Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Miraculous Commentary on the Cross
Scripture: Matthew 27:45-53
Code: 2397

On Friday morning as I was driving to preach at a Good Friday morning service in Whittier, I turned on the news and there was a special national news program with a commentator who came on and said this is a very special day, this is a day when a certain man was prosecuted for crimes He didn't commit, though innocent, sentenced to death. And he went on to talk about the inspiration of a man who stood for what He believed, a man who died for what He believed, a man who was ill treated and unfairly and unkindly and unjustly executed. And what an example He was of character and virtue and how He should inspire all of us.

And it just reminded me, as well meaning as it was, that for the most part the world is aware of the story of the death of Jesus Christ but has very little understanding as to its meaning, as to its real significance. There's little doubt at this time each year that people are aware of the crucifixion story. They're aware of the resurrection account, whether or not they believe it to be history or myth, basically and generally, people are aware of what the story is. But infinitely less aware of what it means.

What does the death of Christ mean? What does the resurrection of Christ mean? I mean, if there wereas history tells ussome thirtythousand Jews crucified by the Romans around the time of Jesus Christ, then why do we remember only one of them? Why is it that of the other thirty thousand, we don't even have a name to remember? Even two thieves dying on each side of Christ to this day are nameless. Surely there were others who died because they believed in something because there was the virtue of commitment, because there was an uncompromising conviction for which they stood. Surely others were examples of love and character and honesty and integrity. Why then does history only celebrate the death of Jesus Christ? In what way is it significant? Where do we find the meaning of the cross? Do we find it in the musings of philosophers? Do we find it by listening to contemporary analysts? Where do we find the meaning of the cross? Of the crucifixion? Of the death of Christ?

Well, the answer to that, of course, is in the Word of God, in the Scripture. We could go all the way back to the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and in chapter 3 verse 15 we would find the promise that there would come one called the "seed of the woman." Now everyone knows a woman doesn't have a seed, a man does. This is a virgin birth being spoken of. And that one born of the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. Even though Himself He would be bruised in the heel. And we there see that Christ while being bruised on the cross is bruising in a fatal way the one who bruises Him.

And we could learn more about the meaning of the cross if we went a little further in the book of Genesis and came to the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham called by God to offer his son on the altar as a sacrifice to God finds that God provides an alternative, a ram caught in the thicket, and here we learn that there is to be a substitute for the one who ought to die. And we learn more about the cross.

We come to Moses and all of the complexity of the Mosaic law, and all of the ceremonies and sacrifices that delineate for us the need for blood shed sacrifice to atone for sin. And we learn more about the cross.

We come to Psalm 22 and we have details about the cross. And we come to Isaiah 53 and the theology of the cross is explained. And Zechariah chapter 12 tells us about the piercing of the one who is on the cross.

And then we could go into the New Testament and we could read the words of Paul who tells us that on the cross Christ was made a curse for us, who tells us that He bore our sin. We could read the words of Peter who says that He who was just bore sins for those who were unjust. We could go to the book of Revelation and listen to the words of the Apostle John as he tells us He was a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. We could read that great treatise on the meaning of the cross called the epistle to the Hebrews in which we find that Christ is offered once for the sins of the world. If we want to know the meaning of the cross, we can go from beginning to end in holy Scripture and it will be explained to us very clearly.

However, I believe one very marvelous thrilling exciting monumental description of the meaning of the cross is often overlooked. And it is the one given in the text I want us to look at this morning. And it is the very text that we come to in our study of Matthew chapter 27 verse 45. Matthew chapter 27 verse 45 through 53, I believe, delineates for us in a most amazing, a most miraculous way the meaning of the cross. We don't need to go to Genesis, though we could. We don't need to go into the sacrificial system. We don't need to go to Psalm 22. We don't need to go even to Psalm 69 which gives us further details. We don't need to go to Isaiah 53. We don't need to go to Zechariah 12 or the epistles of Paul or Peter or John. We don't need to go there, for we find right in this very text, I believe, unequal testimony as to the meaning of the cross and it is inherent in the very event of the cross itself.

In fact, attending the death of Jesus Christ in this particular portion of Scripture are six miracles...six miracles occur simultaneous to the death of Christ which become God the Father's own commentary on the meaning of the cross. This is God's own testimony as to what the death of Christ means. It's all right here. And frankly, you could read it over and over again and not see it if you didn't stop to contemplate deeply its truth. The meaning of the cross is nowhere more clearly delineated than right

in the event itself described by Matthew in these few verses as Matthew gives us God's own commentary on the meaning of the death of His Son.

Let's look at these six miracles and hear what God says about the meaning of the cross through these miracles. The first one we'll call supernatural darkness...supernatural darkness. Notice verse 45, "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." Luke chapter 2 verses 9 to 11 tell us that when Christ was born, there was a great light in the sky. The prophet said that when Jesus came He would be a light to the Gentiles. He Himself in John 8 said, "I am the light of the world, whoever walks in...whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness." Jesus said, "Come to the light while it is light and while you may come." Associated with Christ in His birth and His life and ministry is light. But in His death is darkness darkness.

From the sixth hour, that's at twelve noon, to the ninth hour, that's three in the afternoon. The time of day when the sun is at its zenith. Now Mark 15:25 tells us Jesus was crucified at the third hour, which would be nine in the morning. So He's already been on the cross for three hours by this time. Three hours of daylight from nine to twelve in which He endured the mocking and the jeering and the reproaching and the rebuking and sarcastic cynical taunts of the passersby, the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers. Three hours in the daylight of His exposure and nakedness and torture and dying.

And during those first three hoursfrom nine to noonthe silence was only broken three times. The first time Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," as recorded in Luke 23:34. And He said that on behalf of the Roman soldiers who were crucifying Him.

A little while later, He broke the silence of those first three hours again by saying to a repentant robber hanging beside Him, "Truly I say to you, this day shall you be with Me in paradise." And the first three hours of silence was broken only a third time when He saw John and MaryMary His mother, John His beloved disciplesstanding at the foot of the cross and knew they would be lost when He was gone. And so He committed one to the other and said to John, "Behold thy mother." And to Mary, "Behold thy son." And gave them to each other to care for each other.

But apart from that the three hours from nine to noon were unbroken by any word from Christ on the cross. But now the second three hours begins. And instantaneously it becomes dark over all the land. The word land is ge. It could mean earth. It is the word to be translated earth, as well. We don't know whether the darkness engulfed just the land of Israel, just he city of Jerusalem and its environs or whether the whole half of the earth engulfed in sunlight normally was instantaneously transformed into night. God could do either. We remember, don't we, Exodus chapter 10 when God made it dark only in the land of Egypt? So He could create a localized darkness supernaturally if He desired. We also remember, don't we, in Joshua, reading the wonderful story of Joshua in chapter 10 where the Bible tells us that the Lord made the sun stand still? In other words, it stayed in the sky in one spot,

the earth technically stopped revolving for a moment of time, for a period of time while God did His work. And that must have impacted the whole of the globe.

Then we remember 2 Kings 20 where the shadow from the sun on a sundial goes backwards and God again does a miracle with the sun and with the revolving of the earth which could well have effected and probably did the whole globe.

So, if God wanted localized darkness, He could do that. If He wanted to alter the effect of the sun on the whole earth, He could do that. We really don't know which He did. There are some interesting indications in extrabiblical literature to cause me to sort of think it was the whole lighted part of the earth that went black. Origen refers to a statement by a certain Roman historian who mentions that unusual darkness. Tertullian also wrote to some pagans and in his writing he mentions that unusual darkness and says, "Which wonder is related in your own annals and preserved in your own archives to this day." And there is a socalled report from Pilate to Tiberius, the governor, assuming that the emperor is aware that in all the world it was dark from twelve to three on a certain day.

So, it may well be that the whole of the lighted earth went dark. We really don't know. People have said, "Well, maybe a cloud just passed in front of the sun. Or maybe it was a sirocco, an east wind that tends to accumulate dust to the degree that it makes the sky black." I think not. Because Luke says in chapter 23 of his gospel in verse 45 simply this, "The sun was darkened." And he uses the word ekleipofrom which we get the word eclipse. The word literally means "to fail utterly." The sun failed. That's what happened. God supernaturally turned out the sun.

Now, if God turned out the sun and let the normal sequence of events take place that would take place if the sun went out, the world would go out of existence in those three hours. So somehow God turned out the sun and sustained the world. But it became dark. It was not technically a scientific eclipse. It couldn't have been because the season of the year that Passover is celebrated puts the sun and the moon at opposite ends of the earth. And an eclipse can only occur when they're at the same place. So this is not a scientific eclipse, it simply is the word in its broad meaning "the sun failed." The sun went out. It became as dark as midnight in the middle of the day.

But what is the point? Well, the rabbis used to teach, and it's recorded in the Talmud that they taught this, that if the sun goes dark it will be a judgment of God on the world for committing a great crime. And indeed we could say the world had committed a great crime in crucifying Jesus Christ.

Others have suggested to us that it went dark because nature was throwing a veil over the sufferings of Christ. And still others have suggested that it was dark because this is an act of sympathy on the part of God to cover the nakedness and the dishonor of His Son. And other suggest to us that this is a divine protest. And so it goes.

Now what is the meaning of the darkness? What is God saying about the darkness? No one, no Bible writer, no New Testament or Old Testament comments on the darkness at the cross of Christ. They really need not comment, it's very obvious what it means. If you were to dig into the Old Testament text, you would find that darkness is used in Scripture as a symbol of divine judgment. It is used as a symbol of divine judgment. In Isaiah chapter 5, as Isaiah predicts the coming judgment that's going to grasp, as it were, the life of Israel and choke it out and take those people into captivity, he describes it as darkness and sorrow...darkness and sorrow. If you follow through Isaiah, you'll follow into chapter 13 of Isaiah and Isaiah looks ahead to the final judgment that God is going to bring in the world. And he says the day of the Lord comes and the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light. The sun shall be darkened in its going forth; the moon shall not cause its light to shine and I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. God is associating darkness with judgment.

You come even into the New Testament, as you remember in Matthew chapter 24 in verse 29, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun is darkened, the moon doesn't give its light, the stars fall from heaven, the powers of the heavens are shaken and then appears the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." Judgment darkness.

In the past, when God came in judgment He was associated with darkness. In the future when He comes in final judgment, it is associated with darkness. In the Tribulation time, God brings to the world great darkness so that there's a gnawing on the part of men in the horror of unrelieved blackness. You can go into Joel chapter 2 verses 30 and 31 and there you will find the darkness that attends judgment. You'll find it in Amos chapter 5 verses 18 and 20. You'll find it in Zephaniah chapter 1 verses 14 to 18. All throughout Scripture you will find judgment and darkness associated. If God's salvation is seen as light, then God's judgment is seen as darkness...gross darkness, deep darkness.

And whether the Old Testament writer or the New Testament writer, they all see the darkness. In fact, when angels were cast out and bound in 2 Peter 2:4, it says they are bound in chains of darkness. I think it's clear then that what we see here is the commentary on God's part that this is a judgment. This is the darkness that is associated with divine judgment. God is saying the cross is a place of divine judgment. It is a place for the pouring out of divine wrath. This is not just one among thirtythousand people dying. This is not just a well meaning martyr. This is not just an unusual loving man. This is an act of divine judgment and God attests to that in a very dramatic way by making it midnight in the middle of the day.

Now there's only one thing that God judges, that's all. Only one thing He condemns, only one thing He pours out wrath against and that's sin. So here we have then at the cross the Father's own commentary that this is indeed a judgment on sin. This is much bigger than just one man dying for something He believed in. This is a divine judgment on sin as attested by supernatural darkness.

There's a second miracle that I want you to see in verse 46. "And about the ninth hour," or about three in the afternoon, "Jesus cried with a loud voice," and the word in the Greek is to scream or to yell, "saying, Eli, Eli." Those two words are Hebrew. Mark records "Eloi, Eloi," which is the Aramaic form to kind of make the statement consistent. But apparently Jesus actually uttered "Eli, Eli." "Eli, Eli," My God, My God. And they would have known what He meant by that. There was no doubt in their minds. And then when He said, "lema sabachthani" which means "why have You abandoned Me," or, "why have You forsaken Me," they knew well what He was saying. That He was quoting Psalm 22:1 was apparent to all of them. Those Jews knew Psalm 22:1. They had chanted it. They had perhaps sung it. They had recited it. They had memorized it. They had read it. They knew what He was saying. "My God, My God," in Hebrew, "lema sabachthani," in Aramaic and even those Jews who spoke predominantly Aramaic and knew very little Hebrew would know Eli, Elibecause El, El, the name for God, would be common knowledge to all of them. So they knew what He was saying. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Here's the second miracle. I call it the miracle of sovereign departure. It is a miracle, you see. It's a miracle in reverse, in a sense. It's a strange kind of miracle but it's a miracle in the sense that it is a supernatural inexplicable event that is beyond the capacity of human understanding, for God is separated from God. God the Father turns His back on God the Son. It is said that Martin Luther went into seclusion to try to understand this mystery and came out more confused than when he began. I understand that. God is separated from God. And Jesus in the climax of the sin bearing, at the close of the three hours of the fury of God being poured out at its maximum capacity, cries out about the fact that He is separated from God.

What does that say? What does that tell us? Well, if we go back to Habakkuk chapter 1 and read verse 13, it says this about God. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity." God turned His back because He can't look on what? Sin. Now what does that tell us about the cross? That tells us that Jesus became what? Sin for us. That is the testimony of the Father. By turning His back on Christ, He comments on what was happening. If this was the death of a loving martyr, if this was the death of a good man, an innocent person who had a good cause, if this was some kind of philanthropic or some kind of gracious act or some kind of benevolent human demonstration of commitment, then God should have looked on it with favor. But when God turned His back on it, God was turning His back because there's one thing God can't bring before His face and that is sin. And so the commentary in that is that Christ was bearing our sin.

We don't need to go to the epistles to find that out. That's right there. It's right there. After all, didn't Isaiah 53 say He would be delivered for our transgressions? Doesn't Romans 25 say He's delivered for...4:25 say He's delivered for our offenses? Doesn't 1 Corinthians 15:3 say He died for our sins? First Peter 2:24, who in His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree? First Peter 3:18, who offered Himself suffering for sin the just for the unjust? I mean, doesn't the Scripture clearly tell us in 1

John 4:10 that God sent His Son to be the atonement for our sins? Doesn't Galatians 3:13 say He was made a curse for us? And 2 Corinthians 5:21, He was made sin for us who knew no sin?

Christ didn't just bear sin, He became sin. He was its personification. He bore all the sins of all time, of all people of all ages in Himself. And thus Hebrews 2:9 says He tasted death for every man. For every man He tasted death for He bore every man's sin. Jesus took on Himself the sins of all the ages. But that's why He came. He said that in Matthew 20:28, "I've come not to be served by to serve and to give My life a ransom for many." And that's why God turned His back because God can't look on sin. When Jesus screamed, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" the answer is because God cannot look upon sin.

Now you say, "Well, what kind of a separation is this?" Well, it isn't a separation as to nature. He didn't cease to be God or He would have ceased to exist because He can only be who He is. He was not separated from the nature of God. He was not separated from the trinity. He was not separated in essence or nature or substance. He was separated in terms of intimate fellowship and communion...like a child who sins severely against its own father does not cease to become that father's child but does cease to know the intimacy of a loving communion because the father cannot tolerate the sin. So God turns His back on Christ.

Now, when Christ first came into the world, there was a certain separation because He said to be equal with God, Philippians 2, is not something to hold on to. Which means that when He became incarnate, He let go of some of that equality. So, there was some separation in His incarnation and He also prayed, "Lord, restore Me to the glory I had with You before the world began," John 17:5 which means there was something missing. And now there is an even more profound separation, not just the separation of incarnation but the separation of utter sinfulness. And the fact that God turns His back on Jesus Christ and He cries out those words that David said He would cry in Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why have You abandon Me" indicates that this is a sin situation and God is turning His back on what He will always turn His back on and that is sin.

Now may I suggest to you something that's too profound for us to understand but we must at least grasp the basic truth? While Jesus bore sin, while Jesus took all the weight of all the sin of all the ages, He never became a sinner. And if you can't see that anywhere else, you can see it right here on the cross. More profoundly than it's delineated in any epistle of the New Testament, it's delineated right here. For in the midst of engulfed...of being engulfed in all the sins of all the ages, He has no desire for that sin. Though He is literally drowning in all of the sin of all time, He has no longing for that sin but His longing is expressed in these words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" What is it that He longed for? God. And therein lies the evidence of the purity of His spirit...a purity which He knew He maintained for soon after this, having said "It is finished," He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." Knowing full well that God would take Him for while He bore sin, He never became a sinner. That's why the writer of Hebrews says He is yet without sin, made sin and not

sinned paradox. But when He became sin, God had to turn His back. And the second miracle is the miracle of God turning away from Christ, a supernatural occurrence in which God turned His back on the Son...the miracle of sovereign departure.

And what does it say to us? It says that Christ became sin. What is the meaning of the cross then? It's right here. First of all, it's an act of judgment. What does God judge? He judges sin. Where was the sin He was judging? It was on Christ. There's the meaning of the cross.

And the people mocked. Verse 47, "Some of them that stood there when they heard that said, This man calls for Elijah." They knew He didn't say Elias, Elias, they knew He said Eli, Eli. They knew that. They knew He was saying, "My God, My God." They knew Psalm 22. But this was part of a joke. This was their laughing matter. This was their mockery again. You see, the prophet Malachi had said before the Messiah comes to set up His Kingdom, Elijah will first come. And so they're saying, "Well, this poor misguided Messiah, still thinking He's going to have His Kingdom, maybe He's calling for Elijah to come and announce Him as Messiah and proclaim His Kingdom and help Him get it going...haha." Cruel, cynical, sarcastic mockery...oh, He's calling for Elijah.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

It is at this point the other gospel writers tell us that Jesus said, "I thirst," for thirst was part of the torture of crucifixion. And this was the fourth time the silence of Calvary was broken by the Savior. And verse 48 picks it up and says, "And straightway," or immediately, "one of themprobably a Roman soldierran and took a sponge." The other writers tell us he put it on a hyssop reed which would be about 18 inches high. That would tell us that the cross was very low to the ground. Lifted it up to His lips that it might be able to moisten His lips and quench His thirst a little bit. The word in the authorized for what they gave Him is vinegar. The actual Greek word is oxos. It's a cheap sour wine that was highly diluted with water because it was a common every day drink for laborers and soldiers. It was a thirstquenching drink with a high amount of water and a very low amount of alcohol content and sour wine content. So they gave this to Jesus to quench His thirst.

You say, "Was that an act of mercy?" Oh, I suppose momentary mercy, but the more mercy you showed in the moments, the more you prolonged the ultimate torture. But the idea is at least somebody came to give Him that. And the crowd saw this as another part of the jokein verse 49so they said, "Hold it, let Him alone, let's see whether Elijah will come to save Him." That was their idea. And they carried on their little malicious mockery as far as they could. All the way to the very end until He finally died, they jeered at Him with this kind of talk. So they missed the whole point.

Can you imagine they were doing this in pitchblack darkness? It seems to me they would have stopped to think about what might be going on. It seem to me they might have remembered Isaiah's words about darkness and judgment. It seems to me they might have remembered some of the other prophets who associated darkness with judgment. They might have even thought that what Joel predicted in chapter 2 was coming to pass, when the sun went out as Joel predicted it would in that great day when the Lord would come. I mean, they might have at least thought that maybe judgment was occurring. And when they heard Him cry, "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me," they might well have understood that He was bearing their sin had they understood what was promised and what was required for sin. They understood little of it. They ignored the darkness and they mocked the sayings of Jesus.

Now we learn about God at the cross. We learn that God is a God who is going to show wrath against sin. And God is a God who's too holy to look on the sinner. Those first two miracles then are very instructive. But there's a third, would you notice this one in verse 50? "Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice," and the word is to scream or yell again, very loud, "yielded up the spirit." Now the silence has been broken five times by Jesus. The first three in the first hours. Then "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," then "I thirst," and now finally, just before He expires, just before He yields up His breath He cries with a loud voice once more. He's still strong enough to do it. It's so important that all these cries of Jesus in the last three hours of His life were with a loud voice, except the one "I thirst" doesn't say it was with a loud voice. But these were loudly given cries to demonstrate that He still had physical strength. He could still have enough strength to yell. He is not slowly fading away. He is not letting His life sort of ebb out. He is still strong enough to yell with a loud voice. He is not yet at the point of utter exhaustion. He wants to make that clear. And the reason He cries out as He does is to demonstrate that He still has the resources to stay alive.

In John 19:30 it tells us what He cried. He cried, "It is finished." And having cried that, according to Luke chapter 23 verse 46, He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." He said them both with a loud voice.

Why? And then He yielded up the spirit. That's a unique phrase and will answer our question. In 15 other places in Scripture where it talks about someone giving up the spirit or yielding the spirit, it's always one Hebrew word, or one Greek word that's used. Except in the case of the death of Jesus as described by Matthew and John and in their description, at both times it's two words. And the two words give the idea not just of expiring or breathing out your last or dying, but the idea of handing over or giving over or sending away.

In other words, it's an act of volition. It is an act of the will. He literally sent His spirit away as an act of His own will. It was a voluntary act. And herein is the great third miracle of the cross. That is this, Jesus' life was not taken from Him, He voluntarily gave it up. And that is demonstrated to us by the fact that He died so very soon, when victims normally lingered for days on the cross. In fact,

according to Mark 15 verses 44 and 45, when the word was given to Pilate that Jesus was dead, he couldn't believe it and sent somebody to check on it because it was so abnormal for one to die that soon. And the reason the Scripture says He cried with a loud voice or screamed or yelled is to demonstrate to us that even at the time when He gave up His life, He had the strength to live if He had willed to live.

Jesus not only had the power to take His life back out of the grave, He had the power to give His life whenever He wanted. And no man has that power anymore than he has the power to raise himself. You can shoot yourself, but you've given your power to the bullet. You can take poison but you've given the power to the poison. You can throw yourself off a bridge, but you've given the power to the fall and to the concrete you land on. No man can by his own volition in a moment of time will his own death anymore than he can will his own resurrection. But Jesus did because He has power over death and power of life. And He is making a statement here, dear friends, about the fact that no one was taking His life, He was giving it...He was giving it.

In John chapter 10, may I remind you of some very, very important words? John 10 verse 11, "I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." Verse 15, "I lay down My life for the sheep." Verse 17, "I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man takes it from Me," verse 18, "but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." What a great statement. He had power to lay it down. And He had power to take it again. And it takes God to take that life as much as to give it back.

Now what do we see here? What is the Father saying in His incarnate voluntary choosing to die? What is He saying? He is saying this, that the cross is an act of voluntary sacrifice that could only be done by God who controls dying and living. So what we have here is the judgment of God, sin being borne on the cross, and a voluntary death that could only be accomplished by one who had power over death and that is God Himself. What is the Father saying about the cross then? That it was there that He judged sin, that sin was in the Lord Jesus Christ who was none other than the God Himself who controls dying and living. And He voluntarily gave up His life. No one took it from Him.

So, we see the wrath of God. We see the holiness of God. And we see the love and grace and mercy of God in the miracles of Calvary. At the very moment of His death, three instantaneous miracles occurred. Look at verse 51. This is the fourth of these miracles in this section. We'll call this one sanctuary devastation. The last one was selfgiving death. The one before that, sovereign departure and then supernatural darkness...sanctuary devastation. Look what happened in verse 51 to the temple. "And behold," and that's a startled word, "Behold, amazingly, shockingly, startling, the curtain or veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom."

Now listen, people. There's a reason for that, that's not just incidental. There is a reason for that. God is saying something. The word temple here is not the general word for the whole of the temple, it's the

word naosfor the inner sanctuary, the holy place, the Holy of Holies. Any student of Scripture knows that in the middle of the temple, God had prescribed that there be a sanctuary in which He was to dwell in His symbolic presence. There was a holy place and then there was a great curtain or veil and inside that was the Holy of Holies where no one could ever go except one man, that was the high priest, once a year to offer blood on the altar there for the sacrifice offered for the sins of his people.

So, the Holy of Holies represented the presence of God. And the once a year on the day of atonement, the priest would lift a corner of the curtain, hurry in, sprinkle the blood and get back out again because the symbolism there was that no man really had access to the presence of God...because no sacrifice really had ever atoned for sin, because no lamb was ever sufficient, no goat, no ram, no turtle dove, no pigeon, no sacrifice was ever sufficient, because no one could ever keep the law of God, because no man's righteousness was ever adequate, nobody ever had access to God. And that was continually put before the people by veiling off the place where God dwelt so that men were aware again and again and again and again that they had no access to God. Because God cannot receive sinners into His presence. And since sin had not been dealt with, there could be no real access to God. And so, the curtain kept men from God in the sense of true intimacy...accomplished redemption.

But when Christ died, that thing was ripped from top to bottom. Josephus describes it as a massive thing, predominantly blue, very ornate with all kinds of imagery on it, hanging massively down in front of the Holy of Holies. It was a symbol of separation. And in the instant that Jesus died, God took His finger and ripped it from top to bottom. And at that very moment, the temple would have been filled with pilgrims, filled with priests, filled with sacrifices, everything going on and all of a sudden to the horror of everyone, the Holy of Holies is utterly exposed.

And what God is saying is this, in the death of Jesus Christ there is total access into My holy presence. Why? Because He paid for what? For sin. I mean, this is the Father's own commentary on the meaning of the cross. God throws wide open His arms and says as the writer of Hebrews in chapter 4:16...verse 16 says it so beautifully, "Let us come boldly to the throne to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need." We now can rush into the presence of God for the separation is removed in the death of Jesus Christ who has paid for sin and removed it. It's no longer a barrier. What a glorious truth.

The Father's statement was before the whole temple population. And listen, when that curtain was ripped, it was the end of the temple. It was the end of the sacrifices. It was the end of the priesthood. It was the end of the whole system of Judaism. It was over. It was gone. And to show how much an end it was, within a few years the Gentiles came in and desecrated and trampled that temple into oblivion. That den of robbers began to be destroyed when God ripped the veil that screened off the Holy of Holies. When Christ died, men had access to God. A glorious thought. The old covenant was over. The separation was gone. And this, says God, is My new covenant, through the blood of Christ I

throw open My holy presence to all who will come in the name of Christ with their sins forgiven.

Notice it was ripped from the top to the bottom to show that men didn't do it. I doubt that they could have done it, so heavy was it. But for sure they couldn't have done it from the top to the bottom. The finger of God did it.

What is the great truth here? The great truth is that yes, the cross is the place of God's wrath, the cross is the place where Jesus became sin, that's why God turned His back, the cross is the place where in a voluntary act of love unequalled in the history of the universe God in human flesh bore the sins of unworthy sinners. Yes, and the cross is also the place where redemption was accomplished and there's no more need for separation and God threw open the Holy of Holies of His own personal presence to everyone who comes in the name of Jesus Christ...so says the Father.

I want you to notice a fifth miracle. I suppose for the sake of alliteration we could call this one "soil disturbance." Indeed it was. Verse 51, "The earth did quake and the rocks were split." Instantaneously at the death of Jesus Christ, the Father had something else to say and without an audible voice from heaven He said it in a physical way. He brought to the city of Jerusalem and the area around Jerusalem a devastating earthquake which split rocks open, created fissures in the ground. No doubt those fissures to this day still exist. This was a real earthquake.

What was He saying? What was the point of this? Very often in the Old Testament when God appeared there was an earthquake. We find Him in Exodus chapter 19 verse 18 appearing on Mount Sinai and the mountain begins to shake. We find another earthquake in 1 Kings 19:11. Another time when God appears in 2 Samuel 22:8 there's an earthquake. In Psalm 18:7 and Psalm 77:18 we find God moving and quaking and shaking the earth. Isaiah 29:6; Jeremiah 10:10, so many different places talk about God coming and shaking the earth. Nahum, that great chapter on the character of God, verses 2 and 5 of chapter 1 describes God as one who makes the earth to shake.

Now what is this? Well, let me tell you what it is. What is God saying here? You study the prophets and you study the book of Revelation and you will find there is one promise that God has made to this world and that is that some day the world as it now is and the heavens as they now are are going to be shaken. And shaken to the point of destruction. In Revelation as well as in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah, it tells us that the stars are going to fall, the constellations are going to come apart. The Bible talks about the sun and the moon going out of existence in terms of being lights. It tells about the earth shaking. There will be a great shaking in the final judgment.

Why? Because God is going to redo this cursed earth. In the original creation there were no earthquakes. There was nothing to shake. God created a perfect world and a perfect environment in which Adam lived and enjoyed the presence of God in the perfection that God had intended for that paradise to be. And then when Adam sinned, not only was he cursed and his wife cursed but the

earth was cursed as well. And the earth to this day is rocking and reeling under the curse. And Romans 8 says all creation groans, waiting for the release back to as Milton called it "Paradise regained." And the Bible promises some day a new heaven and some day a new earth. Some day there's going to be a time when the earth is the way the earth was supposed to be. Some day there's going to be a time when the usurper, Satan, who has taken over in ruling the earth is going to be deposed and he will cease being the monarch and Christ will become the monarch. And the earth will no longer be cursed, it will be a glorious new wondrous earth.

That earth is beautifully described in the epistle of the Hebrews to the Hebrews in chapter 20...chapter 12 verse 26. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only but also heaven," He did it once at Sinai, He says I'll do it again. "Yet once more signifies the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made." In other words, God's going to shake out of existence the earth that is, "that those things which cannot be shaken may remain, a kingdom which cannot be moved." So, God is going to shake this one out of existence and redo a brand new one, a new earth and a new heaven in which Christ will reign supreme as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

You say, "Well, what does all that have to do with what happened at the cross?" Just this, when God shook the earth at the death of Christ, I think He was giving the world a taste of what He's going to do in the future when He shakes the earth in the time of the coming of the King Himself. I believe when Jesus died on that cross, He so perfectly accomplished the Father's will, He so earned the right to be the King of the earth, He so earned the right to take the title deed to the earth out of the hand of God as it's seen there in the book of Revelation chapter 5, as He takes the title deed out of the hand of God and begins to unroll that title deed and take over the earth from Revelation 6 to 19. I believe He earned the right to do that on the cross. I believe because of His perfect bearing of sin in His own body, because He finished the work of redemption, the Father said, "You will be the King of the earth, I will give You the nations for Your footstool, I will give You the earth to rule. All people will bow the knee to You. You will rule the universe, on the earth, under the earth, above the earth," it says in Philippians 2. And I believe shaking the earth at the death of Christ was God's way of guarantying the promise of a renewed world and a renewed universe. Christ had earned that and it would come...it would come.

And closely connected to that and one reason why I believe that's the proper interpretation is that it tells us about the last miracle, the sixth one. And this is a marvelous miracle. "Subduing death." "And the graves were opened." That obviously could have happened from the earthquake. But the next part couldn't have happened just from the earthquake. "And many bodies of the saints that slept were raised and came out of the graves." And you should put a period there. That's the way the text should read.

There was a resurrection, folks. There was a resurrection. Did you get that? You say, "What came out of the graves?" Somata, bodies, bodies, not spirits. This isn't some ethereal thing. These aren't

ghosts. Bodies, this is a real resurrection. What bodies? Many bodies...not all of them, it was a very discriminating one. Only select ones. Who were they? Saints. What are saints? Holy ones...from out of the Old Testament era who were waiting for their resurrection, who had been waiting perhaps a long time. When Jesus died, their spirits came from the abode where righteous spirits dwell and were joined with glorified bodies that came out of those graves.

You say, "Is this a real glorification? A real resurrection?" Absolutely. So many people who know the story of the cross, miss this. This is important. This is another statement by God. This is a resurrection, a real literal physical bodily glorified resurrection.

But what happened? They came out of the graves..period. The next sentence says, "After His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared unto many." Can you imagine what kind of testimony they have? "We have a guest for dinner tonight, you won't believe this..."

You say, "What would they be testifying about?" I'll tell you what they'd be testifying about, resurrection. But they didn't go into the city and do it until Christ had risen. Why? Because 1 Corinthians 15:20 says He's the firstfruits of them that slept, right? So it wasn't until after He was raised from the dead that they along with Him began to speak. And I don't think they spoke to anybody except those who already believed. There's no biblical evidence Christ ever appeared after His resurrection to anyone other than a believer. And they went in and I'm sure the believers were thrilled to meet them. And they would say Christ is alive and His being alive is the guarantee that you will live and we're living proof of that. Glorious miracle.

What was the Father saying? The Father was saying the cross is the point of greatest hope for resurrection. Why? Because if your sin is dealt with and your sin is carried away by Christ and the penalty is paid and the wrath of God is all spent and He has drunk the poison, as it were, to the last drop, then you are free from death and free to live. And if access to God is wide open and if He's going to create a Kingdom that will never be shaken, then you have a right to that access and a right to that kingdom and you'll live in a glorified form to possess it. This is the meaning of the cross. This is the testimony of God the Father.

What do we see at the cross? We see the wrath of God depicted in supernatural darkness. We see the holiness of God in turning away from sin because Christ has become sin. And we see God's loving grace and mercy as He in a voluntary act of self sacrifice gives His life to redeem unworthy men. And then we see the curtain in the temple ripped from top to bottom as God says the way of access is now open, your sins are dealt with and you come in the name of Jesus Christ and you can embrace the living holy God in intimate...intimate love and fellowship. And then we see the earth shake and we are reminded that there is coming a day when the promised new earth and new heaven is going to come to place. Jesus will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and we'll be there to reign with Him for the resurrection of these few is the guarantee of the resurrection of the

many who believe in Him. This is the message of the cross. This is God's own testimony by supernatural power as to the meaning of the death of His own Son. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for such testimony, so dramatically, so clearly given when Jesus died that You are a God of wrath, a God of infinite utter holiness, but also a God of love and mercy and grace who receives the sinner. And a God of promise and a God of hope who brings the sinner to a new and glorious kingdom in resurrection life by faith in Christ. Thank You.

While your heads bowed for a moment, the choice is yours. Christ paid the price for your sin. He threw open the way to God. He promises you an eternal kingdom and glorious resurrection. It has been done. It is finished. The only question is whether you will receive the gift. The choice is yours. Only a fool could turn this down. Only an utter fool. Or, one who so loves his sin or her sin as to choose it over against the gift of God. The choice is yours. I trust that you'll choose Christ who has done this for you, that you'll respond to the testimony of God the Father in the miraculous commentary on the meaning of the cross.

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