God's Commentary on the Passion of Christ
Matthew 27:45-53
80-282

Well, the world certainly has been awakened to *The Passion of the Christ*, hasn't it? This film that has dominated the public discourse for the last number of months has exposed millions of people to the account of the suffering, death and even the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's really a remarkable phenomenon to see so many newscasters and media pundits and politicians and entertainers and just about everybody else with the name of Jesus on their lips all the time. It's amazing.

In fact, it's reached such proportions that I received a phone call, not long ago, from a magazine that does not usually call me, *G.Q. Gentlemen's Quarterly* fashion magazine. And I wondered when I went about to return the call what in the world they could possibly want with me, and so did everybody else. And I finally was connected with the writer who said, "In May we're doing a special issue of *G.Q.*and it's going to feature the most popular men in America and we have finally come to the conclusion after our research as to who it is and it is Jesus. And you were suggested to us as someone who could tell us about Him." (Applause)

I said, "I can do that." (Laughter) And so for about an hour and a half I did. I don't know who else they will talk to and how it will all come out, but Jesus has somehow jumped the barrier into the popular culture, hasn't He?

Now there's an upside to that, and there's a downside. Over familiarity with the popular cultural Jesus is not necessarily a good thing, it's going to call on us to be very clear about the Jesus of Scripture as opposed to the popular Jesus of everybody's imagination and preference. And just a few days ago, sitting in the back of the worship center was an entire film crew here and they filmed me for about an hour and twenty minutes, or so. This was from one of the networks, I think they said HBO network and they were doing a documentary and wanted to interview me on this person Jesus in the Christian gospel and how it might relates to anti-Semitism in the world.

You know, it's pretty amazing how extensive the dialogue about Jesus has become. And while I'm sure all these representations are not going to be what we would want them to be, and while I would confess that there are elements of the film that are not necessarily biblical, it provides for us a dramatic opportunity when everybody is talking about to Jesus to step in and say, "Here's the real message, here's the real story," and the film does depict accurately the suffering and the death and even the resurrection of Jesus Christ and makes very clear because the first words that go across the screen are, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities," it makes it very clear why He died. But just watching the movie, you might conclude that He died for everybody's sins and therefore everybody's okay. On the other hand, the film does leave a lot of questions unanswered. Two Jewish people that I know saw the film, one of them was this documentary film maker and he said, "As soon as I saw the film I went out and bought a New

Testament and read the four gospels." That's the second one I heard say that to me. That's good because the question is...how could this happen? How could they do this to Him? How did it happen? What's it about? And how does it apply to me? And that's why we put out a new edition of *The Murder of Jesus*with a new cover, borrowing the imagery of the film and the sub-title, "You've seen *The Passion of the Christ,*now discover what it means to you." Because you've got to get beyond the visual image to the Word of God which explains to us the cross.

And I thought this morning, just to help you, I would do a commentary on the cross. But I'm just going to repeat a commentary for you that is given by someone else. The most powerful commentary ever given on the cross came from God and I want you to open your Bible to Matthew chapter 27 and I'm going to show you God's commentary on the cross, and He gave it at the very time it happened. There were things going on from an earthly perspective in the death of Jesus Christ that they are certainly featured in the film. You see the agonizing torture of Jesus from His scourging on through His crucifixion. But many people suffered that way and there may have been many thousands of people who suffered even more physical pain than Jesus did because they lasted longer on the cross. The sufferings of Jesus physically were not unique, even the Apostle Paul was scourged five times by the Jews and beaten three times with rods. And there was nothing redemptive about those sufferings of Paul. There's something more going on here than a suffering man. Jesus cannot become the hero of the oppressed. He cannot become the hero of the abused. He cannot become the hero of those who are under the threatening power of the establishment. There's a lot more going on there than that. And while I think it's instructive for us to see the physical suffering so that we can understand what was going on in the scourging and the crucifixion, many people have suffered like that.

In order to really understand what's going on there, you've got to go the commentary that God gave while it was happening, and it is found in Matthew 27, starting in verse 45. And I want to read down to verse 52.

"Now from the sixth hour, darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' And some of those who were standing there when they heard it began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.' And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and the earth shook, and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many."

Amazing series of events, right? Just a few verses, this massive supernatural commentary by God on the cross is given to us. Six miracles occurred in those verses I read you, six miracles, six supernatural events.

Number one, supernatural darkness. Verse 45, "Now from the sixth hour darkness fell on all the land until the ninth hour." When Christ was born, Luke 2:9 to 11 says there was great light that dawned. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, in the anticipation of the arrival of the Messiah says, "The Sunrise from on high shall visit us to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death."

When Jesus came, the light went on, the light of God, the glorious light of the gospel shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus even said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world, whoever believes in Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." "He urged men to come to the light...John 12:35 and 36...while the light was still there."

Our Lord was then light. He was identified with light. He was the light to the Gentiles, that is to the world. But at His death there is darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. The Jews begin to measure their day from 6 A.M., the sixth hour is noon. From noon to three it was dark. Mark 15:25 says, "He was crucified at the third hour," 9 A.M. So the first three hours He was hanging there visible, naked before the watching people in the light. Those three hours passed. Soldiers had nailed Him there. They had placed the sign over His head. He is suspended there in the horrific indignity as the passers-by, the soldiers, the curious, the religious leaders watch and mock and insult Him. During that three hours He only broke the silence three times. Once He said to the soldiers, of the soldiers to the Father, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The second time He spoke to a penitent thief at His side and said, "Verily, this day you will be with Me in paradise." Once more He broke the three-hour silence looking down at Mary and John, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son," pointing to John. And to John, "Behold your mother," thus giving her into the care of John. In the light He said three things. All three of them were demonstrations of mercy, mercy toward the soldiers, mercy toward the thief, mercy toward Mary. Each was a revelation of the light of His grace, the shining beauty of His compassion.

But as the second three hours began, at noon when the sun had reached its apex, its zenith in the bright mideastern sky, an astounding miracle took place. And the Bible just says without any fanfare, "There was darkness and it fell upon all the land." Land is *ge*, transliterated g-e, earth. Darkness fell on all the earth. The earth was already half dark and there's no reason to think that it didn't become totally dark. There was a Roman historian named Flagon who mentioned this darkness. Tertullian also wrote to some pagans mentioning this darkness and saying, "Which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your own archives to this day?" So there are historical records of this strange darkness occurring at this place at that time and as far as we can tell, spreading to other cultures.

God had interfered on other occasions. You remember in Joshua chapter 10 the sun stood still? Do you remember in 2 Kings the sun moved backwards on...the shadow moved backwards from the sun on the sundial? And those seem to have affected the whole earth, no reason to think this didn't as well. On the other hand, there was a time, at least one time, when God blackened only a certain area and that was in Exodus chapter 10 during the plagues in Egypt.

What is it that caused this darkness? Well some have suggested it was a local sirocco, or was some local heavy clouds obscuring the sun. But if you look at the very language here in verse 45, darkness fell *ekleipo*, eclipse. This is not an eclipse in the sense that we use the word scientifically, or technically since that would have been impossible. And the reason it would have been impossible is that Passover is in the middle of the month and the month always began with a new moon so that by now the moon was full. If the moon is full, it's on the opposite side of the earth from the sun, it can't therefore eclipse the sun. So this is not some natural phenomena. In fact, the word itself means to fail utterly. And what happened was the sun went out, supernatural darkness, there is no natural explanation. And God made it happen in the middle of the day. The Babylonian Talmud...in the Babylonian Talmud the rabbis used to say that the sun failing would be a bad sign for the world only

to be expected at times of great calamity. Well here was one, in fact here was the ultimate one.

And the question could be asked...why did God do this supernatural miracle? God who turned on the lights at creation has every right to turn them off. Was...was...it was nature, or was God throwing a veil over the sufferings of Christ? Was this an act of sympathy to cover the horror of His dying? Was this some kind of divine protest so that men couldn't see what they had done? What was God really saying about the cross with the darkness?

Well you don't have to think too long to come to an answer. Darkness in the Scripture is a symbol of judgment...judgment, black darkness characterizes hell. Darkness characterizes Mount Sinai when God comes down. Isaiah writes of the darkness of judgment. Joel writes of it. Amos writes of it. Zephaniah writes of it. Jesus speaks of it. God's salvation is always seen as light. God's judgment is always seen as darkness. And God was saying by the darkness that the cross was a place of judgment. This is not...this is not an indication of a judgment to come in the future, this is a judgment in itself right then and there. And God only judges one thing, what is it? Sin. God turned out the lights because this was a judgment on sin. And yet, the One receiving the judgment was sinless, a Lamb without blemish and without spot, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, Hebrews 7:26 says. "In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," Hebrews 4. Second Corinthians 5, "Him who knew no sin."

What is happening there then is a judgment on sin being borne by an innocent sacrifice. Well in some ways that's not anything new, isn't that what the Old Testament sacrificial system pictured, a judgment on sin in the death of an innocent sacrifice? Isaiah 53 verse 4, "Surly our griefs He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried, yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well being fell on Him and by His scourging we are healed. The Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." It further says, "The Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief, rendering Him a guilt offering He will bear their iniquities and justify many." Paul put it this way. Romans 4:25, "He was delivered for our offenses." First Corinthians 15:3, "He died for our sins." First Peter 2:24, "Who in His own self bore our sins in His body on the tree." First Peter 3:18, "He died the just for the unjust." "He who knew no sin became sin for us." First John 4:10, "God sent His Son to be the atonement for our sins." Galatians 3, He was made a curse for us." And in Matthew 20:28 it says, "He came to give His life a ransom for many."

What was going on there? The wrath of God. To once and for all end the discussion of who killed Jesus, God did. God did it. It was by the determinant plan and counsel of God. It was God who was pleased to crush Him. God did it.

There were secondary causes. The Jews, the Romans, but the primary cause was God. Jesus was being judged by the wrath of God and God was pouring out His full fury on Him as He bore all the guilt of all the people who would ever believe. Hebrews 2:9, "He tasted death for everyone." The darkness then tells us God's wrath was being unleashed. That's the first miracle by which God comments on the cross. Sin was really being judged there. Jesus was not dying as an example, He was not dying as a martyr to a noble cause. He was not dying as a good man who shows us how we ought to take our convictions to death. He was dying as a sacrifice for sin and the supernatural darkness shows that God was making that clear.

There is a second miracle. This obviously has no easy or no possible human explanation. We can sort of walk around the edges of it. Verse 46, "And about the ninth hour, three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'"

As the darkness came to an end, as the darkness reached three o'clock from noon, the life of Jesus is almost at an end. The fury of God is almost spent. Judgment is almost over. But Jesus can contain the pain no longer and it's not the pain of nails and it's not the pain of a crown, and it's not the pain of wounds of scourges rubbing against a ragged wooden beam, it is the pain of separation from the Father. That's the second miracle. Jesus cried out with a loud voice, literally He screamed.

You should remember this. Jesus was scourged and was beaten and the film, no doubt, depicts something of the reality of it. Jesus did have to carry that cross which would have weighed 200 pounds plus up a hill. Jesus then nailed on that cross, losing more blood, suspended on that cross having difficulty breathing as His body sagged and collapsed His lungs, pushing Himself up to catch a breath by the wounds on His feet, ever reason to think that He would be an exhausted person. And at this particular point, however, He cries loudly, screaming. He has been enduring six hours on the cross, after all the rest that He had already endured, immeasurable agony. And yet has the strength to be at full voice and to cry out with a loud voice clearly with the words, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" And we are reminded again that this was a man who while human was sinless and so His physical capacities were not diminished by the things that diminish our physical capacities, namely the curse. There's a power in His physicality that we wouldn't even understand, even more than those before the Flood who lived for 900 years because of the vitality that they enjoyed even in their humanity. Well this is one untouched by sin, unquestionably strong beyond anyone's imagination. In fact, one could conclude that since the wages of sin is death and Adam was told that in the day you eat of the fruit and sin you will die, Jesus never having sinned had a body that never needed to die. They couldn't kill His body if they wanted to. And with great strength, He cries out where the real agony comes from, and it doesn't come from the physical pain, the real agony comes from His soul, the realization, the reality, the agony that He is separated from His Father. "Eli, Eli, My God, My God," that's Hebrew, *El*, *Elohim*is God. Mark uses the Aramaic, *Eloi, Eloi. Lama, Sabachthani*is Aramaic which is the popular language. "Why have You forsaken Me?" And by the way, Psalm 22:1 says that verbatim. In Psalm 22:1, David by the Holy Spirit gave a prophecy of what the Messiah would say on the cross. Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This cry of Jesus demonstrates the real pain, the real agony. I think in the film there was an effort made to depict this in the garden. I don't think Jesus in the garden was agonizing over the physical pain that He was about to suffer, He was agonizing over the reality of the sin-bearing and feeling the wrath of God because He knew exactly why He came...He came to be a ransom for many which means He had to come and die in their place, and He knew He would feel the fury of God's wrath.

This is a reverse miracle. This is a supernatural separation, impossible and yet it happened. And while Jesus was not separated from the Father by nature, He was separated from the Father by fellowship.

As a sinful child does not cease to be the essence of his father, but by his sin loses the intimate

fellowship with his father, so Christ did not cease to be God but lost the intimacy of fellowship with His Father which He had eternally known. He had never been anything but loved by His Father. In fact, it was His Father's perfect love for Him that caused the Father to put the whole redemptive plan in motion and elect people and then set history in place to redeem those people, ultimately to gather them into glory in order that He might bring a bride to His Son as a gift of His love. It was the Father's perfect love for the Son that made it all happen. And now, having been loved by His Father perfectly for all eternity, He is treated as if His Father hates Him and His Father turns His back on Him. Why does He do that? Because He's of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon iniquity, Habakkuk 1:12 and 13.

Now verse 47, "Some of those who were standing there when they heard it began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah.'" That is not an honest statement. They didn't mistake what He said. They know the difference between *Eloi, Eloi,*and Elijah. And He spoke loudly and clearly. This is mockery. This was their little pun. They knew exactly what He was saying but in mock, in jest, malicious sarcasm they said, "Oh, He's calling for Elijah."

Why would they say that? Because He had claimed to be the Messiah and Malachi 4, the last couple of verses in the whole Old Testament, you know how it ends? Do you know how the Old Testament ends? It ends with these words, "Behold, I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." Before the Lord comes in judgment, before the Lord comes to set up His Kingdom, Elijah is going to come. The Jews believed that Elijah would be the partner of the returning Messiah to set up the Kingdom. Then when Messiah came, Elijah would come. And so they're mocking, "And you're the Messiah, you must be calling for Elijah." Scorn, dripping scorn. "Ha, ha, ha." How fearfully did men manifest their hatred to the lovely Son of God, hanging there dying for their sins? They mocked Him as a ridiculous claimant to be the Messiah asking for Elijah.

It was at this point that Jesus said something else. He broke the silence again. He said, "I thirst," as recorded in John 19:28 and 29, "I thirst." Matthew doesn't record that but Matthew records the response. Verse 48, "And immediately one of them ran and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave him a drink." Jesus said, "I thirst." Earlier, according to Luke 23:36 and 37, they had offered Him a drink. So this is the second time, but this time He asks, His thirst is great. One of them, probably a soldier who had the *oxos*, it's called, the sour wine, the cheap wine mixed with water that they used to quench their thirst in that hot part of the world. And they also gave it to their tortured victims as some moderate means of mercy. In some ways, however, giving it prolonged death and lengthened agony. The reed was a stalk from a hyssop plant, maybe about eighteen inches, which tells us that the cross was probably not very high. Sometimes you see crosses, they look like they're way, way up. The feet might have been nearly to the ground, maybe a little up from the ground so 18 inches so that you could reach up and give to one a drink. It's an imperfect tense indicating that he was giving Him a drink. That is, it indicates the time involved. This is the small expression of mercy and only one of them did it. The rest of them, verse 49 says, said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." More mockery. They just were having a big time of sarcasm and scorn. "Where is His associate? He's the Messiah, Elijah's got to be around here somewhere, let's see if he'll show up." They're gloating over the fact that He cannot possibly be the Messiah, the whole thing is a ridiculous joke. Look at Him, He is beyond all saving. He is dying. It is over.

Now going back to verse 46, back to what He originally said, "My God, My God, why have You

forsaken Me?" What does that tell us about the cross? If darkness demonstrates wrath, God's separation demonstrates holiness...holiness. This is the miracle in which God comments that holiness is at work. Wrath is at work but so is holiness. Holiness is the issue of separation. The word "holy" means separate. On the one hand, God pours out His wrath in judgment on sin. At the same time that God is pouring out His wrath in judgment on sin, He turns His back protecting His perfect holiness. He had to turn away from His own Son when He made Him sin for us. The lesson here is that this is a holy moment that guilty sinners cut off, separated from God, are being atoned for by this man hanging on that cross. God had to forsake, to abandon, "Why have You abandoned Me?" He had to abandon Jesus at that point because He is holy and Jesus had become the guilt offering. The gulf then was placed between the Father and the Son and Jesus hungering for the Father's beloved communion and knowing Himself to be innocent asks why. And that's the why of holiness as well. Why am I not fit to fellowship with You? And the answer is that for that moment God treated Jesus as if He had personally committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe. And so the point, you see, of the separation is to show that Jesus did indeed become sin. That's why the Father turned His back. He was the real substitute for sinners.

There's a third miracle and it appears in verse 50. This is, as the others, absolutely supernatural. Verse 50, "And Jesus cried out again," there's that strength, "with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.." *krazo*, He screamed with a loud voice, still strong. And what did He say? John 19:30 says what He said. He said, "It is finished." Didn't say, "I am finished," He said, "It is finished." And then according to Luke 23:46 He said, "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit." The Father had turned at that point. The Father had turned. The wrath was over and He can see again, as it were, the Father's face, commits Himself to the Father having accomplished redemption. He yielded up His spirit. He could not die at the hands of men. The Jews couldn't kill Him. The Romans couldn't kill Him. Nobody could kill Him. He voluntarily gave His life. He said, "No man takes My life from Me," John 10, "I lay it down by Myself." He yielded up the spirit. That is incredible. You can't do that. Nobody can do that. I can't say, "I send my spirit into the presence of God, watch my body fall over dead." I can't end my life by speaking it. And in the Greek it says He dismissed His spirit. "Go now." And His real self, His eternal self left that body that slumped on the cross and ascended into the embrace of His Father. This is miraculous.

What does it tell us? It tells us that He voluntarily gave His life. That He did it because He loved us. He was laying down His life for His sheep. He was, as 1 Timothy 2:6 says, giving Himself a ransom, or Titus 2:14, "He gave Himself for us." Or Isaiah 53:12, "He poured out His soul unto death." And what you see there is in this miracle the Father is saying the Son did it willingly, the Son did it voluntarily out of obedience to His Father and love for us. He loved us and gave Himself for us.

What do you see at the cross? The greatest act of divine wrath, the greatest expression of divine holiness. And the greatest act of divine love, the Lord Jesus giving up His life for us. There's a fourth miracle here in which God comments again. Verse 51, "And behold!," exclamation point, it's like "Wow!" in our language, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Stop at that point.

At the moment that Jesus gave up His spirit, at the moment supernaturally, literally He left that human body, at that moment the great veil, the great curtain that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies was ripped from top to bottom. The *naos*, the sanctuary, the place where only the high priest could go once a year, and if anybody else went in there they would have the threat of death at the hands of God, and even the high priest couldn't go until he had prepared himself through

appropriate ceremonies to go into the place, and he bells all over his robe in case he went in in any kind of an unholy fashion, he would have died, they would have stopped hearing the bells and somebody would have gone under and pulled him out. This holy place represented the presence of God where no man had a right to go, where no unholy person could go, but Jesus having died on the cross, the Holy of Holies is ripped wide open and access to the very throne of God is made available. Men who were shut out of God's presence would be shut out of God's presence for all time had not Christ paid for their sins and ripped open the way into the Holy of Holies. At that moment there was no longer Aaronic priesthood, no longer any Levitical priesthood, no longer any temple, no longer any sacrifices, nothing ever a part of that system in the temple had any future. And within a few years, 70 A.D., to put a punctuation mark on that, the Romans came in and obliterated the temple and it's never been rebuilt. And the sacrificial system has never been restored.

And by the way, this happened at three o'clock in the afternoon and that place would have been filled with hundreds of thousands of people, jammed with priests who were nothing more than butchers neck deep in blood, slaughtering one Passover lamb after another for everybody who was celebrating the Passover. There are numbers that indicate they would slaughter as many as a quarter of a million at a Passover. And in one moment there was no more priesthood, no more sacrifices, no more offering, no more Holy of Holies, no more holy place and no more temple. That corrupted den of thieves had seen its last day. The Old Covenant was for certain abrogated and the temple would soon be trampled by Gentiles. Top to bottom? Couldn't have been done by men. High, ornate, inaccessible and God tore it from the top all the way down. In Hebrews 10, among other places in Hebrews, there is a wonderful statement in which we read, "Since therefore...verse 19...brethren, 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, by His flesh He opened up the way into the very presence of God."

So the miracle of the ripping of the veil in the temple was another element of God's commentary on the cross in which God made it abundantly clear that the way is now open into My presence through the blood of Jesus Christ. Supernatural darkness, separation, self-giving death, tearing of the veil, and now a fifth miracle. It's described there in verse 51 as an earthquake, "And the earth shook and the rocks were split."

Devastating earthquake. And God in the Old Testament often did things through earthquakes, as you well know. There are a number of indications of that in the Old Testament. And they always show God in His fury shaking the earth in judgment. And this shaking at the very death of Christ was a preview of coming attractions, folks. It was a preview of what was to come. If you were to go back, numbers of Old Testament passages would be adequate for you to read about this. The one that perhaps sums it up best is the twenty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, verse 19. Isaiah looks into the future at the day of the Lord, the time of judgment when the Lord lays the earth waste, when He devastates it, when He distorts its surface. And down in verse 19 of that chapter it says, "The earth is broken asunder, the earth is split through, the earth is shaken violently, the earth reels to and fro like a drunkard, totters like a shack for its transgression is heavy upon it. It will fall, never to rise again. So it will happen in that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven on high and the kings of the earth on earth and they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon and be confined in prison and be punished." And it goes on to talk about the Lord setting up His Kingdom and reigning all gloriously forever. That's looking at the future.

You know what this was, this...this earthquake that came and this splitting of the rocks? It was simply an illustration of what was going to come. By the very death of Jesus Christ, He had verified, He had affirmed that one day He will come back as Judge. He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives. He will split the Mount of Olives wide. He will establish a great valley. He will judge the nations. He will set up His Kingdom. After that thousand-year reign, He will destroy the entire universe, as we know it, and replace it with a new heaven and a new earth. All of that devastation will lead to paradise regained. And here God affirms the reality of that future. The Christ is indeed the King of the earth. He may at that moment look like a victim, but God sends that fury, sends that earthquake, fractures the rocks and gives a taste of the fact that Christ who at that moment had bruised Satan's head, crushed it literally, will come back one day to take the earth and destroy it and the elements eventually would melt with fervent heat and in its place would be a new heaven and a new earth which He would create, which righteousness would prevail forever.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews sees it. Hebrews 12:25, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking...you better listen to the gospel preacher. For if those who didn't escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but the heavens.'" And he goes on to say, "Our God is a consuming fire." He shook it at the death of Christ as a warning that some day He's going to shake the entire universe and shake it right out of existence. Wow, what a comment. While everybody thinks this is the end of Christ, while everybody thinks He's dying as some helpless victim, the fact of the matter is in that moment there is warning evidence that He having accomplished the perfect work of redemption is exalted by the Father as King and Lord and will come back to judge and to destroy.

There's one final miracle. When the rocks were split, verse 52 says, "The tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many."

This final resurrection, the sixth one, is a capstone miracle. Graves opened up. Now an earthquake can open graves, but it couldn't raise the dead. There's no...there's no physical phenomena to explain this. Many bodies, *somata(?)*of the saints that slept were raised, came out of the graves. Slept referring to death, used mainly of death in the New Testament, it was a real resurrection, a resurrection of bodies, glorified bodies. This is...what is this? What does this signify? The final resurrection, the final, glorious resurrection. They were not spiritual, they were actual physical bodies. They were bodies coming out of the grave. Their souls were there, their *soma*was there, but they actually had bodies, bodily resurrection. This is a preview again of an actual, literal opening of the grave and the resurrection of the dead. Bodies coming out of the grave, spirits coming down from heaven joined those bodies and three days later they went in to Jerusalem. They had to wait three days in order that Christ would be the firstfruits of the resurrection. That's 1 Corinthians 15:20.

This is amazing testimony God is giving. What is God saying? By darkness He is saying this is an expression of wrath against sin. By separation He is saying, "I am holy and this is holy judgment." By the self-sacrifice of Christ, the miracle of literally giving up His life, we see God's love and mercy and grace manifest in the incarnate one and His willing sacrifice. By the tearing of the veil we see the opening of heaven's gates and the throne room of God and the welcome of God to those who come into His presence through Christ. In the earthquake we see the coming promise of a new universe with blessing forever. And in the resurrection we see the hope of our resurrection, the subduing of

death and literal, physical living in the glories of the new world in the presence of our risen Christ.

All of that is God's commentary on the cross before you ever get to any of the epistles. But how wonderfully do the epistles in the rest of the New Testament enrich our understanding of what God supernaturally said there without uttering a word. Bow with me in prayer.

Do you see it? Do you believe it? It doesn't do any good for Jesus to die if you don't repent of your sin and ask Him to forgive you and become your Lord and Redeemer. It doesn't do any good for Him to die if you don't turn from your wicked ways and realize that you cannot save yourself, you are an unworthy and wretched sinner. And the only hope that you will ever enter into heaven comes by faith in Jesus Christ and faith in Him alone apart from any work or any religious ceremony. If you have any doubt or question in your mind about your relationship to the living God, this would be the time to repent of sin, ask to be forgiven and to confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Redeemer.

Those of us who have received this glorious salvation, this is our time for a fresh and a new thanks. Father, we thank You for what You've shown us again in the glory of the cross. And we commit these truths to every heart that they might work their work by Your Spirit in Christ's name. Amen.

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