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LOST IN A BLACK HOLE

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My God, My God...

You've probably heard of a black hole; who hasn't? And you've probably heard the black hole jokes, like 'what happens in a black hole stays in a black hole'; or 'black holes really suck'; or 'black holes are where God divided by zero'. What is a black hole? The answer's easy to say, but hard to understand.

It's a region of space-time so dense that nothing entering it escapes, not even light. Hence the name, it's black. In black holes, the normal laws of physics break down. In sci-fi fantasies they're portals for time travel, or doors to parallel universes. But, that's fantasy. Yet, even though we can't use them to jump back in time they're still deeply puzzling. Astrophysicists tell us they're marked by an 'event horizon', the point of no return. Anything being drawn over the event horizon becomes utterly invisible to us. Black holes consume planets, stars and whole galaxies. Nothing escapes. Nothing.

There's a black hole at the centre of our galaxy, the Milky Way; a big one: a supermassive black hole. It's so big and so dense the whole galaxy revolves around it like our solar system revolves around the sun. If we were ever to be drawn over its event horizon we'd be crushed into an infinitely dense mass; and our mass would add to its power.

On the cross, Jesus entered a moral black hole. It was an event so out of the ordinary, and so strange that our normal ways of thinking can't comprehend it. He crossed an event horizon we can't even approach. When we think about Jesus' suffering on the cross we're often drawn to the physical pain. True, the torture before the crucifixion was brutal, and the crucifixion itself even more so. But, to be frank, plenty of people were crucified in those days, and many of them lingered longer and suffered more deeply than Jesus. Sometimes the soldiers would break people's legs, to make them die faster. But when they came to do that to Jesus they were surprised that he'd already died. His physical suffering lasted about six hours; some crucified men lived for days. But the physical side of the suffering isn't my focus. If you and I could be helped by physical suffering we wouldn't need Jesus' cross. The human race has a penchant for inflicting horrendous suffering on one another; it hasn't helped us one bit.

Jesus' cross was a spiritual black hole. He went to a place no human being had ever been before or since. He alone could do it; he alone had to do it. No one else could help us.

Why?

Because of what his cross did. The cross doesn't represent something, like self-sacrifice or noble courage. Jesus actually did something on the cross. God did something in Jesus. Put simply: Jesus became all the wickedness, evil, and pollution of the world. He was the "Lamb of God" who "takes away the sin of the world". Elsewhere the Bible tells us he was "made sin for us" and that he became "the curse for us". These are short words, but big statements! Jesus was entering a place that only he could go, since only he could take all that evil onto his shoulders.

Let me try to explain. What happens when you feel guilty?

You feel lots of emotions, all tangled up together. Shame, anger, loneliness, fear; these jostle with the desire to escape, to get some relief for your conscience, to justify yourself. In a small way, and to a tiny extent, we experience what it means to bear our sins and failures in our own body. It's only partial, since we don't have pure hearts or clean consciences as Jesus did. The effect is muted. And for us we escape by using some means to justify ourselves; or we numb the pain by entertainment or distraction; or we drink to forget.

But imagine, if you can, what it must have been like for Jesus? For him to pass over the event horizon of the cross; where he became our sin. Where his pure heart, his perfect mind and unsullied conscience were drawn down, ever down, deeper down into the pollution of our evil thoughts, petty wickedness and hateful deeds. We can't go there. Like the deepest recesses of a black hole, it's a singularity. There's nothing like it. Yet it swallowed him alive. And he fought with might and mane. We didn't see that. No one saw it, not even his mother Mary standing at the foot of the cross. She and the rest saw him hanging on the timbers. He didn't get down to fight. He couldn't. He didn't move. But in reality he was descending into the darkest recesses of the moral universe. He was plunging into the darkest spiritual supermassive black hole that ever was: our hearts. He used all of his moral energy and spiritual strength to find every bit of sin, evil, and wickedness within the whole race and to allow himself to experience it all.

His mind was tormented, his conscience accused, his spirit stretched to breaking point. He cried out in his mother tongue: "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachtani ... my God, my God, why did you forsake me". He entered the pit of hell, the deepest recesses of evil, beyond the event horizon, out of our sight. He felt the loss. Cut off from God his Father, utterly removed from the comfort of the Spirit; he was abandoned up to our evil, given over to our sin. All the hordes of hell itself rode on his shoulders. None of us, ever, under any circumstances could have done it. Nor will we be abandoned in that way. He was abandoned so that we might never be.

But, he did what none of us could do. The light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. He alone, of all men for all time, could emerge from that place. In his moral purity, his utter holiness and his unremitting trust of God he took all of that filth and pollution into himself and overcame it. We don't know how that happened. Looking at Jesus' work on the cross is like looking at an iceberg. We only see a small fraction of his agony, the rest is hidden from view; it's in the deep darkness. But what we do know is that he did it; and that trusting that he did it makes all the difference to us. If he didn't go there, we couldn't trust him. The game would be up. Evil would have won. But he did, so we can.

Trusting him means that we'll never, ever be abandoned. Not ever. Because he was abandoned there for us. The black hole of his cross, means light and life for you and me. Like I said, the normal laws of physics don't apply.

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