



Matthew 27:51

Did You Feel the Tremor?

There have been many times in my life while living in South America that a family member or friend has turned to me and asked, "Did you feel that tremor?"

There was an earthquake that shook Calvary the moment Christ died. It was like a gigantic exclamation point written by the finger of God. It pointed to the magnitude of the death of Jesus Christ. It was as if God were saying, "Wake up! Pay attention!"

The sudden shaking of the earth was at the exact moment that Jesus shouted the victory cry, "Finished!" and gave His spirit back to the Father.

POWERFUL EARTHQUAKE AT CALVARY

The Gospel of Matthew says, "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split" (27:51).

The location of the tremor

The earth shook does not tell us the extent of the earthquake that day. It may mean no more than the land and may have been limited to Jerusalem and Judea. But at the cross the ground shook and frightened the battle seasoned soldiers. We are led to believe by the context the epic center was at the cross. The location of the quake was Calvary. Our text simply says, "the earth shook and the rocks were split."

Was this a natural occurrence?

Earthquakes are frequent in the Middle East. Why should we pay particular attention to this sudden shaking at Calvary? The timing of the event is what grabs our attention and the fact that eyewitnesses became very frightened. It was no small tremor, but there was no extensive damage either.

Matthew is suggesting to us that this was another supernatural event. God was involved; God shook the earth. By an act of His will, at a precise timing, God touched the earth and it shook.

The earthquake was miraculous. It was the result of divine involvement. This was not a normal natural occurrence. This earthquake was independent of the natural movement of the plates in the earth. It was by an act of God's will that

natural movement of the plates in the earth. It was by an act of God's will that the earth shook at the moment of Christ's death.

When we keep in mind the other miraculous events taking place at precise timing that afternoon, we cannot but come to the reasoned conclusion that this earthquake is a part of the larger picture of that cosmic event. The supernatural three hour darkness, the tearing of the huge curtain dividing the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, the victorious shout and the manner in which Christ died, the splitting of the rocks and opening of selected graves all reinforce the sound conviction that God did it.

The rocks in the tombs split open. But the important thing we must keep in mind is only certain graves were opened by the earth's shaking. This strange violent earthquake did not disturb anything else that day.

Response of the witnesses

The trembling earth caught the attention of the Roman centurion at the foot of the cross of Jesus and he became very frightened. Matthew records, "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!' (Matthew 27:54).

Luke tells us the centurion began praising God saying, "Certainly this man was innocent (lit. righteous)" (Luke 23:47).

Our response to the death of Jesus for our sins should be one of praise, thanksgiving, trust, worship and love for Him.

We do not know the full effect of all these combined miracles at Calvary on people who experienced them and their families until perhaps the day of Pentecost when 3,000 people believed on Christ as their Savior (Acts 2:41). They must have been a powerful witness to God's redemptive act at Calvary. The book of Acts tells us in the months after Pentecost many priests put their faith in Jesus the Messiah.

GOD SPOKE IN THE TREMBLING EARTH

Calvary reminds us of another powerful earthquake. God spoke at Mt. Sinai and the earth shook in a way Moses tells us "the whole mountain quaked greatly." "The mountain quaked at the presence of the LORD" (Judges 5:5). God spoke at that scene and communicated His law to a fallen and depraved people.

God answered Sinai

When the LORD God made His covenant with His chosen people, He came down on Mt. Sinai and spoke in an awesome manner.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and

who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up (Exodus 19:16-20).

In that meeting with His people God gave specific details of what He required of His people. The only problem is no one could live up to the exacting demands of the law because of man's depravity as a result of the Fall. The law points its finger and says you are guilty. You must pay the penalty for your sin. Yes, God spoke at Sinai.

Again, it is the exact timing of the earthquake that draws our attention to the details. Judgment came upon Korah at the command of God, and the earth opened up and swallowed up the rebellious (Numbers 16:31-32). As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions. ”

William Nicolson suggests, “Calvary was answering back to Sinai. There had been an earthquake on Sinai; there was now an earthquake on Calvary, and the wrath of the former was now hushed in the mercy of the latter. ”

The Law at Sinai magnified our human depravity. It pointed its finger and said all have sinned and the wages of sin is death. Calvary answered that condemnation and declared publicly that God has paid the penalty in full by placing all our sins on His divine substitute and dying. The apostle Paul said, “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for the righteous man shall live by faith. . . . Christ redeemed us from the Law, having become a curse for us —for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’ ” (Galatians 3:11, 13). Then Paul adds, “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Romans 4:4-5).

Calvary's earthquake was saying the Lamb of God died and paid the full wages on our behalf. Christ secured our release from the demands of the death penalty by His death. It was a substitutionary death, the just for the unjust. The Holy One died for the depraved sinners.

Again Nicolson expresses beautifully, “Sinai was the prophecy of Calvary; Calvary was the fulfillment of Sinai. Sinai was the sinner's wretchedness and ruin; Calvary is the sinner's recovery and blessedness. Sinai was God's inexorable voice of condemnation; Calvary, God's fatherly voice of pardon and peace. ”

God spoke at Christ's resurrection

The earth quaked at the resurrection of Jesus. “And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it (Matthew 28:2).

Once again, the timing of the event is crucial. God was involved. God was doing something that morning in the tomb. He was calling the attention of the soldiers to the tomb door.

Paul and Silas were praying and singing

Acts 16:26 tells us, “suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were

Acts 16:26 tells us, suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ”

Note the significance of the timing of the event. The missionaries are praying and singing hymns of praise to God and suddenly there came a great earthquake . . . and immediately all the doors were instantly opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. It was not just an ordinary earthquake in nature. It was supernatural because God did it according to His will. It happened at His specific timing for a specific purpose. God was sending a message to those prisoners listening to the Gospel in their cells. There is a greater liberation and release found in the death of Jesus Christ.

CREATION'S VIVID EXPECTATION OF REDEMPTION

The apostle Paul also suggests to us in Romans 8:19-22 the earth quaked in response to the victory shout of Jesus. He suggests creation is an anxious scout scanning the horizon with head thrust forward eagerly searching the distant horizon with a throbbing, vivid expectation that something marvelous is going to be fulfilled.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ”

Creation's anxious longing

Paul is referring to the non-rational creation, both animate and inanimate. The material heavens and earth is on tiptoe in earnest expectation waiting for the revelation of the sons of God. True, there is personification. It brings out the truth and makes it clearer and easier to comprehend. God has great designs for the new heavens and new earth. Not until we see the glory in Christ revealed at the second coming will the children of God understand the plenitude of their status and privilege. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4). Doesn't that prospect make your heart cry out, Come, Lord Jesus, Come! Lord, Jesus, will I see You today? ”

Jesus said, Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel ” (Matthew 19:28). Again He said, But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne (25:31).

This creation was marred by the rebellion of Adam and suffered terrible consequences as a result of man's disobedience. However, man's redemption at Calvary had its redeeming effect upon all of Creation. Since Adam's fall had such a disastrous affect on all creation, should not its redemption also be involved? The fall of Adam had a cosmic affect on all of creation even though we do not understand all the implications for creation. It is obvious that all of creation was affected.

Then to Adam He said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat from it ; ’

Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it

In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;
And you will eat the plants of the field;
By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:17-19).

Who subjected the creation to this bondage of corruption? God did. And only God could give the creation hope because only God has power to affect this kind of change over His created world. Darwinism and evolution cannot do this. The subjection of the non-rational creation to evil corruption was a part of God's design. The present state of the universe is not permanent. Everything is not going to rust out, wear-out and self-destruct. God is going to bring a cosmic change at the revelation of the sons of God in glory. The hope is that creation itself will be delivered.

The Scriptures never give man or Satan the power to bring about the far-reaching changes that the world experienced at the Fall. Only God could bring about this subjection about. Man and creation did not fall *up*; it fell *down* when Adam disobeyed God.

What if creation could speak for itself? What would it say? What if the rocks could shout? What would they say? Upon the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem the multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen saying, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! (Luke 19:37-38). They were caught up in a great act of worship of the Creator who stood before them. Some of the Pharisees immediately began to tell Jesus to calm down the crowd. Jesus said, I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out! (Luke 19:40).

I sometimes wonder why they don't today because rational humanity has become irrational. God must receive praise. If man will not praise Him the mountains will! It is as if at Calvary they shouted the moment Christ died!

Creation is impregnated with an earnest expectation of the revealing of the sons of God because its freedom from bondage comes when we too receive our freedom of the glory of the children of God. The apostle Paul says, For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. . . that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now (Romans 8:19, 21-22).

Creation is involved in both our bondage to sin and our hope of redemption. The creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God in glory (v. 19). It is subjected by the will of God (v. 20). It will be set free and share in the redemption of God's people (v. 21), and it is still groaning and suffering for that glorious day (v. 22).

What a grand prospect for the child of God and for all of creation (cf. Rev. 21-22; Acts 3:19-21). The LORD God is a redeeming God. The apostle Peter was referring to these same happenings in Second Peter 3:13 when he speaks of the final eschatological events. The apostle Paul has in mind the deliverance that all of creation will enjoy when the children of God are revealed in glory. The great day of redemption will arrive in

creation will enjoy when the children of God are revealed in glory. The great day of redemption will arrive in all of its glory.

The liberation for the sons of God is accomplished. Paul sees the freedom and liberation of the creation also consummated. Creation will share in the glory that will be bestowed upon the children of God.

It is easy for us to see the fading glory of a dying creation because of decay. But how different it is when we focus on the coming glory of God. We wait because our redemption draws near. There is a coming state of glory on the horizon.

One of my favorite perfectly snow cone shaped snowcapped volcanoes has been belching up volcanic rocks the size of small cars the last couple of years. The snow cone has been completely destroyed. It groans and suffers, but one day it will be even more radiant and beautiful than the day it was created by the LORD God. The day of redemption is coming.

The time is coming when the total effect of sin will be done away and creation will have all the glory God intended for it when He created it. It will be as Paul declares, be set free from the slavery of corruption. ”

Today death, decay, rust and corrosion is all around us. But there is a day coming when the creation will be liberated, and its full glory will be revealed.

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of the coming glory of God's creation. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah saw that coming glory (Isa. 11:6; 32:15-16; 35:1-2, 6ff). The apostles John, Peter and Paul also spoke of it (Rev. 21; 22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Col. 1:20).

Just as the whole creation was affected because of the Fall, the whole creation is involved in the affects of redemption. The entire creation sighs and throbs with pain now. But remember, it is the pain of birth pangs. God will produce something completely new. The creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God's children (Romans 8:21 NET).

Creation groans and suffers pains for the day it can shout the praise of God in the new creation. Phillips translates v. 22, The entire creation, as it were sets up a grand sympathy of sighs. Come, Lord Jesus. We join in with inward groaning in our hearts as believers in Christ waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body. Do you long for that today? I do.

Final shaking of judgment

Calvary's shaking is also a portent of another day when the Lord God will shake not only the earth but also the heaven (Haggai 2:6). The whole created order, the totality of creation, will shake in that coming day. It will be the terrible final shaking with judgment and the consummation of our salvation.

That which is temporary and transitory will be removed, but the unshakable —the kingdom of God —will remain. God will inaugurate the permanent, the new heaven and the new earth. It will be in answer to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. At that time all of God's eternal purposes in creation will be brought to their eternal fulfillment. Our redemption purchased by Jesus at the cross will be consummated in glory in Christ (Rev. 21:1ff; 2 Peter 3:10-13). Christ will return in His majesty, power and glory (Rev. 19:11ff). It is the shaking of the second coming of Christ and the whole universe will be transformed.

The Law like Abel's blood cried out to God appealing for judgment, but the blood of Jesus Christ brings a message of cleaning, forgiveness and reconciliation with God for all who believe on Him (Heb. 12:24).

message of cleaning, forgiveness and reconciliation with God for all who believe on Him (Heb. 12:24). Instead of cursing us and calling for judgment, the blood of Jesus pleads our case and cleanses us (1 John 1:7-9; Col. 1:20). Abel's blood cried; Jesus' blood cleanses.

The blood of Jesus is the blood of a better covenant. His blood speaks of our eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12) instead of condemnation and judgment. His blood is the final putting away of our sins (v. 26) which purges our evil conscience (10:22), sanctifies all who believe in Him (10:10, 14). Instead of rejecting us, it reconciles us (10:19), instead of blighting us, it brings blessings. His blood brings cleansing instead of cursing.

Just as in Moses' day, people still fail to pay heed to God's Word and they suffer from their disobedience. When God spoke at Sinai, the whole mountains quaked (Ex. 19:18; cf. Ps. 68:7f). And when Jesus Christ comes a second time it will be as Isaiah spoke of the coming of the day of the LORD. When He rises to shake mightily the earth (21:9, 21). But He is not only going to shake the earth, but the heavens, too. He says in Isaiah 13:13,

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,
And the earth will be shaken from its place
At the fury of the LORD of hosts
In the day of His burning anger. ”

God will shake the heavens and earth at the end of the present world-order (Rev. 20:11; 21:1; 6:12ff; 16:18f; 2 Pet. 3:10). The writer of Hebrews said, “And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN’ ” (12:26).

God reveals His eternal purpose in the earth shaking events. God will vindicate His sovereign will. As Revelation clearly teaches He will exalt the throne of David and all will worship Him.

Revelation chapters 20 and 21 tell us when the LORD God does the shaking all of the material universe will disappear and only the eternal will survive.

All created things will pass away (Ps. 102:25), but the kingdom of God is eternal.

The purpose of this ultimate shaking is to reveal the unshakable. The people of God, who belong to Him, who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, are unshakable. When He comes with His purging fire, will you be unshakable? The Lamb has purified the unshakable kingdom.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ”

Are you investing in the kingdom that is unshakable? Our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29); don't mess with Him. He consumes in the purity of His holy fire all that is unworthy of His holiness.

Today He speaks in a still small voice to all who will listen to Him. He speaks with probing authority of His Word and the quickening of His Spirit that on the cross He shed His blood to give life to all who will call upon His name. We all stand guilty before a righteous and holy God. Jesus Christ died as our substitute,

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upon His name. We all stand guilty before a righteous and holy God. Jesus Christ died as our substitute, paying our sin debt, so we may be a part of His unshakable kingdom. Will you repent and turn to Him by faith right now? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. ”

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