

**The Crucifixion, Part 3:
The Miracles of the Cross**
Looking into the Face of Jesus
The Life of Christ, 2: Pages 555-565
Manuscript: Lesson Plan 120

Introduction

The texts for this lesson are Matthew 27:45–54; Mark 15:33–41; Luke 23:44–49; and John 19:28–30. The past few lessons have also been utilizing these passages.

Have you ever considered how Mount Everest trumps all the other beauty around it. Despite being in the vicinity of some of the most magnificent mountain peaks in the world, Mount Everest, because of its height, stands out among the rest, leaving them virtually unknown. Mount Everest's grandeur obscures the rest.

Because of the magnitude of Christ's death, we may not truly understand the significance of the miracles that surrounded the cross. Miracles of the cross included the darkening of the sun, a mighty earthquake, the rending of the temple veil, and the opening of the graves and the resurrection of the dead saints.

These events have been referred to as the "the foothills of Calvary" (again, reference to Mount Everest). The purpose of this lesson is to help us appreciate even more what Jesus did for us. We can accomplish this by looking at the (other) miracles of the cross. Beginning with . . .

The Darkness: A Divine Portent

What happened? Let us consider the activities from 9:00 AM-12:00 PM. Jesus was busy praying for His enemies. He was taking care of His mother. He was saving a thief. He was struggling to breathe. His enemies were busy casting lots for His clothing and casting insults. The women wept. The apostle led Christ's mother away. Things were busy, and activity was happening. Then suddenly all the activity ceased.

To start, let us look at what we do not know about the darkness. We do not know the extent of the darkness, but it was mostly likely so dark that you could not see your hand in front of your face. We also do not know what area it covered. There is a chance through writings of Phlegon and Tertullian that Rome recorded these events in the annals of Rome.

Now, let us look at what we do know about the darkness. We know it was not a natural event. We know it was not a solar eclipse because it was impossible to have an eclipse during the Passover, which was celebrated during a full moon (Exodus 12:6); and a full moon means that the sun and the moon are on opposite sides of the earth. Further, we know it was not a sand storm or cloudy sky because the Gospel writers would not have called those out. The text becomes silent during the three hours of darkness which may mean that activity ceased and the crowds were silenced.

What does the darkness mean? This was a sign "that God had not been thwarted by the schemes of men, but was working out His eternal purpose."¹

¹David L. Roper, *The Life of Christ, 2: A Supplement*, Truth for Today Commentary Series (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications, 2018), 556.

What did the sign mean? It was a sign of suffering; a sign of the agony Jesus had to undergo as He died for us (1 Corinthians 15:3). It was a sign of struggle; a sign of the climactic battle between Christ and the forces of evil (Genesis 3:15; Luke 22:53; Hebrews 2:14). It was a sign of separation; a sign indicating Jesus being forsaken by His Father as He paid the ultimate penalty for our sins (see Matthew 27:46).

God drew a mantle of blackness over the greatest mystery of the ages: how one Man could die for the sins of millions. It seems appropriate that at the time of Jesus' greatest suffering was a time of silence. Even now, we are silenced because we cannot comprehend what He truly did for us that day.

The second miracle of the cross was . . .

The Earthquake: Divine Power

What happened? To answer this question, we need to look at the activities associated with it. It was near the end of the three hours. Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Then three more sentences in quick succession. "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). "It is finished" (John 19:30). "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Several events happened at this time. First, "The earth began to shake" (Matthew 27:51-54). We do not know how it would have rated on the Richter scale. We do know it split rocks (Matthew 27:51c), and it opened rock-hewn sepulchers (Matthew 27:52a).

What does it mean? This was a demonstration of Divine power. When the Law was given on Mount Sinai, "the whole mountain quaked violently" (Exodus 19:18). Now that the Law was fulfilled, the earth trembled again. This also showed God's power to touch the hearts of men: "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).

With this event in the back of our minds, Are we letting the power of God change our hearts? He has the power to not only touch your heart, but to change your life.

Now we look at . . .

The Veil Torn: A Divine Purpose

What happened? Matthew 27:51a; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45b all tell us pretty much the same thing. Let us look at Matthew 27:51a, ". . . behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

Comparing all accounts, we understand that the rending occurred at the end of the ninth hour. Picture the scene. It is 3:00 PM, which was the time of evening prayer. Faithful Jews, both men and women, gathered at the Court of Women to pray. A priest would go into the temple to offer incense while they prayed.

Think of yourself as the priest who had the privilege of going into the Holy Place to burn incense. Directly ahead of you would be the small altar of incense standing in front of the curtain that veils the Most Holy Place. To them, the Most Holy Place was the most sacred spot on earth; only the High Priest was allowed to enter that sanctuary only once a year, during the Feast of Atonement.

Now, think about the veil. It was massive. It measured 30 feet x 30 feet. We can read the instructions given to Moses when making a curtain for the tabernacle in Exodus 26:31–33:

You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four sockets of silver. You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies.

That was for the veil for the tabernacle. In 2 Chronicles 3:14 we read of Solomon's temple curtain— "veil of violet, purple, crimson, and fine linen." All of this to say, this veil was not only massive in size, but extremely beautiful.

Now, we should get back to the scene. While preparing to burn the incense, the earthquake happened, and the priest could have fallen to the ground. All of a sudden, you could have heard hear the rip. It started at the top, and went all the way to the bottom. Then, in front of you would be the Holy of Holies, wide open. People try to explain this away, but an earthquake would not have ripped the veil, and it could not have been vandalism due to its ripping from top to bottom.

What does it mean? The destruction of the veil heralded the end of the old covenant arrangement. Hebrews 9:16, 17 says, "For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives."

In Colossians 2:14, Paul wrote that Christ ". . . canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

The death of Jesus heralded the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new.

Even as the way into the Most Holy Place was opened by the rending of the veil, so the rending of Jesus' flesh anticipated His return to the Most Holy Place in heaven.

Consider what Hebrews 10:19, 20 tells us, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh . . ."

The most striking lesson is that the rending of the veil means that through the death of Jesus, the way to God has been opened for all people. We just read Hebrews 10:19, 20, let us continue to read Hebrews 10:21, 22: ". . . and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

Now, a word of caution. Do not try to lift the veil back in its place. The rent veil removed the barrier between "special" priests and "ordinary" children of God (1 Peter 2:5, 9). It could possibly signify the removal of barriers between people (see Ephesians 2:14–16). Do not attempt to lift the veil back into its place.

The final miracle of the cross saw . . .

The Dead Raised: A Divine Promise

What happened? According to Matthew 27:51b–53, this could be two miracles. The opening of the graves and the raising of the dead. It seems that the tombs were split on Friday and that the dead raised with Jesus on Sunday—“coming out of the tombs after His resurrection.”

If they were not raised until Sunday, it makes sense that the tombs opened, but no one would touch or deal with them because they did not want to be unclean and they did not work on the Sabbath. There is obviously much we do not know about this incident.

Let us begin with what we do know. We know saints were raised. We assume those raised would be known by those in the area. That is pretty much all we are told.

We do not know whom they appeared to, but the way Matthew recorded the events it implies that many still living in Jerusalem could testify to the truthfulness of the account: “they entered the holy city and appeared to many.” We do not even know the extent of the resurrection. Could it be that they were like Lazarus and had to experience physical death again?

Think about this for a moment. We are told that three people were raised from the dead in the OT (1 Kings 17 – Elijah raised the widows son; 2 Kings 4 – Elisha raised the Shunammite woman’s son; 2 Kings 13 – a man was buried in the tomb of Elisha and, when his body touched Elisha’s bones, he came back to life). Three more were raised during Christ’s ministry (Matthew 9 – the raising of Jairus’ daughter; Luke 7 – the raising of the widow of Nain’s son; John 11 – the raising of Lazarus). Two others were raised during the apostles’ ministry (Acts 9 – the raising of Tabitha/Dorcas by Peter; Acts 20 – Eutychus raised by Paul). Now, on this one occasion, many saints were raised.

What does it mean? There is an obvious connection between Christ raising from the dead and the promise that the saints will be raised to Him. Consider what we read in 1 Corinthians 15:20, “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

Later, in 1 Corinthians 15:51–57, Paul tells us:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is likely a connection between the time of Christ’s resurrection and the saints’ resurrection mentioned in Matthew; that connection was a strong promise to them and to us now of what Jesus has done.

Conclusion

God touched many things around the cross. The sky—it was darkened. The rocks—they were split apart. The veil—it was torn. The graves—many were opened. The “many saints” —they were raised. The hardened hearts around the cross—they were changed: “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54).

Let Him and His sacrifice touch you today.

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