

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Matthew 27:45-56

Things have changed dramatically in our western society over the past ten to twenty years. Previously, most people at least knew many of the facts of the crucifixion of Jesus...regardless of whether they believed them or not. Today, more and more people have totally rejected Jesus as the Son of God and even consider Jesus' resurrection as myth or legend...or at best, a historical event. They see no divine purpose in His crucifixion and resurrection. Even if they do acknowledge Jesus...they only see Him as a historical person...a good person...or maybe a prophet. But they deny His deity and place Him on a plain with other religious figures.

Consider this. By the time of Christ, the Romans had crucified some **30,000** men in **Palestine** alone. The majority of them were executed for *insurrection*...and were undoubtedly sincere patriots who hoped to free their people from oppression. They died for a cause that they believed in.

Why then does history remember the name of only one of those men?

I. THE DARKNESS: (vs. 45)

When Jesus was born, Scripture says that there was a brilliant light as *"the glory of the Lord shone around"* the shepherds in the field (**Luke 2:9**). Jesus even spoke of Himself as *"the light of the world"* (**John 8:12**). But now at His death...there is only *darkness*.

Matthew doesn't make any reference to the time when the crucifixion began, but **Mark** indicated that it began at the *third hour*...around **9:00 AM**.

"It was the third hour when they crucified Him."

~Mark 15:25

Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour (vs. 45)...From **12:00 noon - 3:00 PM**.

It must be noted that this **darkness** could not have been an *eclipse*. The *sun* and the *moon* would have been on *opposite sides* of the earth. **Passover**, followed by the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, always began *on the first Sabbath after the first full moon following the Vernal Equinox*. The **Vernal Equinox** is the *first day of spring* when the sun passes over the equator to divide day and night

equally. The date for **Easter** is always between **March 22nd** and **April 25th**.

Matthew does note specifically that **from the sixth hour (12:00 noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 PM)...darkness fell upon all the land**. It was during this period of **darkness** that Jesus became the *sin-offering* for the world...and as such was forsaken by the Father.

"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

~Romans 5:8

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

~II Corinthians 5:21

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

~I Peter 2:24

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God..."

~I Peter 3:18a

The cross was a place of *immense divine judgment* where the *sins of the world* were *poured out vicariously* on the *sinless, perfect* Son of God. It was appropriate that *darkness* expressed God's *reaction to sin* in that *act of judgment*.

II. THE DESERTION: (vs. 46)

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (vs. 46)...

This is *quoting Psalm 22:1*. **Matthew** quoted this passage using **Hebrew**...Eli. **Mark** used **Aramaic**, Eloi.

Jesus now experienced for the *first and only time in all of eternity*, a *separation* from His heavenly Father He *had never known*. This is also the *only time in Scripture* that Jesus didn't address God as Father. Somehow, God *was separated from* God. For in *becoming sin*, the Father *had to turn judicially* from His Son.

Jesus...

"...was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

~Romans 4:25

"...died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

~I Corinthians 15:3-4

"...who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

~II Corinthians 5:21

"...redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."

~Galatians 3:13

"...Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness..."

~I Peter 2:24

"...died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God..."

~I Peter 3:18

Became *"...the propitiation for our sins."*

~I John 4:10

Jesus Christ not only *bore* our sins...He actually *became sin* on our behalf...in order that those who *believe in* Him *might be saved* from the *penalty of their sin*.

III. THE DECEIVED: (vs. 47-49)

And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." (vs. 47)...

Some of those who were standing near the cross *misunderstood* Jesus' words. Even though He said *Eli*...they thought that He was trying to call for *Elijah*. In the *Greek* the word *Elijah* sounds very much like *Eli*.

Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink (vs. 48)...

Knowing that His *lips* and *throat* had to be *dry*...making it very *difficult* to *hear* and *understand* Him...someone thought a *drink of*

sour wine would *moisten His vocal cords* so that He could speak clearly. Others, however, said to *leave Him alone* and see if *Elijah* would *come* and deliver *Him*.

But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." (vs. 49)...

Obviously, their *mocking* and *jeers* continued to be directed against Jesus.

IV. THE DEATH: (vs. 50)

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit (vs. 50)...

With one last cry, *Jesus* gave up *His spirit* and *died*...committing His *spirit* into the hands of His Father.

"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last."

~Luke 23:46

Even in the midst of His crucifixion, it needs to be noted that Jesus was in complete control of events surrounding His life...and He died at the precise moment that had been determined by His Father. And at that exact moment...He dismissed *His spirit*.

No man took Jesus' life from Him...He laid down His life in keeping with God's *purposed plan of redemption*.

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 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."

~John 10:17-18

One of Jesus' *final words* on the cross was..."It is finished!"...*Tetilesti... paid in full*.

V. THE DISTURBANCE: (vs. 51)

At the time of Jesus' death, three significant events occurred:

- *The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*
- *A strong earthquake occurred, splitting rocks.*
- *The tombs of many righteous and holy people were opened.*

And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (vs. 51a)...

This is the **veil** that separated the *holy place* from the *Holy of Holies* in the temple.

“For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies”

~Hebrews 9:2-3

The veil of the temple was torn...Even though Scripture doesn't give us the size of the **veil**...both *rabbinic tradition*, as well as, **Josephus**, an early church historian...describe the **veil** as being about *60 feet in height, 30 feet in width, and four inches thick* (the *thickness of a man's hand*). It has been said that the **veil** was so heavy that it took *300 priests* to hang it. It has also been said that a team of *eight horses* could not tear the **veil in two**.

Torn in two from top to bottom...The fact that it was **torn from top to bottom** signified that God is the One who tore the thick curtain. It wasn't torn from the bottom by men. God was showing that the way of access into His presence was now available for everyone...not simply the Old Testament high priest.

“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.”

~Hebrews 10:19-22

And the earth shook and the rocks were split (vs. 51b)...

The death of Christ was a powerful, earthshaking event with repercussions even *affecting creation*...an *earthquake*.

VI. **THE DECEASED:** (vs. 52-53)

The *third* of the *three significant events* is only recorded by **Matthew**.

The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; (vs. 52)...

This probably occurred at a **Jerusalem cemetery**. **Matthew** points out that **many**, but *not all*, bodies of the **saints** who had died were *resurrected*.

The tombs were opened...probably by the earthquake, heralding Christ's *triumph in death over sin*. The *miracle* here isn't that **tombs were opened**...it's that **saints were resurrected**.

And coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many (vs. 53)...

Even though several commentaries suggest that these **saints** were resurrected *when Jesus died*...this verse specifically states that their resurrection occurred *after* Jesus was *resurrected*. Also, Scripture states that Jesus is the *“first fruits of those who are asleep!”* (**I Corinthians 15:20**).

These people returned to **Jerusalem...the holy city**...where they were recognized by their *family* and *friends*. Ultimately...like **Lazarus** (**John 11:43-44**)...**Jairus' daughter** (**Luke 8:41-42, 49-56**) ...and the *widow's son* from the city of **Nain** (**Luke 7:13-15**) ...they would once again pass through physical death one day.

But the resurrection of these **saints** that occurred after Jesus Himself was **raised**...they are a token of the coming day when all the **saints in Christ** will be **raised** (**I Thessalonians 4:16**).

VII. **THE DECLARATION:** (vs. 54)

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!” (vs. 54)...

The **Roman centurion**...along with the other **Roman guards**...were taken back by the events that were happening. Even though they had been part of many executions as part of their official duties, they had never observed such events before. Because of everything that **they saw**, they were *terrified* and *frightened* with the unusual circumstances surrounding the death of this Man. Their response... **Truly this was the Son of God!** The events of that day had struck *fear* into the *soldiers' hearts*.

We learn from **Luke** that the **centurion**, and presumably the other soldiers as well, *not only confessed Jesus' divinity*, but *began praising God (Luke 23:47)*.

VIII. THE DEVOTED: (vs. 55-56)

Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him (vs. 55)...

The women who were there observing Jesus' death from a distance had followed Him from Galilee and had been *caring for His needs...ministered to Him*.

While **Matthew** made no reference to what the women may have said or how they felt...the fact that they were observing everything from a distance shows that their hearts must *have been broken* as they observed the death of their Lord...whom they loved and had served.

Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (vs. 56)...

Three women are listed here...Mary Magdalene (**Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:9; John 20:18**)...Mary the mother of James and Joseph (perhaps the same as Mary, the wife of Clopas)...and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John (**Matthew 4:21; 10:2**). They were *observing from a distance*.

John mentioned that Mary, Jesus' mother, and Mary's sister had also been present...but they were at the foot of the cross earlier (**John 19:25-27**). He also mentioned that Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene had joined Mary and her sister at the cross. But perhaps they *couldn't bear to observe the suffering* of Jesus...so Mary and her sister probably departed (with John), while the other two retreated and *observed from a distance*.

With night approaching, they apparently returned to the city where they were staying (**Jerusalem, Bethany**, etc.)...because after the Sabbath, they were *seeking to assist* in the *preparation of Jesus' body for burial (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-3; Luke 24:1)*.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- The death of Jesus demands a response. What is your response to Jesus' death? The crowd jeered and mocked. The masses demanded His crucifixion. The centurion and the thief believed.