18:38] The doctor is properly prepping. The surgery starts with a patience and a tenacity that I cannot imagine. Work is being done.

Man, it don't feel like it in the waiting room. There's more happening than we think. Have you ever planted a fruit tree?

You put a stick in the ground and put some dirt around it and fertilize it and pray over it and water it and go out there the first year and nothing. Nothing's happening.

The second year, you get three leaves. The third year, it looks pretty good, but there's still no fruit. I thought I got a fruit tree.

What'd they sell me? But the reality is, even when it appears like nothing's working, beneath the surface, the roots are growing deeper.

[19:48] The foundation is being established. The tree is becoming stronger. Listen to me. It's becoming strong enough to handle the fruit that it will produce.

And just because you don't see fruit doesn't mean nothing is happening. The roots grow long before the fruit shows.

the tomb was sealed shut with a Roman seal. And there lay the body of Jesus.

But Christ was still moving. Christ was still active. Scripture says that he was proclaiming in the unseen realm that the victory of the cross was secure.

I just want you to understand that we may not see it all. Let me be more clear. We will not see it all. No matter how sealed the fate of our situation may seem, God is doing more than we could even think.

[20:57] God's at work. And also be assured of this. The Lord is already in our tomorrows.

He's already there. We don't ever need to let our faith be limited to our sight. As a matter of fact, if your faith is limited to your sight, it's not faith at all.

Matter of fact, Hebrews defines faith partially as the conviction of things not seen. And do you know what you can't see? You can't see the thoughts and the ways of God.

Isaiah 55, 8 and 9 says this, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I want you to understand today that he is beyond us. He is before us. He is above us. He is below us. He's all over the matter.

[22:01] He's everywhere and whatever the situation we may find ourselves in, no matter how sealed the rock that's in our way seems to be. God is bigger and beyond and ahead of all of it.

I meet with men on Tuesday mornings and we've been talking about the sovereignty of God. And we've talked again and again about difficult matters in life that we never knew the answer in this life too.

And we may never know the answers to those things. However, we came to the conclusion, well, some of them hadn't, but most of us have come to the conclusion that when we get to heaven, we're not going to ask questions.

I've heard people say all my life, boy, when I get to heaven, I'm going to ask, why? No, you're not. I don't think you are.

I believe when we get to heaven, we'll see things as he sees them. And we'll see his face. And all the unclear matters of this life will not only become instantly clear, they just won't matter when we see his face.

[23:31] We'll celebrate at his feet. The reality is, although we don't ask for it, although we wish it would happen another way, God does some of his greatest works in the deepest valleys that we face.

We don't understand that. We can't understand it. We won't understand it. We don't need to understand it. Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 says this, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Folks, you can trust the Lord.

And let me just add this. Do you know what else God has given you? He's given us this body of believers.

I want to ask a question this morning. I want you to respond to it. If you're a perfect person, I want you to raise your hand this morning. If you're perfect. If you're perfect. I don't see any.

[24:56] And you know why? Because there's not any. There's not a perfect person in this church.

He has surrounded us with people that struggle and suffer.

Very similar to the way we do it. We do well not to make it show on Sunday. But the reality is there's a lot more connection here than we could ever imagine.

This is what the body of believers is all about. That's why Christ came to establish the church. We're all individuals walking through fairly common valleys. They come at different times.

They come in different ways. They're pretty common. And our circumstances are not near as unique as we'd like to think they are. Don't fake it. Don't fake it.

[26:03] We need each other. And we come to this place week after week because we need to think together. We need to pray together. We need to be encouraged by God's word together.

We need to seek the face of God together. We need to watch the living testimonies stamped across each other's lives. It's an encouragement to each one of us.

God has put us together to gain strength from each other. And you only get as much as you invest into it. God don't want us to survive the dark days.

God wants us to thrive in the dark days. And the Fridays of life can be horrible. And the weight of the Saturdays, they stink.

It's tough. But folks, Sunday's coming. And we can trust him because Christ lives.

[27:22] With every head bow and every eye closed, I want to ask you this morning, if you've ever surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you've ever confessed that you have need of him due to the sin in your life, that you need him to forgive you and to cleanse you and to come into your life and to save you.

If that's never happened to you, I want you to know that today's the day of salvation. He'll meet you where you are and he'll change your life forever. What a blessing it was last week when somebody came to their senses, as I think about an illustration in Scripture.

And she came down and hugged my neck and said, I need to be saved. If you need to give your life to Christ today, we're going to stand in just a moment.

We're going to sing. You come. Say, Pastor, I want to be saved. Maybe you're here this morning and you have been saved, but you've never been baptized.

We baptized a gentleman last week that had been saved for a long time, but never had been baptized as a believer. We had the joy of him publicly celebrating what Christ had done secretly in

his heart a long time ago.

[28:37] If you've never done that, I encourage you to come. Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church. This is where he'd have you to plant your life and serve him.

And if that be the case, you come. We welcome you and we'll be happy to guide you in that. Maybe you're here this morning and man, you're in a tough spot.

You got a burden in your life. Maybe it's a burden for somebody else. Maybe it's a burden for yourself. You got a burden in your life that you need to lay down before the Lord. You've worried too long. You need to give it to the Lord.

Trust him with it. You can do that at this altar. You can do it with me praying for you. You can do it where you stand. Give that to the Lord. The God of the Sundays is also the God of the waiting on Saturday.

You can trust him with it. Whatever he's told you to do is be obedient and follow him. Heavenly Father, I love you and I thank you for the opportunity you give us to learn from your word.

[29:44] I pray that we'll apply it to our lives and that we'll answer you in response as you speak to us today. In Jesus' precious name, amen.