



Luke 23:46

"Father into Thy Hands "

The cross of Jesus Christ is the center of everything.

Early in the Gospels we hear Christ declaring that He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem and the cross. His entire life was spent in the shadow of the cross.

He was ever eager to go to the cross because apart from that He could not fulfill His divine mission.

The cross was perpetually present to the mind of Christ. It was always in His heart and on His lips after Peter's great confession of Him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He was always moving toward that cross as a Victor, not a victim. He was always moving toward the ultimate final victory over sin and death.

It was on His mind as He spoke to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life" (John 3:14). The cross was the only way Jesus could fulfill His mission. His death was a vicarious, substitutionary sinner's death even though He never experienced sin. He was the sinners' representative dying in his place.

Why did God choose crucifixion since it was an unspeakably horrible death? Cicero was well acquainted with it and said it was the most cruel and shameful of all punishments. "Let it never, he said, come near the body of a Roman citizen; nay, not even near his thoughts, or eyes, or ears."

So it pleased the LORD God to put to grief His Suffering Servant, when He who knew no sin was made sin for us. Let's examine for a few moments the circumstances around the death of Christ.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND JESUS DEATH (23:44-45)

Luke's arrangement of the events at Calvary the day Christ died is topical, not chronological. We get the whole picture when we examine the death of Christ in all four of the Gospels. Each writer has selected events that helped him to explain the message of salvation.

There were six miracles at Calvary. A miraculous darkness enveloped the scene for three hours, and the thick curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom like gigantic hands took hold of it at the top and ripped it apart. An earthquake rocked Jerusalem and split open rocks. People came out of their graves after Jesus' resurrection and entered the city of Jerusalem.

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The mysterious darkness

"It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44; cf. Matt. 27:45; Mk. 15:33).

The very fact that this darkness is mentioned shows it must have stood out in memory as having been of great intensity and an unforgettable experience. It occurred when least expected, at high noon, and lasted three hours, not a few minutes like an eclipse. Besides it was the time of the full moon at Passover when the darkness covered the whole land. No one can say the darkness did not extend over the whole of the daylight half of the globe. This darkness was in the presence of the full sun and covered the sun at noonday. All at once the darkness covered the land and it seems to have departed just as suddenly. It was not late afternoon as the sun normally goes down quietly, but it was a frightful darkness that suddenly dropped like a thick curtain. It was very extensive and concentrated like the three days darkness in Egypt during the plagues preceding the first Passover. Like that event there is only one explanation –God. It was a special act of God. It was as if God put His hand over the sun and blocked its light for three hours.

The gospel writers say "darkness" and then everything falls silent for three intense hours. Even the Divine Sufferer is silent until just before the darkness ends. Out of that impenetrable frightening darkness is a shout of God forsakenness, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" The incredible thing is how that exclusive darkness attached itself to the death of Christ.

What did this darkness mean? The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sins. The punishment was borne by Jesus, so that He, as our Substitute, suffered the most intense agony, indescribable woe, and terrible isolation for our sins. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead. He died for you and me that day.

The judgment of God came upon our sins that day. Our representative and substitute died in our place. Jesus Christ the Son of God was suffering the torments of hell. The Son of God was dying as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was enduring the inconceivable wrath of His Father against our sin. He was paying our debt.

Darkness is associated with the judgment of God in the Bible. At the second coming of Christ we are told that climatic changes will take place in the heavens. Isaiah 5:30; 60:2; Joel 2:30, 31; Amos 5:18, 20; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Matthew 24:29, 30; Acts 2:20; 2 Peter 2:17; Revelation 6:12-17

On the cross the agony of judgment that Jesus was suffering was so intense He finally uttered the words, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus was giving His life as a ransom for our sins (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28; 26:28). And God drew the curtains over Calvary so sinful man could not see the intensity of

Matt. 20:28; 26:28). And God drew the curtains over Calvary so sinful man could not see the intensity of God forsaking God.

The Temple veil was torn

Moreover, in the moment Jesus died the one-inch thick woven loose hanging curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Hollies into two rooms was sliced into from top to bottom. It did not shake to pieces, but was like a giant hand took hold of it at the top of the veil and ripped it apart from top to bottom.

The moment Christ died 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). Luke simply says, "the veil of the temple was torn in two" (Luke 23:45). Referring to the same event Mark writes, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:37-38). The rending of the veil occurred at the moment of His death.

God the Father acted, as any devoted Jewish father standing by His Son's deathbed would have done renting His garments. This was a customary Jewish mourning gesture. God tore the veil as if renting His own outer garment.

This tearing of the veil happed at three p.m., when the priests were busy in the temple slaughtering the Passover lambs. Think for a moment if you had been a Jewish priest slitting the throats of the lambs preparing for the Passover that would begin at late evening when the first star appeared in the distant sky. Perhaps you would have been throwing incense on the altar at that precise moment! What if it had been your Passover lamb that was being slain at that exact moment? Some of the priests working in the temple would have been eyewitnesses to this event. That is probably the reason why "a great many of the priests one after one were becoming obedient to the faith" in Jesus Christ as their Savior (Acts 6:7).

Through the death of Christ the way into the heavenly sanctuary was opened for all mankind. All may now freely enter in by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:19; 9:3). "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, and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (10:19-22). Now we can experience an intimate, love relationship with Christ because His sacrificial death opened a way for every believer to enter into the holiest "through the veil" of His flesh. "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16; Cf. Eph. 2:18-19; 3:11-12).

At that moment the throne of grace was opened up for all who will believe. The way into God's presence is now open for all to come in. Jesus is the only sacrifice needed for us to have a right relationship with God. However, there is only one way to enter and that is through the blood of Jesus (Acts 4:12). The Temple in Jerusalem was no longer God's dwelling place. The Temple was profaned, and consequently abolished by God Himself when in A. D. 70 the Roman army burned it. From the day of Pentecost every believer's body became the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16).

Earthquake and graves split open

Matthew tells us that other things happened. "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).

Josephus (*War* VI. 299) tells of a quaking in the temple before the destruction and the Talmud tells of a quaking forty years before the destruction of the temple.

A. T. Robertson gives keen insight, "We come back to miracles connected with the birth of Jesus, God's Son coming into the world. If we grant the possibility of such manifestations of God's power, there is little to disturb one here in the story of the death of God's Son." The obvious conclusion is the tombs broke open at Christ's death when the earthquake rocked Jerusalem, but the bodies of the saints were not raised until Christ rose three days later.

Yes, amazing things happened the day Christ died. But where is the evidence of His death?

THE CRY OF JESUS AT HIS DEATH (23:46)

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

The victorious Son commits His all to His Father. This is what we would expect of the person who lived the way Jesus did. He had a perfect trust in the heavenly Father which was never broken.

He then addressed His Father in the final statement from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Psalm 31:5). Jesus died with a bedtime prayer upon His lips that every Jewish mother taught her children. He had learned it in the arms of Mary. Only one word is added to this verse, "Father." It tells us how our Lord died: confidently, willingly (John 10:17-18), and victoriously (John 19:30). Barclay says, "Even on a cross, Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his father's arms." Moreover, everyone who knows Jesus as their Savior may die with the same confidence and assurance (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:20-23).

Jesus was an obedient Son through out His life and ministry. Everything that He said or did can be understood only in the light of the cross. Calvary is the key to truth. The message of God centers in His Son on the cross dying for sinning humanity. Unless we are the instruments of His will we blunder through our physical existence without any worthwhile purpose. Jesus repeatedly tells us He did nothing except in the Father's will. "I can do nothing," Jesus said, "on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing, whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (vv. 19-20). Jesus came to do the Father's will and on the cross He is accomplishing the ultimate purpose of His coming to this earth.

"Into God's hands must go all that we are and all that we have. God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. . . How could He do that? Paul tells us "for in Christ all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. . . (Colossians 2:9).

Jesus died in obedience to the Father's will.

Jesus breathed His last breath. He died. The expression "He breathed His last," or "He gave up His spirit" means "to breath out, to expire, to die." Geldenhuys explains the last moments in the death of Jesus were a

means "to breath out, to expire, to die." Geldenhuys explains the last moments in the death of Jesus were a calm restfulness. He had accomplished with satisfaction what the Father gave Him to do.

The March 21, 1986 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* had an article on The Physical Death of Jesus Christ. Here is the conclusion by the author:

Thus it remains unsettled whether Jesus died of cardiac rupture, or a cardio respiratory failure, however the important feature may not be how He died, but whether He died. Clearly the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted, and supports the traditional view that the spear thrust between His right ribs probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and the heart, and thereby insured His death. Accordingly interpretations based upon the assumption that Jesus did not die on the Cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge. "

Jesus died.

The meaning of His death

What was the purpose of His death? The apostle Peter writes, you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

The blood of Christ is nothing less than the eternal power of God. The wonderful truth is that it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses from all sin and its effects on the believing sinner. In stead of lambs it is the blood of Jesus that is offered on the altar for our redemption.

The Bible tells us, The wages of sin is death. It is the punishment of sin. The blood, the death, of the innocent lamb on the altar was a covering for sin. It atoned for sin. The sinner placed his hands on the head of the sacrifice and confessed his sins, thus laying his sins on the victim. The death of the substitute was reckoned as the death or punishment for the worshiper.

The blood was thus the life given up to death for the satisfaction of the law of God, and in obedience to His command. Sin was so entirely covered and atoned for, it was no longer reckoned as that of the transgressor. He was forgiven. Based upon the sacrifice of Jesus the LORD God could declare the believing sinner acquitted.

It is not just that Jesus died, but that He died as our personal Savior. His death was not the death of just anyone. He was God's lamb dying for a specific purpose. Therefore, His blood is the only cleansing for sin.

But all these sacrifices and offerings were only types, and shadows, till the Lord Jesus came. His blood was the reality to which these types pointed.

His blood was of infinite worth, because it carried His soul or life. It was none other than the Son of God who died. In holy obedience to the Father's will the Son of God subjected Himself to the penalty of the broken law, by pouring out His soul unto death. By that death, not only was the penalty paid in full, but the law was satisfied completely, and the Father glorified. Therefore God could be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26b). His blood atoned for sin, and thus made it powerless. It does this by cleansing us of all sin and guilt (1 John 1: 7-10). It has a marvelous power for removing sin, cleansing and sanctifying.

The Gospels each reminds us that the death of Jesus was a victorious death. The only death Jesus could die

The Gospels each reminds us that the death of Jesus was a victorious death. The only death Jesus could die was a vicarious voluntary death. No one could take His life. He voluntarily gave it up as a representative of the sinner. Only the blood of Jesus can satisfy the law and the righteousness of God. No sinner can do that.

Jesus died the only kind of death that was able to satisfy the justice of God and to save men (John 10:11, 15, 17-18).

Jesus did not yield to death in weakness. Jesus summoned death like a chariot or limousine to serve His purposes! It is significant the inspired writer does not say, "He died," but "He gave up the spirit." NASB reads, "He breathed His last." He breathed out his life, clearly indicating the voluntary nature of the act.

Augustine had a good understanding of this great truth. He said, "He gave up His life because He willed it, when He willed it, and as he willed it." No other person has ever done that. You and I don't have that kind of a choice about matters of life and death.

The word translated "commend," or "commit" could be translated "I render up, or lay down." It means, "to deposit with another, to give him charge, to commit." Luke noted that Jesus' death occurred because He willed it. Breathing *His last* (Luke 23:46), He willingly and voluntarily gave up His life (John 10:15, 17-18).

One of the amazing things about His death was the timing. The death of Jesus was unusually quick. Most of the victims of crucifixion were left on the cross for a week to die a slow horrible death of hunger, thirst, dehydration, insanity and infection in the blazing Palestinian sun. When Jesus knew the payment was paid in full He chose to give up His spirit. He was sovereign in His own death. He died like no other man. Jesus chose the timing of His own death to the minute.

Only the death of Jesus could satisfy the righteousness of God.

Jesus, as the High Priest on that last Passover Day, was offering Himself to God as the bleeding sacrifice to atone for man's sin. His cross is the altar of the sacrifice. His body is the bloody Sacrifice. Jesus is the Great High priest offering up Himself as the sacrifice that covers our every sin. By His voluntary death, this Priest carried His sacrifice into the Holy of Holies of God's presence; and with these words offered it to God. The deed is done, finished, complete!

Year after year, for centuries, the Jewish priests had been doing it. Thousands upon thousands of lambs had been slain. Little did they realize that very day just outside the walls of the city, a different kind of Priest had appeared, with a Lamb that brought bloody sacrifice forever to an end. Jesus, the Son of God, offers His broken body, without spot or blemish, to God. He pours out precious and efficacious blood at the foot of the cross. The veil of the temple is rent in two from top to the bottom. God Almighty is satisfied! His wrath is propitiated through the blood of Jesus. He comes from the secret place, saying, "It is enough! No more priests, but Jesus! No more blood, but His blood! The work is done!"

The New Testament has much to say about the sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews 7:22-27; 9:24-28; Romans 5:6, 8; 6:10; 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

At Calvary's altar, the crucified Priest offered Himself, the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world.

THE CENTURION'S TESTIMONY AT JESUS' DEATH (23:47-48)

The Roman centurion in charge of the execution was a professional executor who had never seen anything like this before. He watched how Jesus conducted Himself in the midst of all the hostility and hatred. In His

like this before. He watched how Jesus conducted Himself in the midst of all the hostility and hatred. In His last moments Jesus loud cry of restful resignation made a profound never to be forgotten affect upon that soldier. It was a *voluntary surrender* of His life into the Father's hands. This was a cry of confidence.

The centurion testified, "Certainly this was a righteous [innocent] man, the Son of God" (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). He was greatly impressed by the darkness, the earthquake (Matt. 27:54), and certainly the manner in which Jesus suffered and died. Never had he heard a victim praying for his enemies. This hardened Roman soldier must have been shocked when Jesus shouted and then instantly died, for victims of crucifixion often lingered for days and did not have the strength to speak.

Praising God (v. 47)

The Roman centurion had seen men die, but none like this. Spurgeon suggests this King commanded death to come to His service and convey His spirit to God. Never had the world seen anything like this before. Jesus ordered Rome's death chariot to carry Him back home! From that moment on death became the doorway and vehicle to heaven. Jesus transformed the Roman symbol of the power of death and made it His servant by using the very thing it stood for—death and despair—to accomplish His eternal purpose of victory over death.

A. T. Robertson notes the centurion, "Began to glorify . . . or kept on glorifying." He kept it up. The Roman centurion began to praise or glorify God probably by acknowledging the righteousness of God and he continued to do so (Matt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Lk. 23:47).

Reaction of the crowds

The crowds' reaction is seen in verse forty-eight. Luke describes the people slowly winding their way back to Jerusalem. They must have said to themselves over and over again in deep agonizing conviction of their evil party as they slowly walked, "We did this! We did this! How could we have been party to this?" Cf. Acts 2:36; 1 Thess. 2:14, 15. Returning to the city they began to beat their breasts in self-reproach. Lenski says, "They came to witness a show; they left with feelings of woe. They knew they were guilty before God and deserved death (Rom. 6:23). They must have gone away sounding like the tax collector in Luke 18:13, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner par excellence! It was a time of mourning and lament for the common people who were present."

The burial of Jesus

All four Gospel writers present details of the death and burial of Jesus. His death and burial is a historical fact.

When Jesus died, Joseph immediately went to Pilate for permission to have the body, and Nicodemus probably stayed at Calvary to keep watch. They tenderly took Jesus from the cross, quickly carried Him to the garden, washed the body, and wrapped it with the spices. It was a hasty temporary burial. They would return after the Sabbath on the first day of the week to do the job properly. When they laid Jesus into the new tomb, they fulfilled Isaiah 53:9 and they kept the Romans from throwing His body on the garbage dump in Gehenna outside the city. Condemned criminals lost the right to proper burial; however God saw to it that His Son's body was buried with dignity and love.

It was important that the body be buried properly, for God would raise Jesus from the dead. If there were any doubt about His death or burial, that could affect the message and the ministry of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-8). The resurrection of Jesus caught everyone by surprise. It was not an anticipated event. No one believed Jesus

The resurrection of Jesus caught everyone by surprise. It was not an anticipated event. No one believed Jesus when He said He would rise from the dead. They spiritualized the prophecy or simply could not grasp the possibility. Every one of the disciples was shocked three days later when He was raised. They thought that was the end when Jesus died and was buried.

What will you do with Jesus?

The most discerning people who mingled about the cross that day were not the Jewish religious leaders, but a criminal and a Roman centurion. The executed criminal died that day with great assurance of eternal life, and the centurion spent the rest of his life praising God. Here were two converts, saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!

Can you imagine with me what it will be like when Jesus Christ returns and those who have heard the message of the cross and have chanted down through the ages, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! And then when they see His face will only beat their breasts and scream "We did this! We are guilty. We have sinned. We have done Him wrong. We have rejected Him! For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. "

"The wages of sin is death. "The soul that sins will surely die. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? "

At that time it will be too late. It will be even worse than when these people came back from the ugly scene at Golgotha and deep under the convicting power of God realized they had crucified a righteous and holy God!

Now is the day of salvation. Jesus went to the cross and died for you. Your sin debt has been paid in fully by Jesus Christ. He died for you on the cross. God can now pardon and forgive you of every sin and bestow on you the free gift of eternal life. The reason He can do that is because Jesus was obedient to the Father's will, even unto death. Now a righteous and holy God can offer us forgiveness through His grace. Jesus Christ has already done everything for you. By offering up His Son, God is able to make sons and daughters of all who respond to this work by faith.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain —
He washed it white as snow.

God has swung the door of eternal life wide open for you to come to Him, even as you read this. Put your trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther was going through terrible periods of depression. Luther seemed to see a repulsive and wicked form inscribing the record of his own sins and transgressions on the walls of his room. The condemning hand wrote down the sinful thoughts, the sinful words, the evil deeds, the sins of omission and commission, secret sins, open sins — there seemed to be no end to the list of his sins. Luther bowed his head in prayer. When he looked up again, the writer had paused and was facing him. "You have forgotten just one thing!" said Luther. "And that?" queried his tormenter. "Take your pen once more and write across it all: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin!" At the mention of the blood of Jesus, the evil spirit vanished and the walls were clean!

All you need to do is trust Him. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. "

The apostle Paul wrote, 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).

All we need to do is call upon His name and believe on what He did for us on the cross. His sacrifice is all sufficient to forgive us our sins and cloth us in Christ's righteousness. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. "

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