

**On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell**  
**Week 6 - The final Furlong**  
**Wednesday - God's Hidden Face**



**The Death of Jesus**

*From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."*

*Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."*

*And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*

*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.*

**Matthew 27:45-53 (NIV)**

She had seen horror movies before. They were not her favourite form of recreation, but at least they weren't real. This was real!

The cry of the dying Christ reached her ears in the darkness, a cry of such pain and devastation, of such desolation, that she thought her heart would break with it. She knew for all time, with the surety of shared pain, that Jesus was taking upon himself at that moment the loneliness of humanity separated from the creator. For that brief moment in time, he experienced the full weight of the broken earth's sin and the obliteration of his Father's face from view, for God cannot look upon sin.

For that brief span of time, too, the traveller realised something of what hell must be like. Even in earth's worst moments, God is not absent from the globe. Even when pestilence and famine, violence and evil stalk the earth, the presence of God is still freely available to all who call to him. But in that moment, Jesus felt what it was like for God to turn his face and look away, what it was like to be truly alone.

No wonder the bystanders believed that the end of the world had come. Was he calling Elijah, they wondered - a forerunner to the Messiah, one who, by tradition, would appear again at the end? There was darkness, pain, the terror of the confused crowd that must have scattered blindly in all directions when the sun's light failed. There were howls of outrage and fear as the Holy of Holies, the most sacred and hidden part of the temple where only Priests could go, was dramatically exposed for all to see when the curtain dividing it from the people suddenly ripped from top to bottom.

The traveller could see it all, but the earth beneath her feet shook until the very rocks split open. She had never experienced an earthquake before and was terrified. In that arid land, the ground cracked like sand-paper, and cliffs and craggy hilltops came tumbling down, flattening everything in their path. Around Jerusalem every available cave had been claimed as a fitting tomb for the dead, and now, with rock falls and earth quake, the contents of those caves were laid open. Howls of fear and amazement assaulted Tracy's ears as person after person pushed and shove her in the darkness, running in terror from the tombs, calling out warnings about the dead whom they had seen emerge from those tombs and head towards the city. And all the while, the dying criminals on their separate crosses relinquished their life-blood to the earth.

If ever she might have wished she had not come, it was now. She was running too, hard and fast and without thought. Unheeding of the ground opening up before her, uncaring of those who stood in her way, blind panic at its very worst seized her, and the heaving mass of the crowd around carried all before them. Suddenly strong arms closed around her and held her fast. She struggled but could not break free, trapped in the darkness.

'Stop!' DC insisted. 'Stop, you're going the wrong way.'

She felt a mixture of relief and terror at his actions. 'I can't go back, DC!' she screamed. 'Don't make me!'

He released his grasp but she could still feel his breath upon her hair and his nearness calmed her enough for her to hear what he was saying.

'You must return to the cross,' he said.

'But he's dying.'

'Yes, you must return to hear his prayer.'

'I heard him pray, DC. It was awful.' She was shaking from head to foot now as the shock began to wear off. 'He is forsaken, desolate,' she sobbed, 'I cannot bear it.'

'But he is still praying, Tracy, he has not stopped praying. You must hear his final prayer. Please come.'

How she got there, she could not tell - perhaps DC carried her, maybe she stumbled back- but it seemed only an instant later that she looked upwards into the darkness and saw only the brooding shape of the cross, an empty shadow against a lightening sky. It was still too dark to see his face. But his voice, his voice was a mere dove's wing away as with calm and resolute clarity she heard him say, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46).

A cry of joy escaped from DC's lips as he sank to the ground, tears flowing from his face, his strong arms raised to the cross in worship. 'His mother taught him that prayer, Tracy,' he whispered, 'and Joseph too. It is a child's prayer. Each night, before sleep, every Jewish child says such a thing. Don't you see, Tracy? He is not destroyed, he is trusting his Father, he is resting in the love that he knows will never fail him - yes, trusting even now.'

*Dear God,*

*Make me a child again, to sleep without fear, to walk alone and know you will never leave me, to trust the one who walked the path of earth's terror and won the battle for us all - the one who trusted you and knew no disappointment in the end. Amen*