

THE STORY of THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST
Lesson 25
Matthew 27.45-54
THE SIGNS WHICH ACCOMPANIED CHRIST'S DEATH

We have observed and recorded how the various groups of people who participated in Christ's crucifixion evaluated Him -- *what they thought of Him*. And, I'm sure also, that to many of the multitudes of those who had come into Jerusalem to worship at this feast, many of them from faraway regions -- they may have even entertained no particular opinion or judgment about these proceedings.

BUT WHAT ABOUT GOD? WHAT WAS HE THINKING?
WHAT IS HIS JUDGMENT AND EVALUATION OF THESE EVENTS?
God was not silent. And, GOD DIDN'T LEAVE HIMSELF WITHOUT WITNESS
THAT HE WAS VERY PRESENT...AND HE WAS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING.

All the transactions which were made during the crucifixion event didn't transpire in the unseen world between the Father and the Son. There were also some very extraordinary signs which accompanied Christ's death and which occurred in the visible physical circumstances. These signs serve as God's own personal and supernatural commentary on His Son's redemptive sacrifice.

On at least three other occasions during Jesus' life, God the Father had audibly spoken from Heaven to give His affirmation and commendation of His Son's work: (1) *Matthew 3.17*; (2) *Matthew 17.5*; (3) *John 12.28*. This time, God will speak by intervening and interrupting in the physical elements around the Cross.

1. THE SUN IS DARKENED (verse 45)

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

The darkness descended upon the whole land at high noon. This was the most unusual and unexpected time for darkness. And it was not an eclipse. It was God's way to deliberately announce His Presence and get their undivided attention. It was probably not a total pitch black kind of darkness, like the plague of darkness which God brought upon Egypt just before the Exodus (*Exodus 10.21-23*). They still continued to move around the cross and carry on their wicked business. But, it was a darkness which cast a deep dusky shroud over everybody and everything -- and lasted for about three hours.

God often uses darkness to pronounce and announce His judgments against sin and sinners (*Isaiah 5.30*; *Joel 2.2*; *Amos 5.20*; *Zephaniah 1.14-16*). The darkening of the sun is a commonly- prophesied sign of the Lord's coming in judgment, and especially the final judgment (*Isaiah 50.3*; *Joel 2.31*; *Amos 8.9*; *Acts 2.20*; *Revelation 9.2*).

Surely this darkness was God's public announcement that judgment was being executed against sin -- certainly not Jesus' sin, but the sin He was bearing on behalf of His people. And, the darkness could very well have been also an act of mercy from the Father to shield and hide some of the shame associated with the crucifixion, like His nakedness and the unbridled mockery and unrestrained abuse from His persecutors.

2. THE TEMPLE VEIL IS TORN (verse 51)

Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom...

There was also an earthquake at the same time, and some have speculated that the veil was torn from its effects. But this veil was no ordinary curtain. Some historians have said that it was as thick as the palm

of a man's hand. It was made by stitching 72 separately woven squares of fabric together and then weaving layers of cloth over each other interlinking them until it became untearable. Historians have also said that teams of oxen hitched to either side of this veil could not have torn it. That may be an overstatement, but it gives us some idea of the strength of this Veil. Edersheim relates that in the exaggerated language some employed in that day, it was claimed that it took 300 men to even part the curtains for the High Priest to enter on the Day of Atonement.

But, what did tear it was THE HAND OF GOD. And this, too, was an unmistakable and undeniable witness. **God was publicly declaring that the Old Testament Temple was officially out of business, and that it would never be needed again or re-opened.** The sacrifices and services which had been offered since the giving of the Law were all now forever obsolete and terminated. Not because they had been bad; but because they were designed to be temporary, to begin with. All of these services prophesied the coming of the Christ. He would offer to God that One Sacrifice For Sin Forever which would take away all our sins, instead of just covering them up for limited periods of time.

The Temple structure would stand until the Desolation would utterly destroy it in 70 AD, but God no longer would respect or receive any of the offerings made there (*Hebrews 13.9-10*). The earthly Jerusalem would henceforth be known as: **“the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified”** (*Revelation 11.8*). Jesus had said that **“the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father”** (*John 4.21*). God is making sure that everyone understands now that HE IS DONE WITH THAT SYSTEM, and from now on, anyone who comes to the Father must come through the Son.

The Veil hung between the Holy Place (where the priests performed the daily services and sacrifices) and the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could go behind that Veil, and only on the Day of Atonement, and only with blood. THE GLORY OF YAHWEH RESIDED THERE. As long as the Veil hung, it was an impenetrable, impassable STOP SIGN to approaching sinners. **Hebrews 9.8: The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.** And, the further lesson was that **the gifts and sacrifices they were offering could not make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience** -- in other words, you lived under the constant nagging reminder that YOUR SINS HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN AWAY...only covered. You could come NEAR, but you COULD NOT COME IN.

God had mercifully provided a means for sinners to have access to His grace; but at the same time, God kept His distance because of the ever-presence of sin. But, now, Jesus Christ has PAID FOR OUR SINS FOREVER AND TAKEN THEM AWAY. And, **the way into the Holiest has been opened for us for ever THROUGH THE VEIL, THAT IS, HIS FLESH.** *Hebrews 10.19-25*. (Why do you suppose the Hebrews writer associates drawing near to God's Presence with our not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together?)

We can't begin to imagine or relate to the impact and trauma this would create on the Jewish mind. On this day, the Passover, when Jesus Christ died and the Veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the Temple would have been filled, not only with priests performing the Passover sacrifices, but also with throngs of worshipers. What panic and even terror must have ensued when suddenly the earth shakes and the Veil is ripped from the top to the bottom -- and there exposed to their uninitiated sight was the Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant? No one dared peer inside without incurring instant death for violating the Holy Presence of God. But, now -- THERE IT IS!

Surely, this is a significant sign! We can't help wondering if the impression made by this event and their reflection upon it -- and of course the messages of the apostles in the days following -- is what accounted for a great many of the priests turning to the Lord (*Acts 6.7*).

**3. THE EARTH QUAKES (verse 51)
...and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.**

This again was God's way of shouting to the earth through the elements. God was giving the very earth a major shake-down. The earth quaked and shook at the Presence of God when He gave the Law. There have always been earthquakes, but those who knew the prophecies knew that God had long before promised that one day He would send "the Big One" (*like the major event which the people in California so fear*). **Haggai 2.6: For thus says the LORD of hosts: "Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land..."**

Of course, with the coming of Christ, God did shake up everything. He brought down the Old Covenant order of things, and inaugurated the Christ in its place to administer the Kingdom of God. **Hebrews 12.26-29: but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."**²⁷ Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

But, there was another subsequent reason God has also for shaking the earth. He was not only announcing His Presence and His personal participation and sovereign control over all these events, but HE WANTED TO RELEASE SOME OF THOSE WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN TAKEN CAPTIVE BY DEATH. HE WAS SENDING INVITATIONS FOR A BLOW-OUT RESURRECTION CELEBRATION!

**4. SOME DEAD SAINTS RESURRECT (verse 52-53)
and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;
⁵³and coming out of the graves after His resurrection,
they went into the holy city and appeared to many.**

How many times during the days immediately after Jesus' resurrection do you suppose someone breathlessly said to somebody else: "**GUESS WHO I JUST SAW?**"

Their common mode of burial was to bury their dead either in caves or above-ground sepulchers. The bodies would be either laid on shelves in niches in the walls, or sometimes, they would even be tightly bound in burial cloths and stood upright. This way, they could use the burial sites for multiple corpses. Then, after completing the burial, they would either close and seal a fitted door made of stone, or maybe just roll a large rock to the mouth of the sepulcher.

Well, when Christ died and the earthquake rattled the earth, it either broke open many of these burial structures or else separated the rocks from the openings. Not only did the earthquake expose the unseen world of the dead, but the life-giving breath of God made many of them come to life again.

Matthew records that there were "**many**" of them. We can't know how many "many" is, but to see just one long-dead person walking around would be remarkable -- more than one is just going to further amaze you. But, there may have been a multitude of them, for all we know.

Matthew makes a point to tell us that **“they came out of their graves after His resurrection.”** Jesus Christ is the Firstfruits of the resurrection (*1 Corinthians 15.23*). He is the Author of the Resurrection and the Leader of the Resurrection. We live because He lives...and He makes us live.

The Scripture may not be crystal clear about precisely when they received their new life: whether (1) when the earthquake hit and the graves were opened, or (2) when they actually came out of their graves following Christ’s resurrection. They most likely didn’t come to life again until Jesus’ own resurrection, and then they came into the city following His own re-appearance.

Nor are we told whatever happened to them after that. They most likely didn’t die again, as Lazarus did. They probably visited around, made a few people shriek when they saw them, caught up on old times (although they probably knew those times better than the poor mortals who hadn’t died yet), and made the hearts of the believers in the Lord rejoice exceedingly in their own hopes of resurrection and Heaven.

Then, when the Lord Jesus ascended to Heaven, they probably were taken to Heaven just as mysteriously as they came back from the grave. And when the Lord Jesus made His Triumphal Return to Heaven, He came back to the Father with Gold Medal trophies of His victories He had won over sin and death. **“Behold, here I am...and some of the children You have given Me.”**

5. THE CENTURION IS SAVED (verse 54)

So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

This Roman centurion’s conversion was no less an Act of God than the other signs were. And, his sudden faith in Christ is also a direct consequence of the physical manifestations which God had imposed on them.

You may ask: “Why would this heathen, pagan Roman have the insight to call Him ‘**the Son of God**’?” Luke records that he said: **“Certainly this was a righteous man.”**

But, this same centurion may have even been in charge of the arrest last night when they took Jesus in Gethsemane. He may have commanded the soldiers who attended and guarded Jesus during His interrogations and pushed Him from one hearing to the other. Some of these same soldiers who saw the earthquake and the things that had happened may also have been some of those who tied His hands to the scourging post and joined in the blasphemous mockings.

So, they would have heard all the accusations thrown against Him that He had made Himself out to be the Son of God. Isn’t what they had been taunting Him with around the cross? **“He said He is the Son of God.”** So now, the centurion has probably seen it all. And the last One to speak concerning this One they were crucifying was God Almighty in Heaven. And though He hadn’t spoken with His voice, He had shouted to them through the elements how He esteemed His Son. Through the voices of the elements of heaven and earth, God had clearly shouted: **“THIS IS MY BELOVED SON...AND I AM WELL-PLEASED WITH HIM!”**

AND NOBODY CAN SPEAK LIKE GOD CAN WHEN HE MEANS TO BE HEARD.