



MURRAY MCLELLAN

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

**GOD'S OWN
COMMENTARY**

**A STUDY OF
MATTHEW 27:45-54**

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Grace Fellowship

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Foreword

Presented by Murray McLellan [an unworthy sinner upon whom has been bestowed the mighty grace of God. “*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord’*”(1 Corinthians. 1:30-31 NKJV)].

I do not claim to be, nor seek to be, original in the following manuscript. I seek to magnify and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Unto him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The following writings were originally presented in Grace Fellowship and are provided freely for the glory of God and for the edification of his people. There is little that is original with me. By his grace, God has molded me through his Word, the people I have met, and the books I have read. I am indebted to many brothers and sisters of the faith whom God has blessed with insight and wisdom, and I am thankful that he has allowed them to share with people like me. To all these friends, some of whom I have never met, I offer my thanks. To God be the glory.

Introduction

For the most part, the world is aware of the story of the death of Jesus Christ but has very little understanding as to its real significance. What is the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus? For the answer to that question, I can think of no better place to look than to God's own testimony given to us in the Scriptures. In fact, in Luke 24:25-27, 44-47, and Acts 1:3, we see that Jesus Christ and his "suffering" (of which the Cross is central), through which he would enter into his glory, is the theme of all redemptive history. You can see this theme quite clearly even by a brief look at the events from the beginning of Genesis to the culmination of the events of the Cross.

In Genesis 3:15, we read of the seed of the woman; that he would crush the serpent's head, while he himself would be bruised in the heel. Jesus, as he was being bruised on the Cross in his humanity, bruised (literally, crushed) in a fatal way, the one who was bruising him!

In Genesis 22, in the episode of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, we learn more of the Cross. There is to be a substitute! Abraham's seed or offspring will be the ultimate substitute and through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

We go on to read of Moses and the Exodus from slavery through a great redemption. Included in this is the Passover, and later, all the sacrifices that

teach the need for shed blood and atonement for sin. We continue to learn about the Cross.

The Psalms, such as Psalm 22, clearly proclaim the Cross. Isaiah 53 gives us the theology of the Cross. Zechariah, too, speaks of the one who was pierced. Truly, Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets all speak of the Christ's suffering and entering into his glory.

In the New Testament, Paul proclaims to the believers, "Christ became a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Peter says that he who was just, bore the sins for the unjust, suffering to bring them to God. John calls Jesus the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The writer to the Hebrews states that we who believe "have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The Cross is proclaimed from beginning to end in the Scriptures.

To help us grasp the wonder of the Cross, we now want to focus on one particular passage - Matthew 27:45-54. In this passage, Matthew delineates its meaning through the signs attending the death of Christ. This is God's own commentary—God's own testimony—to the meaning of the Cross of Christ! The sky did not just get dark without purpose or simply for incidental reasons. The veil did not tear, the earth did not shake, and the saints were not raised without reason; but as God's testimony to the meaning of the Cross of Christ. Let's read our passage in its entirety and then we will proceed in an attempt to unfold some of the depths of the riches God has placed here.

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And 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?" Some of

those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him." And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

(Matthew 27:45-54 NKJV)

Supernatural Darkness

v. 45-46

God's first sign was darkness.

Luke 2:9-11 tells us that when Christ was born there was a great light in the sky. The prophets taught that when Jesus came, he would be a light to the Gentiles. In John 8, Jesus himself said, *"I am the Light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness."* Moreover, in John 12, Jesus said, *"A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you ... while you have the light, believe in the light."*

Light is associated with the birth and life of Christ, but his death is marked by darkness ... *"from the sixth hour (twelve noon) until the ninth hour (three in the afternoon)."* Mark 15:25 tells us that he was crucified at the third hour (nine in the morning). He was on the Cross, in the light, for three hours where he endured mocking, jeering, rebukes, and sarcastic, unbelieving taunts. As the second three hours begin, darkness comes *"over all the land."* We don't know how widespread this darkness was. That is not the point of this or any of the other signs God gives. People often analyze and debate the signs instead of looking at that to which the sign points.

What does this mean? What is God communicating to man through this darkness?

Some say that this was nature's way of veiling Christ. Others say that God was showing the world they were committing a great crime. Still others feel that God did this as an act of sympathy to cover the nakedness of his Son. Some think that it is a divine protest against what was happening.

In the Scriptures, we will see that darkness is a symbol of divine judgment. Read Isaiah 5:24-30; 13:9-11 and note that among other signs during the day of the wrath of the Lord, the sun will be darkened. This is taught also in Joel 2:30-32, Amos 5:18-20, and Zephaniah 1:14-2:2. These verses tell us that during the coming great and awesome day of the Lord's anger and judgment against sin, the sun will be turned to darkness.

God's salvation is seen as light. God's judgment is seen as darkness. In Egypt, darkness fell before the last plague—the death of the first-born. In Matthew 8:12, 2 Peter 2:17, Jude 13, and Joel 2:1-2, 10-11, darkness is associated with judgment.

In the darkness at the Cross, God is revealing that this is a place of divine judgment. It is a place for the pouring out of divine wrath. This is an act of God's judgment associated with the day of the Lord which brings in the Kingdom. I would suggest to you, dear reader, the Day of the Lord has already come for the believer! It occurred on the Cross at Calvary; when our substitute took God's anger as he became a curse for us who believe—the just for the unjust—who became sin for us.

There is one thing that God judges—one thing against which God pours out his wrath--- and that is sin. Thus, this is God's divine judgment on sin—attested to by the supernatural darkness. Where was that sin?

In Matthew 27:46, Jesus cries out, quoting from Psalm 22. He is proclaiming God's Word. He is fulfilling Psalm 22! Habakkuk 1:13 tells us God is "*of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.*" God turns his back because he cannot look on sin. What does that tell us about the Cross? Sin was there. Jesus became sin for us and thus God turned his back on his Son's cries. Oh, Christian, don't you dare take your salvation lightly! "*Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses*" (Rom. 4:25). "*Christ died for our sins*" (1 Cor. 15:3). "*Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree*" (1 Pet. 2:24). "*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust*" (1 Pet. 3:18). "*God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:10). "*Christ became a curse for us*" (Gal. 3:13). He "*who knew no sin became sin for us*" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus never became a sinner—though he was treated as if he were guilty for the sins of all who would ever believe. Even in this cry, we see that his heart longs for and desires, not sin, but communion with God. That shows his pure heart. While he bore sin, he did not become a sinner.

The darkness demonstrates that God is judging. What is he judging? He is judging sin. Where was the sin he was judging? It was on Christ.

In spite of this, the people in the next few verses continue to mock. Indeed they are in darkness—both physically and spiritually! John records in his Gospel (19:30), that after receiving the needed moisture for his final cry, Jesus shouts the victory cry—"*Tetelestai*"---it is finished or paid in full! The hymn writer expressed it exactly:

"My sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"

Verse 50 of Matthew 26 tells us that after crying out with a loud voice, Jesus "*yielded up His spirit.*" The word "yielded" is a word that proclaims an act of

one's own will or volition. Jesus' life was not taken from him; he voluntarily gave it up by an act of his will.

John 10:11: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."*

John 10:15, 17-18: *"As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.... Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, and I have power to take it again..."*

At the moment of his death, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The Veil Rent

v. 50-51

We now come to the second sign that Matthew gives us to unfold the meaning and significance of the Cross. We need to remember that the Gospel writers were not historians. They were theologians who had a reason for everything they chose to record. Matthew did not want us to know that the temple veil was torn in two just to fill in space with historical data. He had a clear reason for informing us of that significant event as well as for every other event he includes. This again is God's own commentary on the meaning of the death of Christ.

The temple veil did not tear in two from top to bottom because of the earthquake. Nor could human hands have torn that sacred covering. It was God himself who had that veil rent in two in a great sign that proclaimed the Old Covenant was finished and the promised New Covenant had now been established. The rent veil signified the total end of Judaism: the sacrificial system, Aaron's priesthood, the whole system of types and shadows and ceremonies had come to an end. Those shadows all pointed to this time when Messiah would fulfill all these things (Col. 2:16-17; Gal. 3:19-4:31; Heb. 7:21-28; 8:1-13; 9:1-15, 23-26; 10:1-22). In effect, that veil said, "As long as you come on the basis of this covenant (the Mosaic or Old Covenant), presenting your own righteousness and obedience and an animal sacrifice to

cover your sin, you'll never find rest. You'll never find peace. You'll never be granted the inheritance." This covenant of pictures and shadows was intended to reveal sinfulness and lead those under it to look for a righteousness outside of themselves—the righteousness of another. It was to lead them to trust in Jesus Christ—the Mediator of the Better Covenant (Gal. 3:19-4:7). The torn veil signified that the way into the presence of God for poor sinners like you and me was now wide open.

The veil and the temple proclaimed, "God is holy! Stay away!" The tearing of the veil in two from top to bottom reversed all that and now the message is "whosoever will, come!"

The old veil prevented access. The new veil (Jesus) secures access into the presence of God with full assurance of faith. "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh ...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22). The word new in this passage is a word whose root means, "freshly slaughtered." The great paradox is that Jesus' slaughter brings life. His death is the only way to life that is eternal!

Let's examine more closely this veil of cloth that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and later the temple. God had delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, and at Mt. Sinai they became a nation as God entered into a conditional covenant with them. This is recorded in Exodus 19:1-8. Under this covenant (now called the Old Covenant) the condition for blessing was perfect obedience. "Do" and be blessed. Disobedience brought the curse of death (see Gal. 3:10 and 2 Cor. 3:7-18). This meant condemnation to those who were, by their very natures, sinners. Oh, how much more glorious is the New and better Covenant! No longer is it do. Now

it is DONE! The Old said, “Do or die!” There was nothing wrong with the law. It was holy, just, and good. The problem was with men, who are sinners by nature. The New Covenant is not, “Do and live!” but “It is done—only believe!” We rest in the complete, perfect, and finished work of Jesus Christ. This is the Sabbath rest of the New Covenant. Jesus earned the blessings of the Covenant made with Israel at Sinai. (See the blessings promised in Exod. 19:5-6 and fulfilled in the church in 1 Pet. 2:9-10). He is the one Israelite that lived a life of perfect obedience under the law. That covenant demanded absolute perfection to gain its blessings and if you came short, it demanded your death. Man could not bring to that covenant the obedience it demanded and once man broke that covenant, he couldn’t bring a sacrifice that would really atone for sin. Not only did Christ earn, by his holy life, every single blessing that covenant promised, but he also solved the problem of the law’s curse. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). He died the death that disobedience demanded. He perfectly satisfied the law’s demand against sin by being a perfect sacrifice. Thus God the Father raised him up and set him at his right hand as Lord and King. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests (i.e. of the Old Covenant), to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:25-28).

In Exodus chapters 25-40, God gave instructions on how to build the tabernacle in the wilderness. This “building” was where man was to meet with God during the time when the Old Covenant was in force. Read Exodus 26:30-34. The veil was put in place to isolate this one little cube-shaped room, called the Most Holy Place. It was there that God himself dwelt in his

immediate or manifest presence. That veil separated him as a holy God and said, “Sinners, stay out. Don’t you dare come into God’s presence.” Aaron’s two sons learned this lesson when fire went out from the Lord and devoured them (Lev. 10:1-3). The Lord then proclaimed to Aaron, “By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.” In Lev. 16:2, the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.”

According to Exodus 30:9, Numbers 16:46, and Leviticus 10:1, Aaron’s two sons had brought in either burning coals or incense from a different source, not in accordance to God’s command. You do not add or take away from God’s Word! You must approach God as he says. It does not matter how sincere you are, for such “sincerity” is arrogance and pride, in that you do not submit to the commands of the all-wise and sovereign God.

The message of that whole system is that God is holy and men are sinners. God cannot approach men without anger against their sin and men cannot approach God because of their guilt and shame. The veil testified that the way into God’s presence was not yet opened up (it was future—see Heb. 9:8).

Leviticus 16 explains the Day of Atonement, when Aaron, the high priest, on this one day of the year, solemnly lifted a corner of this veil with fear and trembling, carrying blood and holy incense. He had to be girded in holy linen garb and washed ceremonially clean in water. The Lord said, “Tell Aaron not to come whenever he chooses—lest he die.”

How different this is from the New Covenant in Hebrews 4:16: *“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and*

find grace to help in time of need.” The same thought is expressed in Hebrews 10:19-22.

Despite the fact that God dwelt in their midst, the people of God (including even Moses) could not go into his presence.

It is no wonder then, that this question was asked in Job 25:4, “*How then can man be righteous before God?*” Every religion in the world tries to answer this question—“How can man be justified with God?” How do you bridge the gap—that great gulf fixed—between man and God? And all other religions give the wrong answer by either minimizing the character of God—denying his sovereignty or holiness and emphasizing only love—or magnifying man and exalting his will, putting everything into the hands of men. Usually both are done.

However, once you face the facts of the awesome holiness of the sovereign God and the insignificance and sinfulness of man, then you’ll ask once again, “How then can man be justified or made right with God?” That veil was set up as a barrier between the holy God and sinful man until that question was fully answered; until Matthew 27 could be written! “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” All the Old Covenant is fulfilled and he ratifies the New Covenant with his own blood. Not only is this New Covenant for the nation of Israel, but for all the nations of the world! This is because Jesus Christ is so worthy. The Father stated in Isaiah 49:6, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles (literally: nations), that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”

It is through Jesus Christ, the new and living way, that sinful creatures can have access into the very presence of holy God and not be consumed—can, in fact, actually draw close to our Lord’s bosom, and be loved as his own special children. Oh, Abba Father! (Gal. 4:4-7, Rom. 8:1-17, Eph. 2).

The torn veil was a notice of unemployment for the Levitical priests. By tearing the veil, God was saying, “You don’t work here any more!” They had worked for centuries and they never finished the job and never would. But there has arisen another Priest—after the order of Melchizedek—and he has, by his once-for-all sacrifice, accomplished what the Levitical priesthood could never do. He offered himself as sacrifice once—once, because he finished the job! I, like all believers, have assurance and boldness to enter the Holiest, not because I find myself to be worthy, but because he is so worthy. “To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). We are terrible sinners, but let me tell you something. We have a great High Priest! He is the cause of our boldness because he has finished the work and sat down, and God has said, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more!” (Read Heb. 10:11-17).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would come with blood and incense. He would remove his holy garments and put on simple garments of white linen (Lev. 16:2-4). Our Great High Priest, in the New Covenant, laid aside his glory and took upon himself the form of a servant—a righteous man—and offered up himself—his own blood for his people (Phil. 2:6-11).

Read Leviticus 16 in light of Jesus Christ. Both the priest and the sacrifice had to be undefiled and without blemish. Our Jesus is the perfect, holy, High Priest. He is the burnt offering. He is the goat that was sacrificed—the sin offering—to propitiate the holy law of God and turn away God’s wrath, bringing the sinner into favor. He is the scapegoat—the one forsaken—laden

down with the sins of his people. He has carried our sins away; bearing our iniquities. How far has he carried them? Why as far as the east is from the west! “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). Do you see in the Old there is “a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ!” (Col. 2:17)?

It is God who has torn that veil. We did not open it up ourselves. Had we come to that veil and opened it ourselves, we would have been consumed! Only God can tear and remove the veil that blocked access into his holy presence. Only he can clear the sinner’s guilt, without compromising his holiness and his law’s demands. I am guilty, but I fear no condemnation because of Christ and his perfect work. I am guilty, but where do I take my sin? Do I take it back to Mt. Sinai to be judged on my own merits—my own righteousness—to have the law thunder against me? No! I take my sin to the throne room of God—where the Lord of heaven and earth is a mercy seat who has been accepted into God’s holy presence. And I know I’m accepted in him. The same is true for every truly repentant believer in Jesus Christ.

What a hope we have in Jesus Christ! *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”* (Heb. 6:19-20).

The picture here is of a ship coming to harbor. Harbors were not dug out in today’s manner, and entering one was dangerous. If it was night and dark, ships couldn’t go in. However, they couldn’t stay out in the deep sea with its billows and raging waves or they would drift to their doom. So they had little boats called forerunners. The forerunner would come out to the ship and the crew would put the anchor in the forerunner. It would then be rowed to shallow water where the anchor would be secured. So even though the ship

was out there with the wind and the waves, it was anchored in the harbor! It would be brought in safely when the light dawned.

Life can get tough and there are raging times, but if you have come to God through Christ, you are tied to somebody within the veil! The sin that separated us from God is taken away in Christ. That veil is not rolled up and put away so that it might be put back in its place at some future time. Oh no. The divine hand tore it from top to bottom. It can never be hung up again. Nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Read Rom. 8:31-39). Our Lord is already in the presence of his holy Father, “behind the veil.” Our forerunner will one day take us to himself—there where he is. Isn’t this a better covenant (Heb. 8:6)? Can we ever say enough about him?

The Rocks Rent

v. 51

We have seen that there is much spiritual reality behind the physical acts of God at the time of the crucifixion of the Lord. In Matthew 27:51, we see also at that time, “*the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.*” The word here—split is the same word in the original Greek as is used in regard to the veil—torn. I believe that the rending, or tearing, of the rocks opened up the graves mentioned in verse 52. In that time and place, graves were in caves and rock tombs.

In Luke 19, as Jesus came into Jerusalem during that final week before the Cross, the multitudes cried out, referring to Jesus as the Messiah of whom the prophets had foretold. When rebuked by the religious leaders, Jesus said to them, “*I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out*” (Luke 19:40). And the stones did indeed cry out when Jesus finished the work and fulfilled that “*which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures*” (Rom. 1:2).

If you remember the passages that we looked at regarding darkness and God’s judgment, you will recall also there was earth quaking. The Day of the Lord, the prophets said, would come with earthquakes (Joel 3:14-16; Joel 2:1-2a, 10; Isa. 13:6-13). In Haggai 2:6-9, 21-22, we see that shaking signifies the

removal of kingdoms and the establishment of another. Shaking brought in the Old Covenant as Mt. Sinai shook. Shaking at Golgotha (and also at the resurrection) brought in the New Covenant. The Kingdom has come and the King promises yet another shaking, once he has gathered all of his elect safely into the fold. Read Hebrews 12:25-29! God is going to shake everything one day to show his entire created universe that there are some things that are unshakable—Christ and his Kingdom!

During the earthquake at the time of the crucifixion, the rocks were rent. Jesus was fulfilling the picture given many years earlier in the days of Moses in the wilderness. *“Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap. In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all night with a light of fire. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths. He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers”* (Ps. 78:12-16).

“...Say, ‘The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!’ And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out” (Isa. 48:20-21).

1 Corinthians 10:4 clearly tells us that the rock was a picture of Christ. He was struck—the veil of his flesh was torn—and out flowed a river of living water; a cleansing fountain of which Jesus said, *“...whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14).

When God struck his Son, the rock split and there was opened up a cleft. As the Lord said to Moses, *“I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand”* so that you will not be consumed by my presence (See

Exod. 33), so Jesus Christ is the only refuge for sinners. “*Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one!*” (Isa. 44:8).

Truly the finished work of Christ set about rending rocky hearts to bring freedom and new life in Jesus Christ!

Dead Raised to Life

v. 52-53

When Christ finished the work that he had come to do, the earth shook, the rocks were split and the tombs were opened. After Christ's resurrection, many bodies of the saints who had previously died came out of their tombs and went into the holy city (which I take to be Jerusalem) and were seen by many.

There seems to be either much overlooking of this event or else much speculation as to the details not given to us by God. What does this passage tell us about these details:

- Who they were?
- Did they die again or did they ascend to heaven?
- Did they receive a glorified body?
- Did they appear only to believers, as did the resurrected Christ?

What profit is there to speculate about these things, when they are clearly absent by the design of God? Let us not be of those who puzzle their heads when they should be inspecting their hearts.

We cannot speak with certainty about many of the details—for God does not reveal them to us. However, what he did want us to hear and know, he stated! He “*has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Pet. 1:3). I believe that if we wander off into that about which what Paul warns Timothy—vain babblings and speculations—we will miss the point God wants us to see. What he wants us to see, I believe, is his testimony of his Son and the meaning of the Cross.

When that earthquake came and the rocks were rent, some tombs were opened. What would have been in those tombs? Dry, dead bones!

Let us look to the prophet Ezekiel to help us see what God was proclaiming through this sign. In chapter 36, verses 25-26 there is the promise of the New Covenant, repeated from Ezekiel 11:19-20, “*Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*” Notice the purpose of this covenant in verses 21-23 and 32; it is not for Israel’s sake, but out of concern for God’s own holy name, which Israel had profaned among the Gentiles.

What is promised in this New Covenant? Verse 25 speaks of the forgiveness and cleansing of sins. Verse 26 talks of a new heart—a living one, instead of a stony, self-willed one. This refers to a new birth with a heart of flesh—to one who is born anew with a pliable and responsive nature. In addition, verse 27 speaks of the Spirit to empower obedience.

In Ezekiel chapter 37, we see what it is that God is teaching through a tremendous vision. Verses 1-10 connect what Ezekiel sees back to the promise that he had heard in the previous chapter (i.e. v. 8—a heart of flesh; v. 9-10—the Spirit).

This is an incredible scene. Dry, dead bones are brought back to life again, simply through the proclamation of God's Word! The result is a new and living nation—a creation of God —based upon his mercy and grace. This is the New Covenant promise!

Now look at verses 11-14. Read them carefully in light of what we have read in Matthew 27. I will reproduce the verses here because I do not want anyone to miss this. However, I greatly encourage you to read the entire scene of Ezekiel 36 and 37.

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD."

(Ezek 37:11-14)

The New Covenant is here! When God opened the graves and dead saints were raised, and those same saints walked into Jerusalem, Israel should have known that this Jesus, whom they crucified, was Lord! The King—David's Greater Son—has set up his kingdom (see Ezek. 37:23-28). The covenant of peace—the everlasting covenant has been established (Ezek. 37:26). David's Seed has established his kingdom, without yet uprooting the kingdom of men

(Matt. 13:24-43)—until that day when all the sheep have been gathered into the fold (Matt. 24:14). Then what is now hidden will be made fully manifest and the King of kings will come in all his glory and there will be the ultimate resurrection of the saints—not just this ‘wave offering’.

We learn of the wave offering in Leviticus 23. *“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land which I shall give you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it””’ (Lev. 23:9-11).*

The firstfruits symbolized the consecration of the whole harvest to God. It was a pledge of the whole harvest to come. Notice in verse 11 that the sheaf was to be waved before the Lord on the day after the Sabbath—the first day of the week! Do you see the fulfillment in Christ? In Matthew 27, we see Jesus Christ take a wave offering of saints, on the day after the Sabbath (after his resurrection), as a pledge of the whole harvest to come!

These saints in Matthew 27, raised up out of their graves, were the firstfruits of a mighty army of God. These “firstfruits” of verses 52-53, were waved before God the Father, in the holy city, consecrating the whole harvest to God! By this, God also is showing that those who believed in Christ prior to the Cross were saved by that same Cross and thus had resurrection life and will participate in his kingdom.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live!”

But Jesus answered them saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you,

unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

(John 12:23-24)

From out of Jesus' death, comes life!

Conclusion

In this scene of the Cross and the subsequent days, we have an incredible preview of what will happen when Jesus returns in his glory—to fully manifest his kingly authority. The sun will be darkened and he will judge the world in righteousness. The foundation of the world will be shaken, and he will break down all religious systems except the worship of God alone! The saints will be resurrected unto eternal life and will enter the holy city—the New Jerusalem—that holy place “*by a new (freshly slaughtered) and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil; that is, His flesh*” (Heb. 10:20).

It is in the Cross that the veil is taken away, rocky hearts are rent and cry out to God, and those dead in trespasses and sins, buried in sepulchers of lust and evil, are made alive and come out from among the dead and go into the holy city—the New Jerusalem! What a glorious New Covenant! Is this not a great salvation? “*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?*” (Heb. 2:3-4).

Dear reader, there is a coming Day of the Lord. It will be an awful and terrible day and who will be able to stand? There is only one place of refuge where guilty sinners may flee from the wrath to come. It is the place where God's

wrath against sin has already been poured out in full. It was there, on the Cross, where Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, was slain for the sins of all who would come to him in repentance and faith. Christ alone is where a guilty rebel can find a refuge and much, much more!

God is a just Judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. (Ps. 7:11)

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out... (Acts 3:19)

Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him. (Ps. 2:12)

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

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