



Speaker:
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The Veil of Christ's Flesh

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 56 of 56

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And Jesus cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, who stood over against him, saw that he so cried out and gave up the ghost he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

There were also women looking on afar off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome (who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God came, and went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

And he bought fine linen, took him down, wrapped him in the linen, laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.

We considered last time that wondrous and terrifying cry Jesus made from the cross. He raised his voice to ask his heavenly father why he'd abandoned him. As a man, Jesus was overcome with the weight of God's hatred for the sin he'd taken on himself. As God in the flesh, he knew it would soon be at an end and the great victory of the atonement would be complete.

We now reach that moment. In or around the year AD30, at three o'clock in the afternoon, on the 8th of April, the Messiah, the Son of God and Son of man, the saviour of the world, died.

He likely died on Thursday afternoon and rose early Sunday morning.

It says in v.37 he "gave up the ghost". The word "ghost" is misleading, so I'd suggest we instead read it as "he took his last breath". It's the same as what we do. When we die, there's always one final intake of breath and when that leaves us it's over.

The effect this has on the centurion is telling. He'd seen many others die by crucifixion, but this was obviously different. Jesus didn't get weaker over the space of hours like you'd expect. His exit was accompanied by a great shout to announce his purpose on the cross was finished. It spoke of a control over when he died. It seems this soldier, a gentile, received a revelation from God at that moment. The man who'd organised the crucifixion became the first convert after it!

He also had this contrast between an apparently ignoble death and the amazing events which took place at the same time. Mark records just one of these events: the tearing of the veil in the temple. And it's this event which is the theme I'd like to follow up in a few moments.

Joseph enters the story now. It says he "waited" for God's kingdom. Remember, the introduction of God's kingdom refers to the unfolding of God's purpose in Christ, and Joseph was indeed witnessing the gradual revelation of the kingdom.

He went to Pilate to ask if he could take Jesus's body for burial. It shows his boldness. If you think about it, associating yourself with a potentially subversive group could have consequences. Consider too that his fellow Sanhedrin members would soon find out he was a follower of Jesus.

It was a case of holy boldness! And bravery wasn't a normal attitude of Joseph's. It seems it took the unfair trial and dreadful death of his master to give him the strength to face Pilate in this way.

In John's gospel, we read why Joseph hasn't been prominent until now. It says he was a disciple of Jesus but kept it secret because he was worried about what the other Jews would do.

Pilate expected it to take longer for Jesus to die. I do wonder *why* Pilate should be surprised though. It's true that if it went as planned, death from crucifixion would take days. That was the point. But some died even before they arrived, because the beating was too severe, so I expect some will have died very soon after being crucified. It could be Pilate had taken an interest and was getting updates. If he knew what condition Jesus was in, he'd be able to estimate how long he'd last, and it seems Jesus went unexpectedly.

The bodies of dead criminals would normally go into a common grave, and sometimes they were just dumped in the desert for the animals to eat. Pilate's concession to Joseph tells us something was different. Could it be he was trying to make amends for being part of a false prosecution?

The wrapping of the body in a linen shroud was common. Joseph had a problem with time being against him. Sunset was around 7.20pm. After Jesus died, Joseph had to arrange a meeting with Pilate, go back, arrange the task with others, get the body down, wrap it, take it to the tomb and seal it in just four hours. He couldn't allow his service to Jesus to run into the Sabbath—assuming he still cared about this regulation—so he no doubt roped in some of his servants to help, and John adds the useful detail that Nicodemus, a fellow Sanhedrin member, helped as well.

The body was taken to a nearby garden and placed on a shelf inside Joseph's own tomb which had never been used. It was carved out of rock. The tomb was sealed with a circular flat stone. I know they were extremely heavy, but putting it in place wasn't so bad. It would be rolled down a slope till it was in front of the entrance, so gravity would do the work. The stone kept out robbers and animals. Rolling it away, however, would take several strong men.

Just to explain this title: I want to talk, in the time we have, about Christ's flesh, which the scriptures tell us is a sort of *veil*.

We all know what a veil is—it's a piece of clothing used to cover a face or a woman's hair. If we were doing a word-study on veils in the Bible, we'd see them used in ways we'd expect. For example:

- In Gen 24: 35, Rebekah is about to meet Isaac, her future husband. In her modesty, and to show her godly subjection to Isaac, she wraps a veil around her face.
- In Gen 38: 14, Tamar covers herself with a veil to hide her identity from Judah. She pretends to be a prostitute in a successful ploy to become Judah's wife.
- And in Isa 25: 7, a veil is used symbolically, to describe the spiritual darkness which covers the earth

Even though this isn't what we're looking at today, these examples show us that **veils do hide something**.

As ever, I want to take you along a short track of study which leads to Jesus Christ. To do this we're going to look at three examples of the mention of veils in order to cast light on the significance of the temple veil being torn.

The veil of Moses

You might remember that, after Moses had met with God on Sinai's mountain, his face shone brightly, and he veiled his face when speaking to the people. Let's have a read of Exodus 34, starting at v.29:

And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of Testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them. And Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him. And Moses talked with them.

And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh. And he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. And Moses put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Exodus 34:29–35

Moses enjoyed such close communion with God, his physical appearance changed! We expect that Moses would have been affected in his own soul, but his face shining?

There was a reason for God doing this to his servant. This wasn't merely to show Moses had been in God's presence. His shining face was, as it were, *the very glory of God reflected in him*. And the people were not too comfortable with Moses' new look. So Moses wrapped a veil around his face to mask the brightness.

But what does it represent? We are, as is so often the case, helped in our understanding of this Old Testament passage by the clearer revelation of the New Testament. I'm looking in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. 2 Corinthians 3, starting at v.12:

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech. And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished. But their minds were blinded. For until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament, which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

2 Corinthians 3:12–16

There's a lot in that passage. Let's break this down.

1. **Moses' shining face represents the gospel of Jesus Christ.** It is this gospel which is the full revelation of God's grace; it is the gospel which is the power of God that saves his people from their sins; and it is the light OF the gospel which shines into the hearts of his elect children and gives them repentance and faith.
2. **Moses' veil represents the blindness of the Israel people.** "Their minds were blinded", says the text. The law of God is holy and just, but it has no power to save! We know Jesus is "the end of the law"—that is, he is the *fulfilment* of the law. The only way any man or woman can be saved is by faith in Christ, and anyone who thinks they can contribute to their salvation by keeping his Ten Commandments; who thinks their salvation is in peril if they fail to maintain their "respectable life"; doesn't understand the gospel and is likely not a child of God. You either trust in Christ for everything or you have nothing.
3. **Even after Moses, the hearts of Israel after the flesh remain veiled.** Wherever the Old Testament is read, without reference to Christ and the gospel, the people are in utter darkness. Those who read it, study it, even reverence it, are hopelessly wasting their time. And even though all the ceremonial law pointed to Christ, he is spoken of only in types and shadows. If you're listening today as a child of God, take a moment to think about how great the Father's love for you is. You have the knowledge of "God in Christ", reconciling you to himself. You have this entire revelation of God in your hand, and in it you have the gospel message, spelt out plainly; and it was by this clear message of salvation in Christ—by the very words in this book—that God saved you.

Look back in awe, at the darkened understanding of the people gathered around Moses, and thank God you are who you are, and *that* by God's grace only.

The veil of the temple

You'll probably know the temple was preceded by the tabernacle. Both were constructed according to very specific instructions from God. The core of these structures was a covered "holy place"; then a thick veil, or curtain; and behind that the "holy of holies".

This "most holy place" was where God promised he would meet with the people—or to be more specific, with the people's representative, the high priest. And *he* was only allowed in once a year, this to make an atonement for the sins of the people.

But the first place, the "holy place", was open to all the priests; and we can see that it represents the entire church of God:

[He] hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:6

So we are *all* priests, and it's the whole world of God's elect who are symbolised by this holy place.

Yet there existed this separation, a veil keeping the priests from the fuller manifestation of God's glory. Truly, even this was made with the coming Saviour in view. Just take the colours of this temple veil:

And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made:

Exo. 26:31

So we have *heavenly blue, blood red, and the purple of kings.*

But this veil was thick and heavy. Some say the temple veil was as much as six inches thick, so you can imagine how heavy it was. And anyone but the high priest venturing through it would immediately die.

But we're considering today how all these things shine a spotlight on the person and work of our Saviour, so we'll move on to the subject which my title gave you.

The veil of Christ's flesh

Let's read from Hebrews and you'll see why I'm making these connections with veils. We're in Hebrews 10 and starting from v.19:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

Hebrews 10:19-20

Christ, as you know, was God manifested in the flesh—God in a body. That verse tells us this body was, as it were, a “veil”.

Think about it: Colossians 2: 9 says, “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”. But hang on: do you remember Moses asking God, “I beseech thee, show me thy glory”. But God said, “There shall no man see me and live”. So the Lord God went past Moses and allowed him to see just a glimpse of his glory.

The fullness of the Godhead IS in Jesus, but it's impossible for us to see it in its bare, unveiled brightness. The origins, life and death of Jesus were marked by humility. Do you see then how of his glory was veiled?

In the temple, the high priest would come into the tabernacle armed with the blood of a young goat. He'd go through the veil and make an offering to God for the sins of his people.

This procedure foreshadowed exactly what Christ did for us. He went through the “veil”, *but through the veil of flesh*; and having done so, *he* entered into the most holy place—heaven itself—presenting *himself* as the offering.

...which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil...

Hebrews 6:19

He came from heaven, went through the **veil** of a human body, and ascended to God's right hand—the place of absolute equality—to intercede for us.

I'd like to briefly mention some reasons for Christ adorning himself with a human nature, a body which his Father in heaven had prepared for him to dwell in.

1. *He was manifest in the flesh **so he could suffer and die**.* Our God is eternal; therefore he cannot cease to exist. Only the mysterious union of the God-man could make this possible. And we're reminded in Heb 2:14, that, "through death", he destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil".
2. *He was manifest in the flesh **so blood could be shed**.* God is a Spirit and cannot shed blood. Now blood is the symbol of violence done to a body, and God requires it in order to remit sin. Only Christ in the flesh could shed blood and therefore free us from the penalty of sin.
3. *He was manifest in the flesh **so he could be our Great High Priest**.* The high priest was always taken from among men, and men can appreciate much more a Great High Priest who comes from among them.
4. *He was manifest in the flesh **so he could keep the law**.* God's law was given for men, and to keep every one of the moral rules, and every one of the ceremonial duties and rituals, it was necessary for Jesus to come as a man.
5. *He was manifest in the flesh **so he could be our Mediator**.* How comforting for us, to know that the one interceding for us in heaven itself was once as we were. In doing this, in this loving act, he was made eminently suitable as our representative at God's right hand.
6. *He was manifest in the flesh **so he could be an example of good works**.* Just when we find ourselves in awe of this man who did such good, and showed such compassion and mercy, the word of God tells us that he did so many good works, it's as if all the books in the world couldn't fit them in. In his incarnation, he gave us a record of doing good second to none—one that he urges us to copy.
7. *He was manifest in the flesh **so men could see something of the consequences of sin**.* Although he was acutely battered within his soul by God himself, the visible extent of his suffering at the hands of men was apparent to all. Had the Lord of glory not dwelt among us, we should not have appreciated the seriousness of sin as we do.
8. *Finally, He was manifest in the flesh **so he could enter into our sufferings**.* I have found this to be one of the most prominent reasons given to us for the incarnation. It's not vital to salvation, but it's so important to the child of God—to understand Jesus our saviour pities us as we're tempted is a great comfort.

For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Yet we shouldn't imagine that, since Christ was sinless, he didn't experience temptation like we do. He couldn't sit back, relax, and say "Do your worst, Satan! Do your worst, world! Do your worst, flesh!"

Day in, day out, hour by hour, he was attacked with temptation. It's said our Redeemer was tempted "in ALL points". Satan tempted him to covet. The world tempted him to abandon Calvary. The flesh tempted him to reject the cup of his Father's wrath. And much, much more. Yet, praise his holy name, he was without sin. And as the holy, harmless, undefiled Lamb of God, he was the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

The veil of Christ's flesh. You'll no doubt be aware of the other spectacular events which accompanied Jesus' death: an earthquake, rocks being split and graves opened. But the only one in Mark's gospel was this tearing of the temple veil. That thick curtain was rent in two. It was torn from the top all the way to the bottom.

So, at the exact time that the man Christ Jesus died, the old partition, that which kept the people from the most holy place, that which symbolised the mist of spiritual darkness, that which represented the gospel being clouded by the law, was destroyed. And what's more, it continues the anti-temple theme of Mark. It'd be yet another indication of the soon destruction of Jewish temple religion as it was superseded by the free grace religion of Christ Jesus.

That advent hymn goes:

*Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting lord
Late in time behold Him come,
Off-spring of a Virgin's womb
VEILED IN FLESH the Godhead see,
Hail, the incarnate deity
Pleased as Man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

God bless you all.

Amen.