

God's Miraculous Commentary on the Cross

I. Introduction

What does the death and resurrection of Christ mean? In what way is it significant? The answer is in the Word of God.

II. The Meaning of the Cross in the Old Testament

- A. **Genesis 3:15** promised the coming of One called "her Seed." While Christ was being bruised on the cross, He was fatally bruising the one who was bruising Him-the devil.
- B. **Genesis 22** reveals more about the meaning of the cross through the lives of Abraham and Isaac. Here we learn about the provision of a substitute for one who ought to die.
- C. **Mosaic law** delineates the need for a blood sacrifice to atone for sin. Other passages in the Old Testament fill in other details about the cross (e.g., Ps. 22, Isa. 53, Zech. 12).

III. The Meaning of the Cross in the New Testament

- A. **Gal. 3:13; Heb. 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 5:9**
- B. **Matt. 27:45-53.** Six miracles attended the death of Jesus Christ. They are God's commentary on the meaning of the cross.
 - 1. **SUPERNATURAL DARKNESS (v. 45)** Associated with the birth, life, and ministry of Christ is light (Isa. 49:6; Luke 2:9-11; John 8:12, 12:36). But associated with His death is darkness.
 - A. **The Time of the Darkness** lasted from the sixth hour (twelve noon) to the ninth hour (three in the afternoon). Mark 15:25 tells us Jesus was crucified at the third hour (nine in the morning). Jesus had been on the cross for three hours by the time it became dark. He remained there another three hours before He died at the ninth hour (three in the afternoon.)
 - * **Jesus Breaks His Silence** Apart from three occasions, the three hours from nine to noon were unbroken by any word from Christ.
 - 1. To offer forgiveness: Luke 23:34
 - 2. To save a thief: Luke 23:43
 - 3. To care for His mother: John 19:26-27

B. **The Extent of the Darkness** We don't know if the darkness engulfed the land of Israel only, Jerusalem and its environs, or the half of the earth normally engulfed in sunlight. God could do any of those things.

1. Exodus 10:22-23: localized darkness
2. Joshua 10:12-14: the sun stood still
3. 2 Kings 20:9-11: earth's revolution stopped

C. **The Explanation:** The sun failed-God turned it off supernaturally. Now if in so doing God allowed the normal sequence of events to take place, the world would have gone out of existence. Somehow God turned out the sun and sustained the world (Luke 23:45).

D. **The Meaning of the Darkness**

1. **The traditional views:** The rabbis taught that the sun's failing indicates God's judgment on the world for committing a great crime. Certainly the world committed a great crime in crucifying Jesus Christ. Others suggest the sun went dark because nature dropped a veil over the sufferings of Christ. Some believe the darkness was a sympathetic act on God's part to cover the nakedness and dishonor of His Son. Others think the darkness was a divine protest.
2. **The biblical view:** Darkness was a symbol of divine judgment. There is only one thing that God judges, and that's sin. The darkness at the cross was the Father's commentary on His judgment of sin.
 - a) Isaiah 5:26-30
 - b) Isaiah 13:10-11
 - c) Matthew 24:29-30

2. SOVEREIGN DEPARTURE (vv. 46-49)

A. **The Cry of Christ (v. 46)** The people knew Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1. Even those Jews who spoke predominantly Aramaic and knew little Hebrew knew *Eli*, *Eli* referred to God because *El* was the name for God. This is a miracle in reverse-After experiencing the fury of God, Jesus cries out as He is separated from God.

1. **The explanation of the separation**

- a) **The testimony of the Father:** God turned His back on Jesus because He can't look on sin (Hab. 1:13, 2 Cor. 5:21).
 - b) **The testimony of Scripture:** Isa. 53:5; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18; 1 John 4:10. Christ didn't just bear sin; He *became* sin. God forsook Christ because He cannot look on sin.
2. **The kind of separation:** He wasn't separated from His divine nature-He didn't cease to be God or He would have ceased to exist. He was separated in terms of intimate fellowship and communion.
- a) **At the incarnation:** John 17:5; Phil. 2:6-7
 - b) **At the cross**
 - 1. Christ hated sin: In the midst of being engulfed in all that sin, He never had a desire for it. He hated it.
 - 2. Christ longed for God: He maintained His purity. He was made sin, but He did not sin-that is a great paradox of the Christian faith.

B. **The Mockery of the Crowd (vv. 47-49)**

- 1. **Taunting rejection (v. 47)** They were saying, "This poor, misguided Messiah still thinks He's going to have His Kingdom. Maybe He's calling for Elijah to announce Him as Messiah and proclaim His Kingdom!" Their mockery was cruel, cynical, and sarcastic.
- 2. **Temporary relief (v. 48)** The King James Version says Jesus was given vinegar. The Greek word is *oxos*, which was a cheap sour wine containing a high percentage of water and a low percentage of alcohol. It was a common drink laborers and soldiers used to quench their thirst.
- 3. **Thoughtless reckoning (v. 49)** When they heard Jesus cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," they might have understood He was bearing their sin (Joel 2:31). But that meant they had to understand that God required a perfect sacrifice for their sin. They didn't realize it was Christ. So they ignored the darkness and mocked Jesus.

3. **SACRIFICIAL DEATH (v. 50)**

- A. **A Verbal Demonstration of Christ's Strength:** It's important that His cries in the last three hours of His life were with a loud voice because they demonstrate that He still possessed physical strength. He had not reached utter exhaustion. That made it clear He had the resources to stay alive.

B. **The Voluntary Nature of Christ's Death:** Jesus' life was not taken from Him; He voluntarily gave it up (Luke 23:46).

1. **Its demonstration:** Victims normally lingered for days on the cross, but Christ died after six hours.
2. **Its power:** Jesus has power over death and life. No one took His life from Him; He freely gave it (John 10:11, 15, 17-18).

4. SYMBOLIC DEVASTATION (v. 51a)

A. The Temple's Symbolism

1. **The symbol of God's presence with man:** A great curtain covered the Holy of Holies. No one could enter it except the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day he sprinkled blood on the altar for the sins of the people.
2. **The symbol of God's separation from man:** That only the priest could enter the Holy of Holies symbolized that no man had true access to the presence of God. God cannot receive sinners into His presence until their sin is dealt with. The curtain kept men from God in the sense of true intimacy.

B. The Temple Veil's Destruction

1. **The beginning of internal worship:** The separation no longer exists because the death of Jesus Christ removed it. The barrier is no more (Heb. 4:16).
2. **The end of external sacrifices:** When God ripped the curtain to the Holy of Holies, He pronounced the end of the old covenant system. It was the end of the sacrifices and the priesthood.

5. SUDDEN DESTRUCTION (v. 51b)

A. **A Sign of God's Appearance:** In the Old Testament, earthquakes frequently preceded God's appearance (Ex. 19:18; 2 Sam. 22:8; 1 Kings 19:11, Pss. 18:7, 77:18; Isa. 29:6, Jer. 10:10; Nahum 1:2, 5).

B. **A Sign of God's Judgment:** Rev. 6:12-13

1. **A work of regeneration:** There will be a great shaking of the earth in the final judgment. Why? Because God is going to shake the old earth out of existence

and make a brand new one—a new earth and new heaven in which Christ will reign supreme as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Heb. 12:26-28).

2. **A work of redemption:** When God shook the earth at the death of Christ, I think He was giving the world a taste of what will happen in the future when the King returns. The shaking of the earth at the death of Christ was God's way of guaranteeing the promise of a renewed world and universe. Christ has earned it, and it will happen one day (Phil. 2:10).

6. SUBSEQUENT DELIVERANCE (vv. 52-53)

A. **The Resurrection of the Saints (vv. 52-53a)**

This was a real resurrection of bodies, not just spirits. Not all bodies were raised, only select Old Testament saints. When Jesus died, their spirits came from the dwelling place of righteous spirits. They were joined with their glorified bodies, which came out of those graves.

B. **The Testimony of the Saints (v. 53b)**

You can imagine the kind of testimony they had about Christ's resurrection. The risen saints would have testified that Christ was alive, guaranteeing the reality of resurrection for all believers. They became living proof of that guarantee (1Cor. 15:20).

The cross is the greatest hope for resurrection because Christ paid your sin. You are free from death and free to live. In His kingdom we will have glorified bodies like His.

IV. Conclusion: What do we see at the cross? The wrath of God is depicted in supernatural darkness. The holiness of God is seen when He turned from Christ, who had become sin. The grace and mercy of God is depicted in Christ's voluntary act of self-sacrifice to redeem unworthy men. The curtain in the Temple is ripped from top to bottom as God opens the way of access to Himself. The shaking of the earth reminds us that the promised new earth and heaven will come. Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, and we'll be there to reign with Him. And the resurrection of the saints at the death of Christ guarantees the resurrection of all who believe in Him. That is God's supernatural testimony of the meaning of His Son's death.