

The Gospel of the Rent Veil

For the Christian the most important event in history occurred over 1900 years ago in the ancient city of Jerusalem. On a Friday around 9:00 in the morning a carpenter who was a prophet-teacher known throughout Palestine, was nailed to a Roman cross to die. He was condemned to suffer capital punishment by the representative of the Roman government – Pontius Pilate. Many viewed this event as just another death. But never a man died like Jesus did. He died a most unique and unusual death. It was not so unique by the outward appearance as by what transpired in the courts of heaven. He died as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of many people.

Listen to this account given by Matthew:

“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

When some of those standing there heard this they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. But the rest said, “Leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and all that had happened. They were terrified and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matt. 26:45-54, NIV).

Christ Jesus performed no miracles on the cross. He whose career was ushered in by miracles and whose ministry contained many acts of divine power did not conclude it with a miracle from the cross. Jesus was dead and his lips were silenced. But now God speaks in an awe-inspiring language of his own with a whole series of startling signs attending the actual moment Christ Jesus died on the cross.

When Jesus bowed his head and dismissed his spirit, the Father spoke an “amen” to the finished work of his Son. One of the most startling and significant of these miraculous events was the rending of the temple veil.

Imagine the scene. It was three o’clock in the afternoon. This was the time for the evening sacrifices and many priests were busy performing this ceremony. Some of the priests were present in the temple and actually saw God’s invisible hand tear the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place into two equal parts.

Who can express the solemnity of the moment when the priests found themselves gazing into the sanctuary where for centuries God’s manifested presence had resided. It had been cut off from human view except to the eye of the High Priest who once a year was allowed to cross over the blood-sprinkled threshold and enter behind the veil with a blood sacrifice on behalf of the people.

At 3 o’clock in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “***It is finished!***” and at that moment the ministering priests heard a tearing sound, and as if an unseen hand had severed it by starting at the top, the veil fell apart before their startled , awe-stricken eyes.

That this was a miraculous act of God was evident by the manner in which it occurred. It was torn asunder from the top to the bottom. This veil was thick, and it was so heavy, according to early Jewish tradition that it took three hundred priests to handle it. It is said to have been 60 feet long, 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick. (Alfred Edersheim, [*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*](#).) Only God could have torn it open beginning at the top.

This veil was highly significant. God had ordained that it be made, and he had given the precise pattern, colors, and design. It was beautifully woven of fine-twined linen of blue and purple and scarlet, all embroidered with cherubim. (Exodus 26:31ff)

The veil with all of its great beauty had one primary and unique purpose. It was meant to divide between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Thus it barred access to the presence of God because of the sinfulness of men. God is holy and sin cannot enter his presence. The High Priest alone could enter once a year but never without the purification ceremony and the blood covering to be sprinkled on the mercy seat. (Hebrews 9:7-8) *only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.* ⁸ *The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed.*

The veil had hung there for centuries – hiding the great glory of God in the Holy of Holies. No one would've thought the death of Jesus of Nazareth would affect the veil. But the day of the shadows of the Old Testament ended abruptly on that Day of Jesus crucifixion at 3 in the afternoon. When the Lamb of God had finished his propitiatory sufferings, God by a single stroke tore the veil in two and caused it to cease to exist. It was so sudden – so mysterious and so very significant.

The writer to the Hebrews links the death of Jesus to the veil. (Hebrews 10:19-20 *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,*) You see, the veil was a symbol of the human body of Jesus the Messiah. It was meant to portray the perfection of his holiness in his humanity. Just as God dwelt in the sanctuary behind the veil, so in Jesus Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead in a bodily habitat. Thus the veil was a type of the human nature of the Incarnate God. The hanging veil symbolized his perfect life. But the torn veil speaks of his crucifixion. Through means of the human body of Christ Jesus' suffering on the cross as a sin offering were men enabled to come to God. (Hebrews 10:10 *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*)

For God and men to be reconciled, the unique Son of God must take flesh and blood and live among men and then he had to go to the cross in his mortal nature and die to atone for the sins of his people. By this means he opened the way for them to draw near to God.

When Christ's work was done and the burden of sin had been put away, God removed the veil.

Ponder some of the meanings of this act. The rending of the veil signified the end of the old order and the ushering in of the new order of approach to God. It means that the Old Covenant (Testament) worship through shadows and ritual was gone. The symbolic must yield to the substance it had represented.

The rent veil envisaged the end of sin which separated men from God. When Jesus was made sin on our behalf and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, the veil was rent. (2 Corinthians 5:21) What bars our entrance into God's presence is our sin? But now the way is opened into the Father's presence. By whom? Jesus Christ. In what manner? By means of the veil of his flesh being opened up on the cross as an offering for our sins.

The rent veil now speaks of God's invitation to all who will repent of their sin and believe in Christ Jesus to enter the Holiest of all.

Moreover, the rent veil signified that the work of the earthly priests was done. God has provided another priest. He is the Great High Priest who by his once-for-all perfect sacrifice of himself for sins, forever pronounced the work of earthly priests ended. No one need ever offer another sacrifice for sins because by his one offering, he has perfected forever those who belong to God by faith in His Name.

Also the rent veil signified the end of the sacrificial system. The one final and all sufficient offering has been offered. The redemption of the world is finished! The writer of Hebrews declared: *“neither by the blood of goats and calves but by his own blood he entered once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”* (Hebrews 9:12). Men can now be justified by faith in his blood.

“No more veil! God bids me enter
By the new and living way –
Not in trembling hope I venture,
Boldly I his call obey;
There with him, by God I meet;
God upon the mercy seat.”

The veil has been rent in to by the victorious death of Jesus Christ as our Surety and Mediator. The rent veil is a gateway into the presence of God. Every repenting soul is now invited to come boldly to the throne of grace by virtue of the blood of Jesus.

The message of the rent veil is powerful and victorious. It speaks of God’s holiness vindicated through the death of the Son of God, who put away sin by his unique sacrifice. It marked the turning point in history. The message of salvation is that whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord in saving faith shall be saved and brought near to God. Because of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice we can freely come into the Father’s presence and lovingly cry – *“Abba, Father.”* Amen.

-by Wayne Conrad
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