

## **The Miraculous Events Surrounding the Cross**

Scripture: Matthew 27:45-54

Code: 80-295

Turn with me, if you will, back to Matthew 27. And just a few comments on the last part of the text that I read to you. Matthew chapter 27. Last Sunday, we looked at the reality in Romans, chapter 3, that Christ died for God. Christ died to put God on display. Christ died to satisfy God. To propitiate God. And we saw that on the cross, God is really on display. God's righteousness is on display. God's holiness is on display. God's consistency, as well as God's grace. And Christ died for God. That is in the sense that Christ died to prove to the world that God is absolutely righteous, absolutely holy, while at the same time, being merciful and gracious.

And as I pointed out on Sunday, there was some suspicion about the character of God, due to the fact that God forgave sin in the Old Testament, overlooked sin, tolerated sin, and even removed sin from those who put their trust in him fully, as far as the east is from the west, buried in the depths of the deepest sea, and remembered it no more. And the question that looms large in the Old Testament is not the question, is God gracious, but is God righteous? Obviously, he is gracious. Sinners live, and sinners survive, and sinners prosper, and sinners are even blessed, and the leading sinners are forgiven. The question is, how can God do that and be righteous? And as we saw last Sunday, the cross answers that question, and ends all suspicion.

Christ died then to satisfy the wrath of God, and therefore to proclaim God as righteous and holy and consistent, and yet gracious and merciful. But while Christ died for God, God was no indifferent bystander. No passive onlooker at the events of the cross. Rather, God was divinely active. And God manifest himself at the cross in the things that were occurring as we read starting in verse 45 of Matthew 27. Here we see God acting. Again, not a passive bystander. Not an indifferent onlooker. But divinely active. God puts on a display at the cross that can easily be missed, and every so many years, I feel like I need to come back to this passage and reaffirm its critical nature.

First of all, there is, in verse 45, the indication that from "the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour." This is the first act of God. This is the first divine work. This is the first miracle, if you will, and it lasted, darkness, from 12 noon to 3pm. Scripture tells us that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, which is 9 in the morning, the Jewish day beginning at 6AM, three hours of light had passed until the sun was at its apex, from 9 to Noon. During those three hours, Jesus had broken his silence three times. Once he said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. And then he said, to the penitent thief, truly today, you will be with me in paradise. And then he said, to his own mother, woman, behold, your son. Son, behold your mother, and put his own mother in the care of

John. Each of those first three sayings on the cross are expressions of his compassion and his grace. In one, he asks the father for forgiveness for the very ones who crucified him. In the next, he welcomes a wicked man who repented into heaven. And in the third, he shows compassion to his own mother. Each showing grace. Each showing mercy, even in the midst of his suffering. But at noon, when the sun is at its zenith, an astounding miracle is done by God, and it's God's first commentary on the events. Darkness all over the Gaea in the Greek, translated it's a G and a long E, and it's a word for earth. Interestingly enough, in the annals of Roman history, it is recorded that there was darkness over the known earth at this time, as indicated by the early father origin in his writing against Celsius. We don't know the extent of it. We don't know if it covered the whole Earth. It certainly covered as far and wide as Roman history could record. This was not something totally unusual for God to do to interfere with the Sun. He had done it on several other occasions. Once, he had caused the sun to stand still from a human viewpoint, although from a scientific viewpoint, for a time, the Earth stopped revolving all together. On another occasion, he caused the sun to move backwards so that it moved backward on the sundial. On another occasion, in Egypt, he blackened the sun as a part of the horrible plagues that fell.

But on this occasion, Luke uses a word *eclaipto*, which means to fail utterly. It's as if he turned the sun off. This is an eclipse, some say. But an eclipse in the middle of the month, which is the time of the Passover? That's impossible, because it's full moon on the opposite side of the earth. This is supernatural darkness. This is a divine miracle, and it is God's first commentary on the events there. Darkness in the Bible is a symbol of judgment, obviously. God's salvation is spoken of as light. God's judgment is spoken of as Darkness. Hell is even called outer darkness.

And God was affirming by the darkness that the cross was judgment, the place of the severest, most comprehensive divine judgment, then and there on Jesus Christ. And since God only judges one thing, that is sin, it is a judgment on sin. God then affirms that he is judging our sins in Christ, as we heard tonight in Isaiah 53, he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement to produce our peace fell on him, and by his stripes, we are healed.

The darkness then is God's commentary, God's way of saying that his fury is unleashed on Christ. Here is judgment on sin, born by the innocent sin bearing substitute. But there is more. Verse 46, and this is something only our Lord could know. "About the ninth hour," 3:00 in the afternoon, the end of the time of darkness, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Only he would know that God would have forsaken him. And by the way, it says he cried out, and it is literally the Greek word for scream. After six hours of immeasurable agony, three of them in total darkness. After six hours, the feeling, the fury of the wrath of God upon him, as his sin bearing comes to a climax, he is strong enough to cry and express the sense of alienation he feels for the first time in eternity from God. And by the way, this is exactly what Psalm 22:1 says he would say. It is the fulfillment of that prophecy which says the same thing, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And this demonstrates the second miracle. The first miracle, divine darkness. The second miracle, divine separation. This is a kind of reverse miracle, I guess. This is something that is incomprehensible. How can God be separate from God? How can God the trinity be divided? How can the father be divided from the son? How can God forsake his own son, when they are one in essence? All he had ever known was the most intimate communion with the father, the eternal love of the father. And now he is exposed to being treated by the father as if the father hated him rather than loved him. This is a strange miracle in which Jesus feels the alienation. Verse 47, Some of those who were standing there, when they heard him say "Eli, Eli," which is the expression, my God, my God, "began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' They knew better than that. They knew the name of God, Elohim, Eli. They knew. This was just sarcasm. This is just mockery. This is malicious. This is a joke. This is a twisted pun on their part. He's calling for Elijah. Ha ha. Verse 48, some of those who were there as well, "Immediately ran and took sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and one of them put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink." This is a cheap wine diluted and used to quench the thirst of very common people, probably the soldiers. And verse 49, they kept up the mockery. "The rest of them said, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.'

Here is this immense miracle, which is inexplicable to us, how God can forsake God? And they think it's a joke. There is no way, although I suppose I've been asked many times in my life how to explain this. It is impossible for me to do so. I can only read what you can read. I can take you back to Psalm 22, verse 1, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance of the words of my groaning. O, my God, I cry by day, but thou doest not answer. And by night that I have no rest." And here's the answer in verse 3, "Yet thou art holy. O, thou, who art enthroned on the praises of Israel." The answer to why God must separate, thou art holy. Because God is holy, he separates himself from the sin bearer. In the back of chapter 1, "art thou not from everlasting? O Lord, my God, my Holy One? Mine eyes are too pure to approve evil. You cannot look on wickedness with favor." And again, it is a reminder of this incredible miracle of separation.

God is anything but a bystander. He turns out the sun. He brings the darkness, and then he himself, in some mysterious way, disappears. That's not all. Verse 50, here God acts again. "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit." He cried out again. Very interesting. This is intended by the writers of Scripture, and by the Lord himself to indicate how strong he is. It's six hours into his crucifixion; he is still able to scream. It's cradzhas, it means literally to scream. He's not gonna slowly fade into some kind of coma, which with crucified people could take days. He will not die of exhaustion. He will yield up his spirit when the time is right. And if you compare the gospel of John and the gospel of Luke, you find that Jesus had already said "it is finished", John 19:30, and he had already said "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit".

And that introduces us to the next miracle. The miracle of acceptance. And so, he yielded up his spirit to his accepting father. The work was done. The price was paid. God was satisfied. And

Jesus sent his spirit out of his body, and he himself went with it. He had said, no man takes my life from me, I lay it down myself. And that's what he did. When he knew that the father was ready to receive him, because the sin bearing work was finished, and God was satisfied. He knew when the father departed. He knew when he was forsaken. And he knew when he was welcomed. So God is active, turning out the sun. He's active forsaking his own son. He's active when being satisfied, he welcomes his son back.

There was a fourth miracle in verse 51, "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Now you have to understand that the temple is naeas, the holy of holies, and the holy of holies had a barrier so that no one could go in there. Only the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement could go into the holy of holies, where the arch of the covenant was, and there sprinkled blood on behalf of the nation for their sins on the mercy seat on the top of the arch. And the high priest going in there had to have bells on his garment so that if he had gone in there in any sense unclean, and God had killed him, they would know he was dead because they wouldn't hear the bells. As long as they heard the bells, they knew he was still alive, and moving around.

This is symbolic of the fact that people were shut out of God's presence. No one really could go in there. But it wasn't a gradual change. When Jesus died on the cross, God himself ripped that curtain from top to bottom, ripped it, because Jesus had done what no priest could ever do. Only one priest, a high priest, could go in there, and he couldn't take anybody with him, nor could he make the way for anyone else to come. But at the death of Jesus, God himself ripped the curtain wide open and the holy of holies was open to all. And by the way, this was 3:00 in the afternoon on Passover, and the temple would have been jammed with people. In one moment, the holy of holies that no one had ever seen was completely exposed to everyone. No more Day of Atonement. No more high priests. No more priests. No more sacrifices. No more barrier. And soon, the whole temple would be trampled by the Pagan Romans. And to this day, never ever rebuilt. At this moment, the corruption of that robber's den started to come down. And what was the father saying? Access is open to all. Christ the great high priest did what no priest could ever do. He threw the way to God open. He ripped the barrier. And the father punctuated his work by himself ripping the curtain. And then in verse 51 again, you see another act of God, "the earth shook and the rocks were split." God was giving people preview of what is going to come to those who do not come by way of Christ into his holy presence. One day in the future, God is gonna shake the whole earth. There will be massive earthquakes described in the Book of Revelation, the likes of which no one could even comprehend. And finally, the whole disintegration of the world as we know it. Hebrews chapter 12 talks about the fact that we are a part of an unshakable kingdom. But there's coming a day when God will shake the world.

And so God again acts to give people a taste of the judgment to come, consistent with the words of Jesus, who said there will come in the end time earthquakes. And there's one other marvelous thing that God did, in verse 52, "the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen

asleep," that is who had died, "were raised. And coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." This is staggering. The miracles around the death of Christ are just overwhelming. At the same time that the Earth shakes and the rocks split, tombs start spitting out resurrected saints who have been given bodies. They don't go into Jerusalem, it says, until after the resurrection of Christ, because he was the first fruits and all others follow him. What is God saying here? God is saying for the saints in the future, there will be a, what? A resurrection.

No, God is no innocent bystander. God is no indifferent onlooker. While Christ is dying for God, God is affirming everything that is going on. God is affirming that this is a judgment on sin. God is forsaking the sin bearer because of his own holiness. God accepts him back into his presence when his work is complete. God throws open his throne room for all who come by faith. And God warns of judgment for those who refuse to come, and promises resurrection to those who do.

The account I read closes in verse 54, "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" God himself gave testimony to his son in these miracles.

Our father, as we come around the table now, we gather up all these thoughts, all these truths, all these glorious Biblical revelation. We understand that the Lord, Jesus Christ, died to satisfy you, died to put your righteousness, holiness, consistency as well as grace and mercy, on display. We understand that you were not just idly standing by, but you were punctuating that event with evidences to prove that this was indeed the son of God, feeling the fury of your judgment, feeling alienation on our behalf. And then having completed that sin bearing, finding heaven open to receive him, and heaven opened for us who believe and enter your presence. And there will be a judgment on those who refuse, and a resurrection to life for those who receive Christ. What drama. No wonder the Centurion and others said this was truly the son of God. That's our confession regarding our savior as well. And we come now to this table to honor him.

Lord, direct our thoughts to our own hearts, as well as the cross. We know that we are not to eat in an unworthy way, or drink in an unworthy way. That means, while courting sin, cultivating sin. Help us to confess, and ask for your cleansing that we might partake in a holy and a pure way, and not come to this table defiled. Work your cleansing work in our hearts, as we rejoice in the gift of your son. Amen.

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