



Miracles at Calvary in the Death of Jesus Christ

What do the three hours of darkness at noon day, the torn veil in the Temple at Jerusalem, the earthquake that rocked Calvary, and the dead saints who were raised from the dead all have in common?

These were miracles at Calvary the very moment Christ died on the cross. The timing of these strange events gives them credence that they were not natural phenomena.

The miracles accompanying Jesus' death give evidence to the reality of the death of Jesus Christ.

The Calvary miracles all have a direct connection with the death of Christ.

Three hours of darkness over the land at the death of Jesus (Mark 15:33-34; Matt. 27:45; Luke 23:44-47)

"Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour" (Matt. 27:45, NASB95). All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 Update.

Sudden darkness at noonday

Jesus had already been suffering on the cross for three hours (9 a.m. until noon) when a darkness came "over all the earth" at noon time. All of a sudden the darkness closed off the scene at Calvary and seems to have departed just as suddenly. It extended far beyond Calvary and Jerusalem and lasted for three hours. This was not a simple phenomenon, but a supernatural manifestation in nature. This darkness over Palestine and neighboring regions was not an eclipse of the sun because this was the time of the full moon of the Passover week, and it lasted for more than a few minutes. This was a three hour supernatural darkness that covered the whole land from noon until 3 p.m. It was an intense darkness, a concentration of force like the three days of darkness in Egypt. This darkness was as if The LORD God in His Sovereign power drew His veil over His Mercy Seat to prevent profane eyes to look upon His atoning sacrifice.

During those three hours we see only darkness, and hear only silence. The suffering Servant of Yahweh was "wounded for our transgressions." The Lamb of God was dying for the sin of the world. God was making atonement for our sins.

The church father, Tertullian said to some heathen, "at the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your archives to this day."

The meaning of the darkness at Calvary

John W. Shepherd writes: "When the darkness, like a heavy curtain, fell over the scene of the tragedy, silence reigned and a feeling of awe and horror crept over all. For the three portentous hours of darkness Jesus hung on the cross in silence. It was doubtless a period during which He suffered extreme anguish of spirit and physical pain. The increasing nameless agonies of the crucifixion were deepening more and more with every

moment into death. He was forsaken almost wholly by men and felt the sense of a desolate isolation and loneliness" (*The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 601).

Very near the close of the three hours of darkness, feeling God-forsaken, Jesus cried out in the anguish of His soul "words which have echoed through eternity and reverberated down the centuries of time: 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which interpreted from the Aramaic is: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' It was a bitter cry rung from His lips by suffering far greater than that of the mere physical pain of crucifixion. . . Of course the Son was never more well-pleasing to the Father than in this hour when He was voluntarily laying down His life for the redemption of the human race. . ." (*ibid*, p. 602).

John Broadus said, "It must have been as our substitute, because He 'bare our sins in His own body on the tree,' that He was forsaken."

In those terrible moments on the cross the full fury of the wrath of God was upon Him. "He felt the way a lost sinner feels, without Himself having sinned," says Shepherd. With these words from that terrible darkness "the suffering of Christ for a lost world" came to a climax. "Here He drank to the dregs the cup of sorrow, grief, and pain on our behalf." Shepherd says, "Christ gave Himself a 'ransom for many.' Him who knew no sin God 'made sin' for us. On the cross Christ became a 'curse for us' and so redeemed us from the curse of the law. We are 'redeemed by the precious blood of Christ' shed on the Calvary. He gave himself a 'ransom for all'" (p. 602).

Leon Morris observes, "Darkness is associated with judgment in several places in Scripture (Isa. 5:30; 13:10-11; Joel 3:14-15, etc.), and it appears that we are to understand it here as pointing to God's judgment on sin that is link with the cross" (Matthew, p. 720).

In that darkness at Calvary we see Isaiah 53 fulfilled. No eyes of depraved man saw the mysteries of that suffering. Our redemption is done, completed, finished!

"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:4-6).

The apostle Paul gives the best commentary of what happened at Calvary in that darkness. "He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When Jesus cried, "It is finished!" and gave up His spirit another veil was torn.

Torn Veil in the Temple torn at the moment of death of Jesus (Mark 15:38; Matt. 27:51; Luke 23:44-45)

These signs occurred simultaneously the moment Jesus "gave up His spirit" and died.

The veil separated depraved man from a holy God

"And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). This was the veil that separated the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place from the Holy Place in the Temple in Jerusalem. Into the Most Holy Place no man ever ventured except the high priest on day Day of Atonement. Once a year the high priest lifted a corner of this heavy curtain in entered into the Holy of Holies, carrying sacrificial blood which he sprinkled on the mercy seat, and made supplication for the people of Israel. The thick veil separated depraved humanity from the holiness of God. It hung there solemnly declaring to the world, "Thus far, but no further."

The Talmud informs us that the heavy veil was sixty feet long and thirty feet wide and the thickness of the palm of a man's hand or four inches, and was composed of 72 squares woven of thick fabric. Therefore, no man's hand tore it down; it did not fall apart from natural decay; there was no rent in it. It was as if the great hand of the LORD God ripped it apart. It was torn in two equal pieces, down the middle, "from the top to the bottom."

When did the tearing of the veil take place? It was torn in two pieces at the precise moment Jesus died on the cross. At the precise moment that Jesus died the veil was torn from top to bottom. Matthew says, "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" (Matt. 27:50-51).

This was the time of the evening sacrifice in the Temple. At the very moment Jesus died on the cross as the Lamb of God, the priests were in the Holy Place, in front of the veil, engaged in their priestly duties. God meant for the priests to see His hand upon the events. One of the results of the rending of the veil was "a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7b).

Jesus Christ is the only way into presence of a holy God

Access to the presence of the LORD God was now available to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The presence of the LORD God was thrown open to all mankind. Our sin problem had been resolved by the payment of the price of our redemption. Sin had been dealt with by our real High Priest who had entered into the true Holy of Holies and made the perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus removed every possible obstruction and we now have an intimate fellowship with a holy God.

"Therefore, brethren, since 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" (Hebrews 10:19-20). The way is now open for us to boldly enter into the presence of God.

Indeed, the apostle Paul says it is through Jesus Christ that "we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Ephesians 2:18-19). We have "access" to the Father. We have the freedom to enter through the assistance or favor of another person, Jesus Christ. The word is used for introducing a person into the presence of a king, or where a ship docs. We have the haven of God's grace. This is what Jesus did for us when He torn the veil in to and opened the presence of God open to all who will call upon His name believing Jesus died for their sins.

John Broadus writes, "Christ, our high priest, has entered the true Holy of Holies in heaven, offering once for all the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of His own blood (Heb. 9:11-28); and now in His name we may look

without dread upon the very throne of God, and come with boldness to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16; 10:19)" (Matthew, p. 576).

The earthquake at the moment of Jesus' death (Matt. 27:51)

Because of the timing of the earthquake it is evident that God made known His presence at Calvary. The earthquake was an act of God.

"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" (Matthew 27:50-51). His death followed immediately after His victory shout and His giving up His spirit. Therefore, the violent shaking of the earth took place at the very moment of Christ's death.

The Roman centurion witnessed the crucifixion, the moment of death of Christ, the powerful earthquake, and declared, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39-40; Luke 23:47).

This mighty shaking of the earth opened up many tombs, but not every tomb.

Bodies of the saints were raised from the dead at the death of Jesus (Matt. 27:51-53)

The violent shaking of the earth opened up select graves—the graves of the saints. Christ's death opened the graves. His death destroyed the power of death by His death (1 Cor. 15:50-57). The penalty of sin no longer has a grip on the redeemed.

"And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. 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" (Matthew 27:51-53).

Dead believers in Christ who were buried near Calvary

At the earthquake the graves were opened and saints who had been buried near Calvary arose and after the resurrection of Jesus appeared to many people in Jerusalem.

The rocks were split open instantly when Christ died, and the rock-hewn tombs of the believers were shaken open. These believers in Christ were raised from the dead and three days later they went into Jerusalem as testimony to the power of Christ's resurrection! Saints of Jesus who had believed on Him and died before His crucifixion were raised from the dead and appeared unto many of the disciples after the resurrection of Christ.

These were believers in Jesus Christ who had died before His crucifixion and were raised from the dead. After His resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the city of Jerusalem and appeared to many. These saints were raised at the time of Jesus' death, but did not appear in the city of Jerusalem until after the resurrection of Christ.

Dead saints raised from the dead at death of Christ

We are not told about the state of these raised bodies. They were probably revived natural bodies, and not their final resurrection bodies which will take place at the second coming of Christ.

The open graves were a demonstration of the power of God before a watching world. The graves were exposed on Friday afternoon until Sunday morning. No one would have been permitted to close these tombs on Sabbath and the Passover.

Ever since the resurrection and ascension of Christ all believers ascend to the presence of the LORD God awaiting the great resurrection day when they will be reunited with their resurrection bodies.

Here is hope for every believer in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:24-29).

Some abiding principles and practical applications on the death of Jesus

1. There is clear historical evidence that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead.

This is the greatest message in the history of the world. It is Good News for the condemned sinner who is under the judgment of a holy God.

2. The miracles at Calvary are not natural phenomena.

The miracles at Calvary demonstrate the sovereign hand of God over the life and death of Jesus Christ.

3. The greatest miracle is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How do we know that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God? Because God raised Him from the dead. How do we know that we are saved by simple faith in Christ? The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us assurance that God accepted the atoning death of Jesus for our sins.

4. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ saves.

"that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

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