

“The Signs Accompanying the Death of Christ”

Mark 15:33-38; Matthew 27:51-53

(Preached at Trinity, August 19, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last week we saw the solemn event of the death of Jesus.
This was the most important death in history. It was a real death, a death like all others. It was also a death unlike any other.
 - A. Death is the normal course of life in our fallen world.
God told Adam:
Genesis 2:17 NAU - "but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."
Death is the just penalty for sin
Romans 6:23 NAU - "For the wages of sin is death"
Romans 5:12 NAU - "just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned"
 - B. Jesus became our sin-bearer and so He became subject to death.
On the other hand, Jesus was sinless so death had no power over Him. Jesus GAVE His life.
John 10:17-18 NAU - "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."
 - C. This death was a substitutionary death. His blood was a perfect atonement for sin. This sacrifice was God's only remedy for sin. His death procured the salvation of all of the elect.
2. The death of Christ was the grand display of His redemptive purpose in redeeming His elect people. It was the fulfillment of His promises. As it was accomplished God displayed His power and glory in several ways.
I title this evening's sermon, "The Signs Accompanying the Death of Christ."
I want to look at both Mark's and Matthew's Gospels to look at these miraculous displays of God's power. They declare to us that this was God's doing. It was His amazing work.
Psalms 118:23-24 NAU - "This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴ This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

I. Darkness covered the land

Verse 33 - "When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour."

A. This was supernatural darkness

1. It is possible the darkness covered the entire earth
The word γῆ can be translated land but most frequently earth. I wouldn't be surprised if God removed the light of His countenance from all of creation.
2. God is light – He had forsaken this sacrificial Lamb
Darkness was the natural sign of His turning away
Light existed before the sun – it is fitting that light would vanish in the darkest hour of creation
3. This gives meaning to our Lord's words,
"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
4. Jesus was left alone to bear the sins of His people

B. The midday sun was extinguished to hide this solemn sight

1. Spurgeon: "It was midnight at midday."
2. From 9:00 until noon Calvary had been a busy place
The soldiers performed their various duties
The passers by blasphemed Jesus
Jesus dealt with the repenting thief on the cross
He comforted and provided for His mother
3. What happened between the 6 & 9th hour is a mystery
 - a. Jesus was left alone to suffer unimaginable agonies as He drank the cup of God's wrath.
 - b. It is not recorded that He said a single word
 - c. Never in the history of the world were there three hours like these
4. As the ultimate sacrifice was being offered upon God's altar the scene was hid from the face of men. There would be no mocking or idle curiosity during this time.

C. Darkness is the ultimate sentence for those who will not have Christ

1. Jesus was the light of the world, yet the world did not recognize it
John 1:5 NAU - "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
2. Hell will be the ultimate display of darkness – forsakenness from the light of the countenance of Christ
Matthew 22:13 NAU - "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"
3. Lost humanity tries to pretend there is no hell – If God did not spare Jesus Christ, what hope does sinful humanity have?
John 3:36 NAU - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
4. Hell will be an eternity of darkness – full separation from the light of God's glory

II. The Temple veil was rent

Verse 38 – "And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

- A. The description of the veil
1. It was said to have been a hand breadth in thickness and woven of 72 twisted plaits each consisting of 24 threads.
 2. It was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide
 3. It would have been an impossible deed for man to tear this curtain
- B. At the moment of Christ's death while the priests were officiating in the Temple the veil was ripped from top to bottom
1. It was torn by the hand of God
 2. In Christ a single sacrifice removed the need for any other
- Hebrews 9:11-12 NAU** - "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."
- C. The tearing of the veil signified what Jesus had accomplished
1. Man now has access to God through Jesus the Savior
John 14:6 KJV - "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."
 2. Jesus was the fulfillment of it all
 - a. The mercy seat signified Christ the great Propitiation
 - b. The pot of manna signified Christ, the Bread of Life
- D. The tearing of the veil also signified the partition wall being removed between the Jew and Gentile
- Ephesians 2:13-15 NAU** - "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace,"
1. The ceremonial law by which the Jews were distinguished from all the people of the earth was now destroyed in Christ
- E. The tearing of the veil signified the end of the Judaic religious system
1. The temple service was now at an end
 2. God demonstrated that He had forever left the temple
 3. It was a perfect fulfillment of Christ's prophecy
Matthew 23:37-38 NAU - "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!"

- III. Switching to Matthew's Gospel we read that a great earthquake shook the land
Matthew 27:51 NAU - "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split."
- A. This too was a supernatural act of God
1. The earth shaking was a sign of God's presence
Exodus 19:18 NAU - " 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."
Isaiah 64:3 NAU - "When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence."
 2. It is also a sign of judgment
Psalms 18:7-8 NAU - "Then the earth shook and quaked; And the foundations of the mountains were trembling And were shaken, because He was angry. ⁸ Smoke went up out of His nostrils, And fire from His mouth devoured; Coals were kindled by it."
- B. Creation was doing what man would not do – Jesus said that if men would cease to cry Hosanna the stones would sing His praise
Luke 19:37-40 NAS - "And as He was now approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." ⁴⁰ And He answered and said, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"
- IV. Matthew's Gospel also records that graves opened and the saints raised
Matthew 27:52-53 NAS - "and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many."
- A. In dealing with these verses our curiosity is not fully satisfied
1. When dealing with Scripture we must be careful not to take the text further than what is revealed
 2. Our desire is to rightly handle the Word of Truth
2 Timothy 2:15 NAS - "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."
 3. There are things we are not told
 4. Who they were – except that they were Old Testament saints. But which ones?
 - a. Perhaps the martyrs who spilt their blood in the proclamation of God's Word—men like Jeremiah, and even John the Baptist.

- b. We hear the words of the NT martyrs:
Revelation 6:9-11 NAU - "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; ¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.*"
5. To whom they appeared we are not told – only that they went into Jerusalem and testified to many
 6. What they said we are not told – we would assume they testified to the resurrection of Christ
 7. Did they rise to die no more? We are not told – although there is reasonable evidence for believing that they rose to die no more Every indication is that they arose to die no more – that like Enoch, or more importantly, like Jesus, they ascended body and soul into heaven.
 8. We must not assume that it was a purely natural event – that the graves were opened by the fissures caused by the earthquake
- B. Some things we can know from this passage
1. It was a real resurrection – not the appearance of corpses
 2. This occurred at the moment of Christ's death pointing to the significance of His death –
 - a. His death destroyed the power of death
Hebrews 2:14-15 NAS - "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵ and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."
 - b. His death destroyed the dread and fear of death
1 Corinthians 15:54-57 NAS - "But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
 3. Those O.T. saints that died before Christ did not miss out on the power of His death
 4. After the resurrection of Christ they entered into Jerusalem and appeared unto many. They were a testimony to the power of Christ's death

Conclusion:

1. These things had a profound effect upon many who observed them.
Matthew 27:54 NAU - "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!"
2. Many, however, went unchanged.
3. Do you stand in awe of these things?