

We have all probably heard the saying “*Familiarity breeds contempt.*” ... It could be a harsh reality of life. ... “*Familiarity breeds contempt*” suggests that the more we get to know someone or something... the less we respect or value them (or it.) This often happens as a **Workplace Dynamic**. An employee who was once excited about their job... may start to take it for granted... and criticize the organization or the job... as they become more familiar with the daily routine.

Overexposure to a Hobby might also bring it onto a person. Someone who was once passionate about a hobby or interest may start to become bored or frustrated with it after spending too much time focused on it... leading to a loss of enjoyment and appreciation.

It happens with **Long-Term Relationships**. ... In a long-term friendship one person may begin to feel unappreciated or undervalued... as the other takes their presence and support for granted... leading to feelings of contempt.

These examples demonstrate how prolonged exposure... or too much familiarity with a person... place... or thing can lead to a decrease in respect... appreciation... or affection.

(But let me ask a very important question)... Is there a danger that a Believer in Christ might experience this attitude toward Biblical truth...? Toward Christ... and His expressed love for us...? Can a true believe ever become calloused (or “ho-hum”) toward listening to another sermon about the Love Jesus has for us...? ... “*Great! Another one! I’ve heard this message more times than I can count. I wish that I could hear something brand new. I want to be challenged. I want to have ‘spiritual goose-*

bumps’... I need something fresh and exciting... This message about the love of Jesus is for younger (immature) Christians...” ... So we check out. We mentally dis-engage.

We might not express such thinking out loud ...and we might try to hide the fact that we’ve gone somewhere else. ... But I believe that it is possible for those of us who have had prolonged exposure and familiarity to Biblical truth... to have our (over-all) appreciation and affection decrease over time – UNLESS WE TAKE ACTION AGAINST IT.

So... before I preach another one of those sermons about the incredible love that Jesus has for us... I would like for us to stop and pray. Let’s ask God to give us all eager spirits and strong desires to be refreshed in these truths. Let’s ask God to fill our sails with a new sense of celebrative joy in these familiar truths.

- **PRAY** -

In our study through Luke... today we come to one of the most incredible passages that clearly show Christ’s love for us. This is just too important for anyone to be “*ho-hum*” about. ... We are looking at what Christ endured on the cross for us. We begin with verse 44 in Luke chapter 23.

Luke 23:44

As the crucifixion proceeds... the heavens begin to comment. The crucifixion began at the third hour (which is 9:00 a.m.)... at about the sixth hour (which would be 12:00 noon – midday – when the sun is at its zenith)... darkness fell over the entire land and lasted until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.).

Why was there darkness...? What do you think that means?

Someone might say... *“Well, it’s just dramatic. I’ve seen a lot of movies... and whenever you get to the climax there’s darkness. It always just makes it more dramatic or something.”*

It’s more than that. ... Every place in the Old Testament that talks about the day in which the justice of God will come down and destroy evil ... darkness is mentioned. ... God’s Day of Justice is sometimes (in the Old Testament) called the *“Day of Vengeance.”* ... It’s sometimes called the *“Day of the Lord.”* ... It’s sometimes called the *“Day of Judgment.”* ... Every time destroying evil is mentioned... we always find darkness associated with it. Always.

For example... in Joel 2:31... God says: *“On the day of vengeance, the sun will be turned to darkness.”* ... In Amos 8:9... God says: *“On the day of the Lord, I will make the sun go down at noon to darken the earth.”*... Zephaniah 1:15... and so on... and so on.

So what’s going on here in today’s opening verse – (verse 44)? ... What is Luke telling us? ... In those three black hours... sin was poured upon Christ’s soul as He became sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

From 12:00 noon to 3:00 in the afternoon... the judgment that eradicates and demolishes evil... was coming down on Jesus and eradicating and demolishing Him. ... Why would Jesus willingly do that?

You (most likely) know the answer to that. But let’s not be calloused to it.

All analogies or explanations of what happened fall short... although they might be *somewhat* helpful. ... Think of Christ's heart as a sea surrounded by the mountains of our sin. ... Then imagine our sins coursing down from the mountains (as a mud-slide) into His heart... until all the mountains of evil have slid into the sea.

Or think back to the magnifying glass you played with as a child. (Unless only boys did this...) If I held my magnifying glass under the sun's rays... I could start a fire... and I often did... for the fun-of-it. Remember how... if you focused the white spot of its concentrated light on a leaf... a bug... or ant colony - it would begin to burn. ... Our sins were pin-pointedly focused on Christ... while He hung on the cross for three hours. ... He was suffering the fiery wrath of God. ... On the cross... the mass of our corruption poured over Him. ... Wave after wave of our sin was poured over Christ's sinless soul. ... Again and again during those three hours... His soul recoiled and convulsed as all our lies... sexual sin... hatreds... jealousies... murders... and pride were poured into His purity. “

Because each one of us has to have our judgment day come down on Him... so that you and I don't have to go through it ourselves. ... (You know) our salvation is a confusing thing. ... In order for any of us to be saved... we have to declare: “*I deserve to be punished - so reward me!*” ... “*I deserve to be cast out - so take me in!*” ... We must accept the truth that *Jesus* was cast out that we could be taken in. ... **Jesus** was demolished. **Jesus** was judged.

One of the great ironies in all of the Scripture is when these people mock Him by saying: “*He saved others, but He won't save Himself.*” ... There has probably never been anything more foolish to have fallen from the lips of

man... No! ... He saved others **because** He wouldn't save Himself. ... Jesus replaced us... at the center of the bull's eye... where all the eternal justice of God was going. ... He **replaced** you and me at the center of the bull's eye.

This is all part of God **accepting** the request we make: "*I deserve to be cast out - but take me in!*" ... But there is even MORE! ... We also have (here) *the factor of **with-ness.***"

The second thief says to Jesus: "*Remember me.*" (That's all he asks.) "*Remember me.*" ... What does Jesus say? ... He gives him something else. ... He says: "*I'll do better than that. Today you're **with me.***" Of course... we might understand Jesus to be saying: "*We will live together in heaven.*"... Certainly it's that... but there's more to it.

Please recall with me the number of times Paul has written in Scripture: we died with Him and we're raised with Him. ... For example... Paul in Romans 6:5... says: "*We've been united with him in his death.*" ... Okay... but here's something even more astonishing. In Ephesians 2:6... Paul says: "*God has raised us up with him and has seated us with him in the realms of heaven.*"

Huh...? "*Wait! I haven't **died!** My feet are still planted here on earth. What do you mean I **have been** seated in the heavenly realms with Him...? That's a mistake. I'm sorry. I know you're inspired... but I guess you can get your grammar wrong. You mean we **will be** raised with Him. We **will be** seated in the heavenly realms.*"

Then I can almost hear Paul say:, "*No, no, no. I deliberately put it in the past tense.*"

Because **THIS** is what Paul is saying - and this is what the gospel is. This is what salvation is for Christians. **The minute you believe in Jesus Christ, everything He has done will be true of you in God's eyes.**

Why can Paul say in Romans 8:1, "*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*"? ... It is because you are as free from the penalty of sin as if you had already died... as if you had already paid the whole penalty yourself.

When Paul says you're *with* Him in His death... you're *with* Him in His resurrection... you're *with* Him as He sits at the right hand of God. ... (And what that means is the minute you believe... God sees you in Him. ... The minute you believe... everything that's true of Jesus Christ - is true of you!

We are with Him in His death (we are forgiven...and... not only that) ... we have been raised with Him and seated with Him. ... In Christ you are as beautiful... you're as attractive... you're as delightful in God's sight... as Jesus is. ... Jesus had the audacity to pray what we read in John 17:

"Father, love them even as you love me." ... **Even as**. (Don't allow yourself to become calloused to those two words!) - *Even as*. (Not "a little bit like"... or "a dim reflection of.") *Even as*. ... Jesus says: "I'll do more than just remember you. As of this moment... because you believe in me... you're with me."

Don't be calloused. "*Well I understand all this stuff.*" ... Good! ... But is it something that is really affecting you?"

Perhaps there are some of you who thought: "*Well, I've heard this before (this idea that once I believe... I'm in Christ. ... In God's eyes... I am as accepted... and as loved... and as delighted in... as if I'd done everything*

Jesus had done.) ... Yeah-yeah... I've heard that before... and I already know it." ... OK... so... are you using it the way Paul tells us to... in Colossians 3...? (Let me paraphrase)...

“Look at your pride. Look at the gossip. Look at the hurt feelings. Look at the backbiting. Look at the unhappiness. Look at all of the things that are wrong with you. Why is it there? Set your mind on things that are above. Set your mind where Christ who is your life is. Set your mind on your life which is hidden in Christ.”

If you and I fully knew how loved we are... we'd be perfect. Listen to me. If you REALLY knew how loved you were... if you REALLY knew how delightful you were to God... if you really knew this... if it affected you... if it melted your heart... if it really controlled the way you live... you wouldn't get upset about criticism.

You wouldn't feel always hurt. You wouldn't need approval. You wouldn't need power. You wouldn't need control. You'd move through life at large. You'd move through life with poise. You'd move through life with grace.

You might have HEARD all of this before – but none of us REALLY know it!

All of your problems come because you don't believe this deep down. You don't know this. You have information... but it's not real to you.

It's possible... especially if you've been attending church for a long time... that you've heard an awful lot of things you've heard before. ... But why do you come to church...? ... May I suggest that it is because in the gathered body... as we sing... as we pray... as we hear God's Word preached... we're seeking spiritual reality (a deeper conviction) for things we already know.

(But) I also realize that there could be some who think: “I’ve never heard this idea that once I believe... at that very moment I’m *with* Jesus in the sense that I’m *in* Jesus and God treats me as if I’d done everything Jesus has ever done. I’ve never heard that before.” ... Welcome to Christianity. You have been stuck in religion.

But for any who have heard this before but it’s not affecting you... Beg for reality. Beg for the Holy Spirit to make it a reality. Use the worship. Use the time of communion that we will take later on... . Use everything to say... “This is the thing I need more than anything else. I need to get it.”

Think about it. Reflect on it. Look at the three hours of having wave-after-wave of focused judgment placed on Him. Look at Him on the cross. Every single one of us needs the truth of Christ’s love to sink-in deeper! That is why we are here.

So look fully at Jesus dying for *you*... don’t turn away because you’ve heard this all before. ... If you see Jesus forgiving *you*... if you see Jesus looking down at *you* - and dying anyway(!) ... once that reality hits deep enough... you’ll be able to forgive those who criticize (and worse) those who hurt you. ... When this reality hits... you’ll be changed. Though I deserve to be cast out... God... take me in... because Jesus took my darkness... and because when I believe... I can be put into Jesus.

Look fully at the truth of “*with-ness*.” You are with Christ... seated in the heavenly realms. God the Father will never love His Son MORE than He does right now – and you are IN HIM. ... [P A U S E] ...

At the very end of the darkness another event occurred...

Luke 23:45

The great curtain of the Holy of Holies was split. ... This curtain was the grandest of the thirteen curtains in the temple. ... It was woven with expensive yarns from Babylon in blue... white... red... and purple with representations of cherubim. ... It was thick (as thick as a man's hand) and very substantial. It was sixty feet high... and it spanned the temple from wall to wall. Rabbi Alfred Eidersheim wrote that it was so heavy it needed 300 priests to hang it. ... No human hand could have torn that veil. ... It was torn by God's own almighty hand - from top to bottom - to signify the end of Judaism and the end of an age.

The great curtain's function had been to block all eyes from and forbid access to the Holy of Holies except once a year when the high priest entered with blood offered for himself and the sins of the people.

But now... in the darkened heart of the temple... at 3:00 in the afternoon... while all the priests would be in the courtyard starting the evening sacrifice... this hefty curtain was slashed in two as if a great sword had sliced through it. ... This was a portentous omen of the coming destruction of the temple. The judgment had begun.

But even more... it was a joyous sign of spiritual access. With the curtain forever parted... the Ark of the Covenant... the blood-covered mercy seat... and the cherubim were opened to the world. ... That afternoon... the way into God's presence opened to all. The writer of Hebrews exults:

Hebrews 10:19-22 (ESV)

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts

sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

There was no longer a need for a priesthood... because all who are in Christ are “a royal priesthood” (according to 1 Peter 2:9). ... Unlimited access to God is now the privilege of every child of God.

Luke 23:46

When someone dies... there is what is commonly known as the “death rattle.” The “death rattle” is the sound that a person makes when they draw their last breath. ... It is always with a struggle and with great effort.

The two thieves on their crosses undoubtedly died that way... but the Lord Jesus did not. He voluntarily died. He dismissed His spirit. Did you notice what He said... and how He said it? “*Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit*” - **with a loud voice.** It wasn't at all like a man whose life is ebbing away.

We will miss its force unless we feel the triumph in which it came. Luke records that “*Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last*”. ... It was a shout of victory!

This was no ordinary death by crucifixion. Normally the crucified... due to progressive weakening... fell unconscious and died feebly. But Jesus gave up his soul because He chose to do so... with a shout of confident victory.

“*Into your hands I commit my spirit*” was the Jews’ traditional evening prayer that pious Jews offered before going to sleep. Jesus chose to pray it at the moment He entered the ultimate sleep — death.

This prayer is a quotation from Psalm 31:5 (a psalm in which David describes what has befallen him from his enemies) ...and it concludes with an assertion of confidence in God (in 22–24). ... When David prayed: “*Into your hands I commit my spirit*”... he was asking to be **preserved** from death. ... But when Jesus (the ultimate son of David) prayed it - it was a prayer of trust in the Father at the moment of death. ... When Jesus prayed this “good night” prayer... He prayed it as no other Jew had ever prayed it.

Luke 23:47

Matthew... Mark... and Luke all point to the head Roman soldier (the captain or centurion) who had apparently been in charge of carrying out this execution. Upon seeing what had happened... he realized that Jesus had been no ordinary person. ... Presumably this soldier had carried out other such executions... but never had he experienced what he did at this one.

The centurion had supervised the cruel flagellation of Jesus. But he had also heard Jesus mercifully tell the daughters of Jerusalem not to weep for Him but for themselves (v. 28). He had seen Jesus look at him and his cohorts and pray, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (v. 34). He had heard Jesus promise Paradise to one of the thieves crucified beside him (v. 43). He likely had stood close enough to the cross in the chilling darkness to make sure no foul play occurred and had sensed the cosmic sign of the eerie “midnight day.” He had heard the victorious calm with which Jesus gave up his life.

I agree with J. Vernon McGee who wrote:

The centurion, I believe, became a saved man. He had charge of the crucifixion of Christ. At the foot of the cross he looked up and saw that something unusual was taking place, and he could glorify God. He saw that Christ was a righteous man. The other Gospel writers add to Luke's account that the centurion said that He was the Son of God. I realize that the centurion's confession of faith was not enough to join the average Bible church, but let us put him back where he stands. He is at the Crucifixion. He knew nothing about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He had never read any books on theology. This poor fellow was in the dark, but he couldn't have said anything that revealed his faith more than this.

This Gentile soldier understood something that most of the Jewish nation had missed: **Surely this man was innocent.** The captain understood that Jesus had not deserved what he received... yet Jesus had borne it all with dignity... courage... and even words of forgiveness.

If Dr. McGee and I are correct... this is the third miracle in today's passage. The first was darkness... the second was the tearing of the curtain... and the third was a miracle of a transformed soul. ... In the centurion's declaration at the foot of the cross... we see that Jesus' death was not only for Jews... but also for Gentiles.

Luke 23:48-49

What a contrast we see here. The centurion seems to come to faith... and those who had followed Christ for (perhaps) three years of His public ministry... walk away grieving as though all hope was gone. Faith was born in one... and faith had diminished among the dedicated followers of Jesus.

The whole point of my message today has been to encourage us all not to allow our faith to diminish.

Perhaps part of your story is that you can't imagine life without the church and Jesus. You have for many years now been listening to Gospel accounts about Jesus and the cross that He died on. ... But as a result... the edge has been taken off of your faith. Being overexposed... your faith has been dulled by indifference.

However... when we come to a scene like this (as narrated by Luke) it becomes clear what it took to make the payment. ... We can't (really) fathom what it meant for Jesus to have the Father's back turned on Him... and suffer wave after wave of pin-pointed magnified sin placed on Him.

I urge you... don't underestimate the gift of eternal life. Although it cost you and me nothing... it cost Him everything — untold suffering in that period of dark judgment.

If you genuinely understand what the Lord has done for you... then you have but one response... be refreshed with joy and praise!