

The Power of Darkness

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[0 : 00] Thank you so much. Beautifully read. Well, good morning again, everybody. I bring you the warm greetings of your sisters and brothers at Harper Church and Christianity Explored Ministries.

And they are praying for us today as we gather around this passage. It's a fantastic passage.

Please do turn in your Bible with me to that passage.

Which your pastor's a bit of a bandit. I was sitting in Belfast Airport on Thursday and decided, right, I've got a flight delay. Now's a chance to crack on a bit with Luke 22. So I started doing my prep and I thought, I'll just make sure I've got the passage right.

So I sent him a text saying, Graham, just to be clear, Luke 22, 39 to 65. Is that right? By reply. Oh, mate, you're kidding. No, you're on Job 7. And then and then we only kidding.

So I've dished that one out a few times myself, so it was good to get it back. But this is an amazing text. It is great to be in the time of year, isn't it? And I guarantee you've said this already this morning or last week as you were coming home.

[1 : 00] The time of year when the day's beginning to lengthen. On your way home at night, will you not say to people, look at that, it's 20 past 6 and it's light. Or in the morning if you're up early, look at that, it's just back at 6 and it's light already.

It's great to be at that time of year. But as we turn to Luke 22 this morning, we are descending into darkness. Jesus said to those who came to arrest him in verse 53, When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me, but this is your hour and the power of darkness.

And I want to take that as a title for our study this morning, the power of darkness. There are essentially two things I want us to think about, but of course there's going to be subheadings.

So there's about 15 things. But we'll try and condense it to two main things as we look at it together. Number one, the depths of this darkness. And then in a few moments, the defeat of this darkness.

So first of all, the depths of this darkness. Let's just try and get our bearings on the big biblical picture. Because from the beginning of his revelation of himself to us, our God is a God of light.

[2 : 12] The first words ever recorded of God are, let there be light as he banishes physical darkness. Gloriously. But we quickly find in the book of Genesis that the created order experiences spiritual darkness.

And it comes along when God's word is denied in chapter 3 of Genesis and when it's disobeyed.

And so spiritual darkness, as we talk about it, to give it a proper definition, is basically rebellion against God, rebellion against his word, rebellion against his ways.

And the arch rebel, Satan, and all his efforts are channeled into rebelling and to bringing about rebellion. That's why we read in verse 47 about Judas' betrayal of Jesus.

Because before we get to that, we read in verse 3 of our chapter that Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the number of the twelve.

And he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, verse 5 tells us, and agreed to give him money.

[3 : 25] So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. I find these words at the beginning of chapter 22 that tease up our passage this morning, I find them quite chilling.

That there is a gladness in deep darkness. That there is a celebration in deep darkness. The authorities couldn't legally arrest Jesus, so now they're glad they celebrate the dark deal done with Judas.

And Judas himself has had a long-term problem managing his love of money. You know, well, I'm sure 1 Timothy 6.10 famously confirms what we see here, that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

And that's what we see worked out in Judas' life. John 12 recounts for us that occasion when Mary poured the expensive ointment in the feet of the Lord Jesus.

And Judas Iscariot complained. He said, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? And John adds, he said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief.

[4 : 41] And having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put in it. That's a way at the beginning of the adventures of the Lord Jesus Christ with his disciples.

You've gone right through Luke's gospel. Do you remember in Luke 11.35, Jesus says, when the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? When the light that is in you is darkness, then the addiction to money feels good.

And ripping Jesus off is nothing in comparison to the joy and the satisfaction that the money you'll get promises you. And when you're a person like that, and in the presence of the Lord Jesus, and hearing all that he has to say, and totally unaffected by it, you're only there to hold the money bag, you're only there to pretend to be one of the disciples so that you can rip them off.

When you behave like that for long enough, one day you'll find yourself capable not only of ripping Jesus off, but selling Jesus off. Capable of betraying the Lord of life.

And not only betraying him, but betraying him for money and betraying him with a kiss. So verse 47.

[6 : 01] While he was still speaking, there came a crowd. And the man called Judas, one of the twelve was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. Here's the depths of the darkness.

Not only does he love money more than people, not only does he use a sign of love as a means of betrayal, but when the Lord tries to snap him back into reality, Judas is powerless to see sense.

He can't stop himself. Look at verse 48 with me. Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? What a moment that was for Judas.

The Lord Jesus looks him straight in the face and says, Judas. So he names him Judas. And he names his crime, would you betray? And he names his victim, the Son of Man.

And he names his means with a kiss. But the darkness has overwhelmed Judas. And although he's been helping himself to the money, he cannot help himself now.

[7 : 09] He looks into the eyes of Jesus, who knows exactly what Judas is doing. And he goes ahead and executes his betrayal. For Judas, the depth of darkness is to hear Jesus question, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?

And for Judas to think in effect, Nevertheless, Jesus, not your will, but mine be done. But we don't just see exceptional rebellion in this text, as we see with Judas.

We also see typical rebellion in Peter. The incident here with Peter is the story of a follower of Jesus who, unlike Judas, was determined to do well.

So how did Peter end up, as we heard read to us there so helpfully, weeping bitterly, full of regrets, having on three instances denied that he even knew Jesus?

Well, we're going to slow the pace slightly now, and I want us to take a little bit more time over Peter as we trace how the darkness overwhelmed him, and maybe compare notes with Peter and see some parallels from our own experience.

[8 : 22] I want to notice, I think, four things. Notice, first of all, the problem with Peter was his personal confidence. We see with both Judas and Peter that the behavior of these men is not just human frailty.

There is profound spiritual darkness at work. Have a look back to chapter 22, verse 31. Jesus said, Now, can you imagine the Lord Jesus saying that to you?

Saying your name twice with a sense of urgency and saying, Now, look, here's the issue. Satan has demanded to have you. Would that not make you very cautious?

Would that not make you extraordinarily careful? But there doesn't seem to be much of that with Peter, verse 33. Lord, I'm ready to go with you, both to prison and to death. And Jesus said, I tell you, Peter the cock will not crow this day until you deny three times that you know me.

There's Peter imagining that imprisonment and death won't be able to prize him from Jesus' side.

And yet Jesus knows and tells him that before the night is out, Peter will deny even knowing Jesus.

[9 : 50] So his first problem is his personal confidence, his ability to make promises to Jesus about his love and commitment and faithfulness to him.

His second problem is what we might call his willful disobedience. Just try and track the deterioration with me here. At this point, there is still strength to be found for Peter.

Jesus has a strategy to stop his followers being overwhelmed by darkness. He has prayed for Peter. He has warned Peter. And now at the beginning of our particular section, in verse 39, as Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him, and when he came to the place, he said to them, pray that you may not enter into temptation. And temptation can mean either temptation to sin or meaning a time of severe trial and testing. And the Lord Jesus knew about the power of darkness.

He saw it as a clear and present danger. And he says to the disciples, pray that you will not enter into either temptation to sin or a severe time of trial and testing that will lead to temptation to sin.

[11 : 11] Again, because you know your way through Luke's gospel, back in chapter 11, verse 4, in what we call the Lord's Prayer, he gave an example. He taught his disciples that they ought to pray, lead us not into temptation.

And Jesus wanted his disciples to acknowledge, as we pray to our Heavenly Father, on a routine basis, that we are not personally able to stand in the hour of trial.

It's the opposite of what Peter felt with his self-confidence. The Lord Jesus wants us on our faces every day, saying, Lord, we will not stand in the hour of trial. That's the point of that clause.

And you may recall that Jesus had also precisely warned them about this in chapter 21. Have a quick look back to verse 33 of chapter 21.

He says, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that a day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

[12 : 14] He couldn't have been clearer as he prepared his disciples for the hour of severe trial and test.

And now, on the Mount of Olives, he gives them a straightforward instruction. Pray. Go and pray.

And Jesus himself went and prayed. That was a straightforward instruction.

But there's no record of Peter and any of the other disciples doing so. In fact, our chapter 22, verse 45, when he rose from prayer, Jesus rose from prayer and came to the disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow.

And he said to them, Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The problem of personal confidence, the problem of willful obedience, Jesus has told them to go and pray.

He's told them to go and acknowledge they're in dangerous times and he didn't do it. I wonder, do you see yourself here as I see myself? I have no doubt that the failing to obey Jesus' commandment to pray is the unquestionable source of my failure in many times of tests and trials.

[13 : 22] Just rank, willful disobedience. Think about it. What we're seeing about the Lord's prayer. He's given us a model of prayer whereby we acknowledge every day our need of forgiveness and our need of provision and our spiritual frailty before our Father.

Lead us not into temptation. Lord, don't let the road be a road of trial and testing because I will not stand in it by myself. We're meant to know that about ourselves.

We're meant to say that to our Heavenly Father. And yet, how often on the wrong side of a spiritual car crash do we sit, you know, head in hands reflecting on how we just barreled into the day blind to the spiritual danger we may face through an unfounded sense of spiritual confidence and through willful disobedience, neglectful disobedience in prayer.

Third thing we see, we notice, is Peter's careful distance. Verse 54 of our section this morning, Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him to the high priest's house.

And Peter was following at a distance. Well, good on him that he followed at all. But the detail that Luke records of the distance that Peter kept between him and Jesus is very significant.

[14 : 53] It points at least, do you not think, to a subconscious, cautious self-preservation. Peter was following at a distance.

Can we notice this morning how quickly the situation changed? Seeing Jesus being taken into custody, seeing Jesus offering no resistance, has changed how Peter feels about the Lord Jesus. When they came for Jesus, John tells us that it was Peter who had been quick, though not particularly skillful, with the sword.

He was part Galilean, part Glaswegian. And when we get to glory, I'd love to ask him, Peter, was that the upstroke, actually, when you're lifting the sword when you took the poor bloke's ear off?

What was going on with it? It would be really interesting to know. But have a look at verse 49. When those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword? [16:00] And it was Peter in verse 50, John tells us. Didn't wait for an answer from Jesus. Struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said, no more of this.

And he touched his ear and healed him. So get the picture. Peter was ready for a sword fight. He might possibly have been prepared in that situation to be arrested and killed in the skirmish there and then.

I think he was being truthful when he said, Lord, I'm ready to die for you. I'm ready to go to prison for you. And I think that was the context in which Peter saw that happening. They won't take me alive and they won't take you alive.

I'm your wingman, Lord Jesus. Peter could have coped with that danger, fighting with Jesus as Jesus also fought.

But what we learn from Peter now walking at a distance, at a careful distance from Jesus, is that it is much more difficult to remain confident in a Savior who is willing to suffer loss.

[17:14] Much more difficult to follow a leader who heals those who've come to harm him. It's the Lord's apparent passivity with his enemies and the enemies of his people that puts a distance between Peter and the Lord and often puts a distance between us and the Lord.

You know, as Peter watched that freshly lopped ear being perfectly restored, that miracle happening, and that miracle having zero impact on the arrest party, and Jesus saying, enough with the swords, and Jesus submissively going with those who were taking him in ultimately to death, Peter hangs back.

And the mystery is, why doesn't Jesus just thump these guys? Why doesn't he, with all the sovereign power he has, take the breath out their lungs? They're toast!

They're finished! A thought from Jesus and they're gone. Why doesn't he do it? Why does he tolerate this nonsense? And Luke tells us, doesn't he, how completely overwhelmed Jesus looked here?

Have a look at verse 32, sorry, verse 63, at the end of our passage. Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.

[18:44] They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, prophesy, who is it that struck you? And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him. And all this was going on when Peter sat at the fire.

So not only had he seen Jesus passive at the point of arrest, he was now seeing Jesus passive at the hands of his enemies. And Peter sat there around the fire among the group, struggling to summon up the same devotion to Jesus.

Jesus now bound and blindfolded and beaten and bloodied. And you know, 2,000 years later, people are still in that situation.

They may be personally impressed by Jesus but publicly embarrassed by him. Personally impressed by all the things they see that he's able to do in the Gospels.

Personally impressed even by his love and self-sacrifice but publicly embarrassed to identify with someone who's prepared to appear so shamefully weak as that.

[19:53] They can't bring themselves to trust in and stand by a Saviour who was willing to suffer, to be rejected, mocked, spat upon, blasphemed, nailed to a cross. But that is the absolute core of the Gospel.

Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1. He says, Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel and not with words of eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

At that point in Peter's life this cross experience of Jesus which began long before he was actually nailed to the pieces of wood looked like folly.

It looked pathetic. It looked so unappealing. It looked so hopeless, so embarrassing. Peter's keeping at a careful distance.

[21:03] But the day would come and I'll tell you about it later when Peter with Paul with all of us who know Christ saw that that is the power of God. Final thing for us to notice.

His personal confidence and willful disobedience and careful distance and his social acceptance. Verse 55 When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together Peter

sat down among them.

Now it's interesting the way Luke records it that there's now no distance between Peter and those who arrested Jesus. Distance between him and Jesus but Luke really draws our mind's eye to the point that Peter gets right in among them there.

That's a risky thing to do. He'd been the one who tried to be a bit handy with the sword. So it was likely that they clocked him. They knew his face but Peter had perhaps subconsciously decided that he was going to settle at least that night where he was going to be was amongst this crowd.

He wanted the security of being among them and soon that was put beyond all doubt as the questions came. Verse 56 The servant girl seeing him as he sat in the light looking closely at him said this man was also with him but he denied it saying women I don't know him.

[22 : 28] A little later verse 58 someone else saw him and said you're also one of them. Peter answered man I am not. And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted saying certainly this man also was with them for he too is a Galilean.

His accent gave them away. But Peter said man I do not know what you are talking about. And immediately while he was still speaking the cock crowed and the Lord turned and looked at Peter and Peter remembered the saying of the Lord how he had said to him before the cock crows today you will deny me three times and he went out and wept bitterly.

You see how fast that happened. Now let's not imagine that Peter's crimes are in a different league from our own. Haven't we all felt the inner conflict that Peter experienced here as we're forced to decide whose approval we want most.

The world's or the Lord's. Haven't we all felt that kind of I just like to be among them. I just like to fit in.

I just like to be accepted. I just keep a slight distance from Jesus. It's not going to mean anything. But it means I can follow him and still be pals here in the crowd.

[23 : 57] And although these three denials happened over a period of more than an hour, the stunning reality is that it happened so quickly. Just as Jesus said, remember I read to you chapter 21 verse 34, watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dot dot dot cares of this life and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

Is that not exactly what happened to Peter? The cares of this life, that is the need to belong, the need to fit in, the need to be accepted, the need to be approved of by the culture, by our peers, the need to be loved in the world that is in rebellion against the Savior, that will come upon us suddenly like a trap as it came upon Peter.

Peter. He couldn't see that as he went to his death offering no resistance, the Lord Jesus was fighting and winning for Peter and all the others who would put their trust in him.

He didn't see it at that point, he did see it later, but not at that point. See, here's the depth of this darkness in Judas and in Peter.

But more briefly, let's finish with the defeat of this darkness. Let's see the triumph of the Lord Jesus even in this dark session.

[25 : 23] We get nowhere near resurrection morning yet, but there is still triumph of the Lord Jesus here. Notice a couple of things in the text. Number one, Jesus defeated the darkness by his prayerful submission.

Back to the top, verse 41, he withdrew from the disciples about a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if you're willing, remove this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done. And you know, until this point in history when the Lord Jesus was born, Satan had enjoyed a 100% success rate with all the men and women who ever lived as they embraced his dark rebellion against God to varying degrees.

there had never been a human being before who in total integrity and sincerity could go before the Father and say, nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.

But notice what is happening here. On that dark night, here is a man born of woman, fully God yet fully human. And he's unlike all the others who came before him and came after him.

[26 : 36] On that dark night, he does not run from God and his will, but he runs to God and his will. And he kneels and he pleads in the light of his Father's will.

And it gives us a sense, a clear indication, doesn't it, of the inestimable horror of what Jesus was about to face, that he asked his Father that if possible there could be a change of plan.

And you and I can be sure that if there was any other way to destroy Satan and his darkness and free men and women from the grip of sin and reconcile them to God forever, then the Father who so loved the Son would have found it in this moment.

If there was any other way of redeeming sinners and defeating the darkness, his Father would have found it in this moment, but there was none. there was no other way.

Both the Father and the Son are committed to the plan of salvation. Verse 43, and there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him. That was the Father's way of confirming to his Son that the cup could not be removed.

[27 : 53] Father, is there any way, Son? There's no other way. the cup is a reference to the experience that the Lord Jesus is about to face.

It's like drinking a cup. It wasn't just unbearable physical suffering, but unimaginable spiritual suffering. Jesus describes the contents of that cup just a couple of verses earlier in verse 37. Let's glance at it for a moment. He says, So he knew with all that was happening, all the suffering, all the betrayal, all the denial, he knew that the plan was going split second according to the will of his Father.

And in Luke 22 verse 37 that I've just read, the Lord Jesus is quoting, you recognize it from the end of Isaiah 53, probably to say all of Isaiah 53, but he just quotes the last part, verse 12, which says, Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.

That's how the darkness was defeated. darkness defeated in the darkness as the Lord Jesus prays submissively and obeys the will of his Father and is numbered among the transgressors and finds a way by his death in our place to make intercession for the transgressors, to set us free from our sin, bearing the sin of many.

[29 : 46] the darkness is defeated as God treats his perfect son in the way that loathsome sin deserves to be treated, so that he can treat loathsome sinners in the way that his perfect son deserves to be treated.

And that's happening at that moment in the garden. And this was not easy for Jesus. Look at verse 44, and being in agony, in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

He was in agony, not at the prospect of dying, but of bearing in himself the gut-wrenching vileness of human sin. We don't find it gut-wrenching and vileness. We quite like it. We toy with it.

But to the Lord Jesus, it is gut-wrenching vileness. You know that experience you get when you've been out a walk and you go home and you go in through the front door and you're in the door just a couple of minutes in the home and you suddenly get that revolting stench in your nose.

And what's the first thing you check? And there it is. And you glance back and there's that beautiful pattern over the white wool carpet.

[31 : 09] And some dog has done its business and you've trod in it and you've dragged it into the house. Now you know that kind of repulsive, gut-wrenching, oh, vile. The smell, the look.

I don't want to put you off your lunch. I'll say no more about it other than this. Multiply that sense of revulsion a billion times and you're not getting close to how God feels about our sin.

God's sin. And Jesus, I'll come to you, buddy. And Jesus, Jesus knows and feels it in the midst of it. Jesus knows and feels that reality in the midst of it. He knows that he's about to deal with that. It's the agony for him of on the cross bearing this gut-wrenching vileness of human sin as he's numbered among the transgressors, as he takes our place on the cross.

That's the proclamation of the gospel. And as a consequence of that, he's going to be cut off from fellowship with his father. So he is in an agony in the garden as he thinks of it.

[32 : 19] It didn't look like it at the time, but this was the defeat of darkness. In Colossians 2, Paul, speaking of the Lord Jesus, says that he, in these very moments, disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to shame, triumphing over them by the cross.

Peter couldn't see it. He saw the opposite. He saw Jesus being disarmed by the rulers and authorities. He saw them putting him to shame, but no, it was the very opposite.

And it's wonderful that later Peter got to see it. 1 Peter 2, verse 21, for to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you. Leave an example that you should follow in his steps.

Listen to what Peter later rejoiced in. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. Peter was seething at him for that at the point, but

later he saw it.

When he suffered, he did not threaten. Peter thought that was so weak, but later he gets it. But continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[33 : 35] By his wounds you've been healed, for you were straying like sheep. Oh, Peter knew all about that, but have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. that dark night, the depths of the darkness, also in the midst of it all, the defeat of the darkness.

Jesus defeated the darkness by his prayerful submission. And finally, Jesus defeated the darkness as our perfect substitute.

This is amazing. In order to free Peter and me and everyone else from the power of darkness over us, from our sense of being conquered, completely at ease in that crowd, in the depths of the darkness, the Lord Jesus not only had to bear our sin, he had to do it as one who had none of his own.

He had to be able to do that in total personal perfection and that's what we see here. And although we're rightly challenged by his straightforward command in verse 40, pray that you may not enter into temptation, the real take home of this text this morning, is not just that we should pray more, certainly that is an application, but the point is to see Jesus as our true and only champion.

That's what we need to see. He is the champion over our prayerlessness. The instruction came, the command came, pray, and they didn't do it just like I didn't do it, just like you didn't do it.

[35 : 12] But Jesus did it. The true champion over all our sinful prayerlessness, all our failure and trials and temptations, all our rebellion against God's will, in the midst of that dark night, he prevailed.

And do you know that even as he did that, even as he went and prayed, even as he went in agony and sorrow that we cannot enter into, do you know that as he was doing that, he was achieving something glorious, that before he died as our substitute, he lived as our substitute.

So he died for my prayerlessness, having not failed to be prayerful himself. He died for my failure to submit to my heavenly father's will, having utterly submitted to his heavenly father's will.

So that now as we turn to him, risen from the dead, we can know beyond doubt in this dark world, according to Colossians 1, that he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

darkness. The power of darkness was awesome that night. The depths of the power, but the defeat of that darkness is glorious and is eternal.

[36 : 53] Let's pray together. we ask, gracious heavenly father, as we look at your son, as we think about this text, this amazing historical record of what happened to him and how humans reacted and how the demons and Satan reacted and how we still struggle with the picture of a submissive Jesus, not realizing what he is accomplishing, not realizing that by that arrest and by that mocking and by that beating and by that spitting and by that cross, he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them by the cross.

How we thank you for the gospel today, for its power to deliver men and women this morning from the domain of darkness and transfer us to the kingdom of your beloved, risen and exalted son.

We thank you that in him, in his perfection, in his substitutionary death, in his resurrection and reign, we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

Grant us to glory in our Savior, in his precious name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. ULATE I END