

## The Miracles of Calvary

Last Sunday we celebrated the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus. By his death he has conquered death and then he rose triumphant. Christ is risen! He reigns and we have hope because of his resurrection. Thank God for the resurrection, but there were other miracles associated with his death on the cross that we seldom talk about. These miracles of Calvary testify to who He is and what he accomplished on the cross.

Turn to Matthew 27 and the story of the crucifixion. Matthew points out these miracles associated with Jesus' crucifixion beginning in verse 45. **“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land...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 and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”**

### **Matthew 27:45, 50-54**

Notice it says, “when they saw all that had happened.” Even the skeptics, the Roman centurion and the soldiers with him, the people that stood to mock Jesus, all of them saw a series of events that left them terrified and either convinced Jesus was the Son of God or at least questioning what had happened and what it all meant.

The first thing we notice is **Darkness over the land**. Luke's account reads, **“It was now about the sixth hour and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining.” Luke 23:44-45** This was approximately from twelve noon until three in the afternoon. Not exactly when you would expect it to be dark in Israel. This was not an eclipse as some have suggested. For one thing, an eclipse doesn't last for three hours. In the second place, the crucifixion happened at Passover when the moon was full and an eclipse can't happen when the moon is full, so they tell me. How God chose to darken the land, I don't know, I simply know the bible says for three hours, while Jesus hung dying upon the cross, the sun appeared as if it stopped shining! What did it mean?

We consider darkness as a sign of judgment. In the last days the sun and moon will be darkened, etc. Darkness and judgment go together in the Scripture and don't forget, there was

judgment happening here. Calvary is the place of judgment, where your sins and my sins were placed upon Jesus Christ and he bore the penalty, the judgment and the punishment for our sins!

Consider darkness as a sign of the condition of the human heart. It was the ultimate evil, the creature crucifying the Creator! Think of the darkness of our culture and our world. The depravity of the human heart, the slaughter of the unborn, sexual abuse of infants and children, human trafficking, senseless killings and suicide bombers. How twisted and corrupt our world. Darkness covered the land then and now but...Redemption was secured. The light has come! Jesus, the light of the world has risen and he has overcome the darkness. He is light and he calls us to live in his light, to let our light shine before the world so they can see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. Thank God the light of the world conquered the darkness!

The second miracle of Calvary: **The veil of the temple was torn.** This veil was in the temple, separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, the place we call the Holy of Holies. J. Oswald Sanders in his book *The Incomparable Christ*, quotes from the Talmud when he records the veil “was suspended by hooks from four pillars of gold. It measured sixty feet long by thirty feet wide, worked in seventy-two squares, and was reputed to be as thick as the palm of the hand (about 4 inches).” We aren’t sure how accurate that is, but we know the purpose of the veil is accurate. “It was not a gateway, but a barrier.” The veil kept everyone from entering the holy presence of God because they couldn’t enter his presence with sin in their life. Once a year, on the day of Atonement, the curtain was drawn aside to allow the High Priest to enter to sprinkle the mercy seat with blood, to make atonement for the sins of the people. The veil, the holy of holies, the sprinkling of the blood of an animal that died in place of the guilty person, all of that became obsolete and unnecessary as Jesus died on the cross. That whole sacrificial system found its fulfillment, its completion in the sacrifice of Jesus.

**The veil was torn from top to bottom, indicating it was a divine act.** God himself tore the veil, opening the way to his presence through the cleansing blood of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews explains, “**Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.**” **Hebrews 10:19-22** With our sins cleansed through the blood of Jesus and through our faith in his saving grace, we can now come into the spiritual Most Holy Place, into the very presence of God. The veil has been torn and the way into God’s presence opened to us through Jesus Christ!

**The tearing of the veil indicated the system of offering sacrifices year by year was over.** The priests probably sewed the veil back together and went on with their sacrifices and traditions until 70 AD when the temple was destroyed. But in God's sight the old covenant had come to an end and the new covenant had begun. There was no need to continue offering sacrifices upon the altar in Jerusalem. Remember Jesus said to his disciples as he handed them the cup at the Last Supper, "this is the new covenant in my blood." This new covenant was based not upon an old order of animal sacrifices, not upon the offering of the blood of bulls and goats and lambs, but this new covenant was based upon the sacrifice of his own blood, his life. **"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."** Hebrews 9:12 That's why the bible says this is a better covenant. His once and for all sacrifice obtains eternal redemption for all who will believe upon him!

There was no need to continue to come to the temple in Jerusalem to meet God and receive his forgiveness through sacrifice. Jesus himself is the New Temple, the meeting place of God and man. We come to him and find forgiveness and cleansing of our sin.

**The tearing of the veil made it clear that Jesus Christ was the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. Nothing else and nothing more needs to be done to reconcile us to God!** The work of redemption was done when Jesus died upon the cross. James Boice wrote, "Jesus put away our real sin by his real death." Hear again from the writer of Hebrews, **"Christ did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people: and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."** Hebrews 9:25-28

One other note: The veil was torn in two at 3:00 in the afternoon, the time of the beginning of the evening sacrifice at the temple. The priests would have been in the temple, carrying out their duties when the veil was torn. They would have seen it and would have known something miraculous was happening as it ripped from top to bottom. Perhaps that explains why Luke says, **"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased**

**rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7** The priests saw something that convinced them a miraculous change had come.

The third miracle of Calvary: **The earth shook and the rocks split.** Earthquakes are not miraculous and apparently earthquakes, or at least tremors are not uncommon in Israel. But the timing of this earthquake was miraculous. At the very moment of Jesus’ death, the earth shook and the rocks split. Something cosmic was happening. Recall the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:22 that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, groaning for redemption. Perhaps the whole earth experienced a contraction at the birthing of redemption’s plan.

The earth shook, rocks split, but it wasn’t just a general earthquake. There was a preciseness about this. At the very moment of Jesus’ death as he uttered a loud cry the veil of the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, the rocks split and the fourth miracle of Calvary occurred: **The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.**

We don’t really understand what happened. Perhaps it was only the tombs in the area of Golgotha, where Jesus was buried, that broke open. We know it was only the tombs of certain of the saints. We don’t know if these were Old Testament saints that died many years before or recently. We don’t know how long they remained alive. Were they raised like Lazarus and then they died again or were they raised like Jesus, with a glorified body and they were then somehow transported into heaven at some time? We don’t know who they saw or what they said, if anything. It’s all a mystery. According to Matthew the graves were opened at Jesus’ death, apparently as a result of the earthquake, but they didn’t come out of the graves until after Jesus’ resurrection.

It seems as if they were evidence of his defeat of death. The resurrection of these saints was a symbolic demonstration that by his death on the cross he had broken the chains of death on the saints of God. The bible says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus was raised as the firstfruits of all that would be raised and this is a sample. It was almost as if there was so much life generated at Jesus’ resurrection that this was the overflow, it just spilled over onto those saints that had died in hope of the resurrection, that died in hope of the Messiah and his eternal life. They rose, perhaps not to stay, but merely to testify that by death Jesus had destroyed death and given us the hope of eternal life. Here was even more proof!

One more thing to consider. These righteous saints of God had lived and died before Jesus' atoning death and resurrection. It is evidence that the resurrection of the righteous who died before Jesus was as dependent upon Jesus' resurrection as is our future resurrection. It's all about Jesus!

The final miracle of Calvary is found in **The Confession of the Roman Centurion:** **"Surely he was the Son of God."** The Roman soldier in charge of Jesus' execution was no doubt a hardened soldier, experienced at his job, unpleasant as the duty might have been. After a while, it just becomes a job. You put to death enemies of Rome. It's your duty. He had perhaps seen thousands of men die by crucifixion, yet something miraculous happened on this day. It wasn't just the darkness that came over the land for three hours. It wasn't just the earthquake or graves opening. He wouldn't have cared about the tearing of the veil in the temple. But something else happened; there was something about the way this man died. Mark's gospel records, **"With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last...And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God.'"** **Mark 15:37-39**

What was it he saw and heard? Walter Wangerin in his book *Reliving the Passion* points out that the cry Jesus uttered was a cry not of despair or desperation. The centurion had seen and heard men cry, begging for death, begging for the soldiers to end their pain, but Jesus' last cry was a cry of victory. Wangerin writes, "A loud shout. No, this is not at all what the centurion expects. It's a cry that he has heard before, to be sure – but never in defeat and never, never in death, always when the soldier has won the battle or the king the war! This is a cry of triumph! The centurion whirls around to see Jesus: he sees eyes like fiery darts in the darkness; he sees a mouth thin and thin, as thin as the blade of a sword, grinning! Victorious? King of the Jews – victorious over what? What do these flaming eyes announce? Satan, thou art defeated in my defeat! Sin, dispossessed of a people! Death, look about thee, thou art not mighty and dreadful. Lo, I close my eyes and die – and death shall be no more." Wangerin writes, **"O Christ! When you died, you broke the wall that divided us from God: you struck it, you cracked it, you tore it apart – you made a door of that which had been death before. And the sign was that 'the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom,' and the mercy seat was made open to my approach."** ...Walter Wangerin Jr.

The mercy seat was made open for all of us, including the Roman centurion responsible for putting Jesus on that cross. “Surely this man was the Son of God.” He saw and he heard. He realized he didn’t take Jesus’ life from him, Jesus laid it down, willingly, for him, for that Roman soldier, for you, for me. The greatest miracle of Calvary was perhaps that Centurion, and all that have followed him, all that have declared Jesus to be not only the Son of God, but have claimed him to be their Savior and Lord.

If you’ve not done that, I invite you to open your heart to Christ today. Through his death on the cross he opened the way to God, opened the way to mercy, to salvation, to hope, to new life, to eternal life. The bible says, **“If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”** Romans 10:9-13