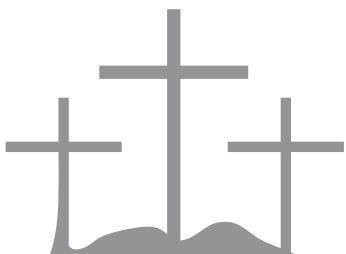
MIRACLES AT THE CROSS



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Miracles at the Cross

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Published by The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd.
Holly, MI 48442

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First Edition, March 2024

Printed in the United States of America

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PREFACE

“Come, and see the victories of the cross. Christ’s wounds are thy healings, His agonies thy repose, His conflicts thy conquests, His groans thy songs, His pains thine ease, His shame thy glory, His death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation.” Matthew Henry

“Miracles at the Cross” takes a deeper look into five events during the death of Jesus Christ that were clearly directed by God. These items are amazing individually, but as a group, they can only be explained as intentional actions by God Almighty.

“Miracles at the Cross” examines the timeliness of the mid-day darkness, the veil in the Temple being torn in two from top to bottom, an actual earthquake, graves being opened with people coming back to life, and the climax in the resurrection of Jesus.

“Miracles at the Cross” contains five study guides for personal study or a group discussion and thirty devotions applying the truths to everyday life. *“Miracles at the Cross”* will help convince you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

lesson 1

DARKNESS

Dr. Randy T. Johnson





I have mixed emotions about December 21st.

On a positive note, it is our son-in-law's birthday. We are thankful for him and so pleased with how he cherishes our daughter. He is a nice addition to the family and he appreciates gifts. We try to make sure his birthday does not get missed being so close to Christmas.

On a negative note, it is the shortest day of the year (Michigan, Northern Hemisphere). In 2023, if you worked an 8:00 am – 5:00 pm job, you probably missed daylight. Sunrise was 7:57 am and sunset was 5:02 pm. Only nine hours and five minutes of light are not enough.

1. Do you have a relative whose birthday is near a holiday? Do you make any special arrangements to celebrate them?

_____
_____
_____

2. How does darkness affect people? What suggestions do you have to help them?

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_____
_____

One miracle at the cross that may not receive much consideration is the darkness. It is such a noteworthy event that three writers point it out.

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." Matthew 27:45

"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Mark 15:33

"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Luke 23:44

3. What initial observation do you make concerning these passages?

_____

_____

_____

Three questions that need to be addressed are when this happened, what happened, and why it happened.

- *First, when did the darkness happen?*

Mark 15:25 says, ***"And it was the third hour when they crucified him."*** *"The Bible Knowledge Commentary"* states, "Using the Jewish method of counting hours from sunrise (and sunset) Mark alone recorded that Jesus' crucifixion took place at the third hour, that is, 9 A.M." Jesus was put through several court trials throughout the night and was crucified at nine in the morning.

Mark 15:33 continues, ***"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour."*** The third hour was nine in the morning; therefore, three hours later (***"the sixth hour"***) was noon. Noon was when the sun was at its zenith. A cowboy fan might say, "It was high noon, partner." This darkness continued for three hours until three in the afternoon (***"the ninth hour"***). Kent Hughes points out, "The Greek tenses indicate that it came suddenly, and all the Gospels regard it as a supernatural wonder."

4. What events do you recall from the time Jesus was on the cross?

_____

_____

_____

5. How would the darkness have played into the scene for everyone?

_____

_____

_____

- *Second, what happened?*

Concerning the darkness, I like the description given in Luke 23:44-45, ***"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two."*** Luke says that the sun ***"failed."***

6. What thoughts come to mind when you think of failing? How does failing relate to this passage?

_____

_____

_____

Please remember that the night before Jesus was celebrating the Passover with His disciples. James Edwards (*"The Pillar New Testament Commentary"*) points out, "The darkness at the crucifixion cannot be well accounted for by natural phenomena: solar eclipses do not occur when the moon is full at Passover; nor is a dust storm likely during the wet spring season." Warren Wiersbe agrees, "At noon, a miraculous darkness came over the land, and all creation sympathized with the Creator as He suffered. This was indeed a miracle and not some natural phenomenon, such as a sand storm or an eclipse. It would not be possible to have an eclipse during full moon at Passover." Darkness in the middle of the day was clearly an act of God. He can use nature to perform miracles, but this time He acts directly. This day is both the greatest day for mankind (Jesus dying for our sin) and the lowest day ever as God takes the spotlight off of His Son.

7. Other than “Good Friday,” what would be an appropriate title for this day?

_____

_____

_____

This darkness was foretold in the Old Testament.

“‘And on that day,’ declares the Lord God, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.’” Amos 8:9-10

“A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.” Joel 2:2

“The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” Zephaniah 1:14-15

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.” Isaiah 60:1-2

8. What descriptions are associated with darkness in these passages?

_____

_____

_____

9. What could Amos mean in saying, ***"mourning for an only son"***?

_____

_____

_____

Ronald Kernaghan (*"The IVP New Testament Commentary Series"*) makes a noteworthy observation, "This scene depicts a time of utter silence. Mark records no gibes, insults or mockery. There is only darkness." I imagine time stood still.

- *Third, why did the darkness happen?*

Commentators basically agree that the darkness was associated with man's sin being placed on Jesus.

"Was probably a cosmic sign of God's judgment on human sin which was placed on Jesus." John Grassmick (*"The Bible Knowledge Commentary"*)

"We are not able to enter into the fullness of the desolation felt by Jesus at this moment as the Father regarded him as sin. This desolation was the deepest suffering." A.T. Robertson (*"Word Pictures in the New Testament"*)

"There can be little doubt that Mark understood the darkness as God's supernatural act and associated it with his judgment." Walter W. Wessel (*"The Expositor's Bible Commentary"*)

"Darkness at noon, by its paradoxical nature, was a fitting sign for God the Creator to give to those who had rejected the light of the world." R. Alan Cole (*"Tyndale New Testament Commentaries")*

"The darkness at Calvary was an announcement that God's Firstborn and Beloved Son, the Lamb of God, was giving His life for the sins of the world. It was also an announcement that judgment was coming

and men had better be prepared." Warren Wiersbe (*"The Bible Exposition Commentary"*)

H. D. M. Spence-Jones (*"The Pulpit Commentary"*) records some of the observations from several historical figures.

"There was a great and remarkable eclipse of the sun, above any that had happened before. At the sixth hour the day was turned into the darkness of night, so that stars were seen in the heaven." Phlegon of Tralles (Recorded by Eusebius)

"Either the God of nature, the Creator, is suffering, or the universe is dissolving." Dionysius (He saw this phenomenon at Heliopolis, in Egypt)

"The sun was constrained to withdraw his rays, and close his eyes, that he might not be compelled to look upon this crime of the Jews." St. Cyprian

"The creature could not bear the wrong done to its Creator. Therefore the sun withdrew his rays, that he might not behold the deeds of the wicked." St. Chrysostom

Scripture clearly states the reason for Jesus' death.

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:3-6

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:24

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

10. Why did Jesus die?

_____
_____
_____

The darkness ended with the lament of Jesus. Mark 15:34 records, ***"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"***

11. Why did Jesus say this?

_____
_____
_____

At three in the afternoon, the Son had finished His calling. Therefore, the sun could do its purpose and stop failing. Darkness was overcome by the light (and the Light). Everyone got to see some amazing events. We will discuss some of those in the upcoming lessons.

NOTES

GOD IS PRESENT IN OUR DARKEST HOURS

DEVOTION #1 - JOSH THAYER

I want to talk about a miracle that happened during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over the whole land, and the sun's light failed. It was not just a regular eclipse or anything like that. We are talking pitch-black darkness. It is like you are in your closet with the door shut. It was a miracle from God that testified to the divine nature of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 27:45 says, ***"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."*** Mark 15:33 reiterates, ***"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour."***

The darkness was a sign of God's power and His love for humanity. It also showed the magnitude of the sacrifice that Jesus made on behalf of all of us. He took upon Himself the sins of the world, and His death on the cross was not just a physical death; it was a spiritual death as well.

However, the darkness was not just a sign of judgment. It was also a sign of hope. It was a sign of the resurrection, which demonstrated God's power over death and sin. Even in our darkest moments, God is still in control, and He can turn our mourning into joy. That is pretty miraculous.

What can we take away from this? I think it is pretty simple. We need to have faith in the miraculous power of God. He is still working miracles today, just like He did during the crucifixion. We may not always understand what is happening in our lives or in the world

around us, but we can trust that God is in control and that He is working all things together for our good and His glory.

Please remember the miraculous events that happened during the crucifixion, and have faith in the power of God to work miracles today. He is more than we will ever need and He is always with us!

"GOLF-1. ALL SECURE"

DEVOTION #2 - JOE WILSON

Have you ever found yourself in darkness? I am talking about the truest kind of darkness, the darkness where you cannot even see your hand in front of you. You can feel its presence, but you cannot see it.

Your senses are at such a heightened state, you can hear and feel each and every breath you take, each and every beat of your heart. Reading this, you may feel your pulse begin to speed up as you contemplate the fear of being in a darkness that is unlike anything you have felt before. Just to add another aspect, there is no light switch. The darkness is outside of your control.

As I write this, the one situation that stands out clearest in my mind is that of my first duty station after joining the military. Being of a lower rank at that time, I drew the short stick of walking a fence line during the midnight shift. This fence line was not any normal fence line where you could see people, places, or things. All you could see was a small glimmer of a red lens flashlight off a chain link fence. There was so much that was unknown and so much to be fearful of. I often was just waiting on the sun to rise. I looked forward to hearing that voice on the radio calling my call sign, "Golf-1. Status?" It was code for reassuring them I was okay and reassuring myself I was okay.

Luke 23:44-49 records, **"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said,**

‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.”

As Jesus Christ hung on the cross, He was paying the ultimate sacrifice for my sin, for your sin, and the entire world’s sin. From noon to 3:00 pm it was dark (***“while the sun’s light failed”***). It was darkness, unlike anything they had experienced before. Were they waiting for the sun to rise to erase and explain the unknown? Maybe. Not knowing any better they just accepted the darkness they found themselves in.

I am so thankful that the Son rose in my life. He reassured me by providing the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide me. He did gave the true hope of an eternal relationship with God.

Thank you, Lord. “Golf -1. All secure in You!”

A DARK WARNING

DEVOTION #3 - MARK PITTENGER

Every year in August, my family takes a trip up north to Roscommon, Michigan. My grandparents own a cabin up there so this has been a family tradition that started when my mom was a kid. One of my favorite things about being up there is the night sky! Most nights, you can see so many stars! However, when the stars are covered by clouds or you get into the forests at night, it can get very, very dark! A few years back, my mom was reading about a cemetery that is about 20 minutes from the cabin. It is the remains of an 1870s lumber settlement and is claimed to be one of Michigan's eeriest places to visit. So, of course, we had to go!

After driving down a few backroads and a two-track trail, we arrived at the cemetery. There is a forest around three sides of it and a small parking lot on the other. There were no lights there and we arrived just before dusk. We decided to wander into the woods and check it out. So, there we go, my uncle first, I followed behind him, and then a line behind me consisting of other family members. Not long after getting into the woods, the sky darkened and we could not see anything. It was so dark that we had to hold onto the shirt of the person in front of us to stay together! We eventually made it back to the parking lot safely, with a great story to tell!

Anyone who has experienced this type of darkness knows the eeriness of it. However, this darkness could be explained by nature! In Mark 15:33, we see a kind of darkness that could not be explained naturally. It is a kind of darkness that only made sense with a supernatural explanation. Mark 15:33 reads, ***"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until***

the ninth hour." As Jesus hung on the cross giving His life for us, God the Father poured out the wrath of our sin onto Jesus. In doing so, it gave the people who were present at the crucifixion, a very apparent warning! At that moment, the whole earth was covered in darkness!

The Bible is not the only documentation of this darkness. Secular historian Thallus (52 A.D.), believed to be a Samaritan, documented this event. He is quoted as saying, "On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness." One of the things that make this event significant is that it happened at the sixth hour, meaning twelve-noon. This event described by Mark's Gospel, as well as a secular historian, happens in the middle of the day!

Thallus is further quoted as saying, "This darkness appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun." He is saying it looks like an eclipse, but no eclipse is happening. It is just deep darkness without reason! What a powerful statement coming from a secular historian; however, he could not be more wrong. There was a reason! God was warning the people what life without Jesus looks like. It is a place that would be described as dark, earth-shaking, uncomfortable, and unpleasant.

Old Testament prophecy, which the witnesses would be familiar with, foretold of this event. Joel 2:10 reads, ***"The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining."*** Even knowing this prophecy, while witnessing this event unfold before their eyes, the Jews did not accept what was happening.

Although they had enough to know Him and should have known Him, we have something more than they did. We have the Old Testament prophecy and the documentation of those prophecies being fulfilled in the New Testament. We have the proof that Jesus is who He said He is and that He endured the wrath of His Father for our sake.

It is a scary feeling to be lost in darkness, so I ask, do you realize the significance of the darkness at the cross and what it means for us? We do not have to suffer the wrath of God. Jesus paid it all!

Amos 8:9 adds, ***"'And on that day,' declares the Lord God, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.'"***

NOT A STORM

DEVOTION #4 - JEANNIE YATES

"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Mark 15:33

I did not grow up in an area of the country where there are tornados and tornado sirens. When you move from the West Coast to the Midwest in late October, no one warns you about these things. They say, "I hope you are ready for a lot of snow!" I was never cautioned with, "Michigan averages 15 tornados a year and you should be prepared to hear a loud siren test on the first Saturday." You can probably imagine our first storm season in Michigan was a little unnerving, to say the least!

Now, after almost 20 years, we are barely phased by the Saturday siren tests and, like true Michiganders, at the sound of an unscheduled siren, we head outside to look up at the sky. (Just kidding; kids, do not try that at home!) According to Google, there are several atmospheric warning signs that precipitate a tornado's arrival: dark greenish sky, wall clouds, approaching clouds of debris, and large hail. There is something awesomely terrifying about a darkening sky in the middle of the day. Once in a while, the clouds will be so massive and dark that it almost resembles the darkness of night. Unlike the tornadic skies of the Midwest, the darkness that surrounded the cross at the crucifixion of Jesus was not at all familiar and offered no physical explanation. It was a supernatural, miraculous event. There in the middle of the day, at noon (***"the sixth hour"***), darkness covered the whole land for three hours. In Luke's Gospel, he writes, ***"the sun's light failed"*** (Luke 23:45).

This was not the first time they had heard of such darkness. For hundreds of years and throughout generations, families would have passed down the story of God bringing plagues upon Egypt until Pharoah relented to Moses and let them go. One of these plagues was unexplainable darkness that lasted for three days. In Exodus 10:21-23, we read, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived."*** Like that plague in Egypt, this darkness at Golgotha was not a passing storm, a little black cloud, or even a temporary solar eclipse. This was unexplainable, complete darkness. The Old Testament prophet, Amos, spoke of this darkness saying, ***"'On that day,' declares the Lord God, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight'"*** (Amos 8:9).

Many times throughout the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as ***"the Light"*** and ***"darkness"*** represents evil, sin, and separation from God. In John 8:12, Jesus says, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** Through His death on the cross, ***"the Light of the World,"*** who lived a perfect, sinless life, took on all of the darkness. The full weight of all that we, as sin-filled humans, had done and will do was placed upon Him, and for three hours, all was dark. The commentator R. Kent Hughes puts it like this, "Because he became sin for us, he had to undergo the cosmic trauma of separation from God who ***'is light, and in him is no darkness at all'*** (1 John 1:5). In the dark of the cross's night, Jesus was *alone*. His separation was not just *felt*; it was *real*. God's holy nature demanded separation as the Son became sin."

Think about those three hours of darkness, separation, intense pain, loneliness, and the gravity of Christ's sacrifice for you and me. Take a moment to worship Jesus for enduring the darkness in your place.

Thank Him for His amazing love as you read the following lyrics from Chris Tomlin's song, *"Jesus Messiah."*

> He became sin, who knew no sin
> That we might become His righteousness
> He humbled Himself and carried the cross
> Love so amazing, love so amazing
> Jesus Messiah, Name above all names
> Blessed Redeemer, Emmanuel
> The Rescue for sinners, the Ransom from Heaven
> Jesus Messiah, Lord of all

JOY COMES WITH THE MORNING

DEVOTION #5 - RICH SAWICKI

"It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon." Luke 23:44 (NIV)

This verse depicts the darkness that fell over the land during the crucifixion of Jesus. It was a physical manifestation of the spiritual darkness that surrounded the people at that time.

Darkness in the Old Testament referred to God's judgment. Exodus 10:21-22 (the ninth plague was darkness) records, ***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days."***

As Christians, we understand that the death of Jesus on the cross was a sacrifice for our sins. We also understand that it was a dark and painful moment in history. However, even in the midst of that darkness, there was hope. Psalm 30:5 says, ***"For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."***

Jesus' death on the cross was not the end of the story. He rose from the dead three days later, proving that He had conquered sin and death. This is the message of hope that we hold onto as Christians.

When my wife and I struggled in our marriage and sought out counseling, we were reminded of a verse in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 that basically says that this too shall pass. We hold onto that Scripture closely to this day.

No matter what darkness we may face in our lives, we can have hope in Jesus. He is our light in the darkness, our hope in times of trouble. When we face difficult circumstances, we can turn to Him and trust that He will guide us through whatever comes our way.

Let us remember the darkness that fell over the land during Jesus' crucifixion, but let us also hold onto the hope of His resurrection.

May we trust in Him to guide us through the darkness we face in our lives, and may we always remember that He is our light and our salvation. Amen.

John 1:5 gives a beautiful reminder, ***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."***

FIGURATIVE AND LITERAL DARKNESS

DEVOTION #6 - PASTOR KYLE WENDEL

Have you ever experienced total darkness? I am referring to complete darkness. It is not the kind of dark where you can still see some things or can make out the silhouettes of items. I mean total darkness. It is terrifying. I would not label myself as someone afraid of the dark; however, I do not enjoy being in an area that I do not know and it is very dark.

My wife and I took a trip to the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky a few years back. The trip was incredible and we saw some awesome things. One of the craziest experiences I have ever had in my life was in those caves. We took a tour through the cave system. They had lights throughout the cave so you could see and it was not total darkness. However, we came to this giant cavern and the tour guide explained that he was going to turn off all of the lights for a moment. He instructed us to all sit down because it would be total darkness and we would not even be able to see our surroundings or each other. We laughed a little expecting to still be able to see some.

Next, the lights went out. It was complete darkness. I could not see anything. I could not see my wife right next to me. I could not even see my hand right in front of my face! If we were not with a group or guide, I could tell you that I would be terrified with no way to get out. It was absolute darkness.

In Scripture, we see a time when absolute darkness comes over the world. We see it happen when God judges Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but we also see it happen at Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew 27:45 records, ***"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."***

The crazy part about this is that it was not a natural occurrence. There was no solar eclipse that would have happened at this time. A solar eclipse cannot happen when there is a full moon and the feast of Passover would have happened during a full moon. So, there is no natural explanation for this happening. It was solely judgment from God. Specifically, it was the judgment on sin.

For three hours there was darkness. I find this ironic. The people were blind to what they were truly doing. They did not believe that they were crucifying the Son of God. They were blind to their sin. Now they have found themselves in darkness figuratively and literally.

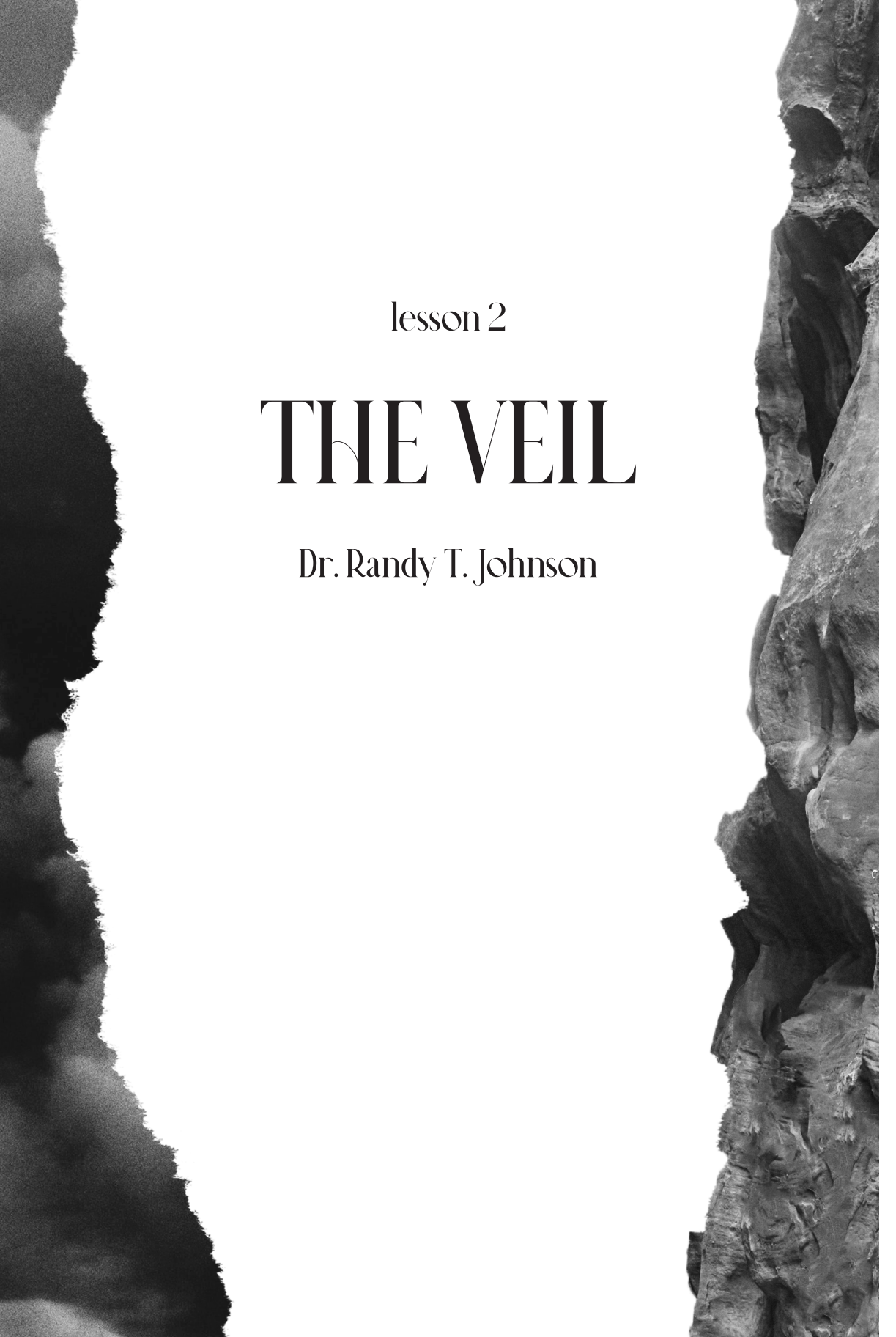
I often wonder about the people who crucified Jesus and the ones seeing it happen. How many would have realized what they had done? How many would have realized that Jesus was God? We know from Scripture that some did realize that what they had done was wrong. However, for some, the tough realization is that they chose to harden their hearts toward the Savior. They could try to make excuses and justify what was going on and the things that were going on around them.

One of the craziest things that blows my mind about the cross is that Jesus died for all of mankind, even the ones who physically nailed Him to the cross and mocked Him. Jesus loved them. Jesus knew them. He still died for them and their sins.

In reality, that is where we all sit. We may not have been the ones who physically nailed Jesus to the cross, but it was still our sin that did it. Our sin is what made Jesus willingly lay His life down on the cross. It is easy to condemn the people who were there and we quickly can forget that we did it too. We were all in darkness in our sin, but Jesus gave us light and life.

How great it is to have Jesus as our Savior, who took our place. He took our punishment from sin for us. All we have to do is believe and trust in Him. I pray over the next couple of weeks that we continue

to study the cross and be fascinated by the work of Jesus. We need to fall to our knees and worship Him for all that He has done for us. God is so good. God is so powerful. Let us worship Him.



lesson 2

THE VEIL

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Normally when we think of a veil, we envision a facial covering for a woman. However, *"Merriam-Webster"* lists curtain as a synonym for veil. Curtains normally cover a window for privacy. Most people do not like to feel as if they are living in a fishbowl.

In 2020, Hadley Keller wrote an interesting article titled, "11 Smart Ways Designers Use Curtains *Not* on Windows." The list is creative.

- Use them like wallpaper.
- Turn two rooms into one.
- Make a canopy bed.
- Use them as a door.
- Turn a closet into a bed nook.
- Give art a textual backdrop.
- Conceal storage.
- Create a shaded patio.
- Cover less than ideal walls.
- Create a headboard.
- Create a walk-in closet.

1. Which of these ways have you tried? What other ways have you used or seen curtains hooked?

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The Bible speaks of a very important curtain (veil). It separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where only the high priest could enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement. No one else (not even another priest) could ever enter it. Pastor Jack Wellman adds, "Only the high priest could do this and then only once a year but they tied a rope around his waist in the event he did something wrong and if he died as a result, they could drag him out from behind the curtain since they couldn't go in and get him and they too would perish. The veil represents

the separation of a Holy God from sinful mankind because our sins have separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2)."

2. What are some things you have heard of this veil?

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This veil was commanded by God. It was first described to Moses for use in the Tabernacle. Exodus 26:31-33 records, ***"And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy."*** In 2 Chronicles 3:14, Solomon continues the command when building the Temple, ***"And he made the veil of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it."*** This veil or curtain was still being used in the time of Jesus' earthly ministry.

This veil was quite substantial. Wybren H. Oord (*"The Veil of the Tabernacle"*) writes, "According to the Talmud, the veils were sixty feet long, thirty feet tall and four inches thick. Jewish tradition claims that the veils were so heavy it took three hundred priests to hang them." In an article from Liberty Gospel Tracts, the author agrees that the veil was "a handbreadth thick" (which is four inches) and added that "two horses could not have pulled it in two."

3. What are some benefits of this veil being so intense?

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The veil was also a piece of art. *"The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary"* documents some observations from the writings of Josephus (first-

century Jewish historian). He said the veil was in fact a tapestry woven in Babylon, on which was displayed a portrait of the heavens. Sweeney and Powell think this was probably the starry sky at night. Therefore, worshipers would associate God's presence in the Holy of Holies (which was hidden by the veil) with God's presence in the heavens (hidden by the firmament of the sky).

4. How have you pictured the veil?

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With this backdrop, we continue our study of the miracles at the cross of Jesus Christ. Matthew 27:51 says, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."*** The veil (curtain) being torn in two would have been devastating. No one was allowed to enter this holiest of places.

5. In what direction did the tear move? What could this emphasize?

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Louis A. Barbieri Jr. (*"The Bible Knowledge Commentary"*) notes, "This curtain separated the holy place from the holy of holies in the temple (Hebrews 9:2-3). The fact that this occurred from top to bottom signified that God is the One who ripped the thick curtain. It was not torn from the bottom by men ripping it. God was showing that the way of access into His presence was now available for everyone, not simply the Old Testament high priest."

A.T. Robertson (*"Word Pictures in the New Testament"*) adds, "This veil was a most elaborately woven fabric of seventy-two twisted plaits of twenty-four threads each and the veil was sixty feet long and thirty wide. The rending of the veil signified the removal of the

separation between God and the people." Through Jesus' death, we have access to God!

Warren W. Wiersbe (*"The Bible Exposition Commentary"*) says it very succinctly, "The rending of the veil symbolized the wonderful truth that the way was now open to God (Hebrews 10:14-26). There was no more need of temples, priests, altars, or sacrifices. Jesus had finished the work of salvation on the cross."

Jesus' death tore down any barrier to coming to God. We no longer have to go through a priest or any other person.

Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*"Preaching the Word"*) points out two truths that come from the veil being torn in the Temple. First, it showed judgment by symbolically saying, "It is all over." The moment after Jesus breathes his last breath, the temple in Jerusalem becomes a desolate house. Jesus' death brings final judgment to the temple. Second, it conveyed salvation by saying, "It is all open." While closing one door, Jesus' death opens another. Now, through Jesus and Him alone, the whole world is invited into the presence of God.

6. How did people go to God before the death of Jesus?

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7. Since the death of Jesus, how can people meet with God?

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I like to imagine what the priests did once the veil was torn. Did they cover their eyes? Did they run for safety? Once they realized they were still alive, did they look inside? Did they go inside? Did they reevaluate who Jesus was?

Hebrews 4:16 describes how we are to view meeting with God today, ***"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

8. What does the word ***"confidence"*** imply to you?

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Instead of the word ***"confidence,"*** the New Living Translation and King James Version tell us to ***"come boldly"*** to the throne of God.

9. Does this create another dimension in your mind?

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10. How should this affect our prayer life?

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Finally, Hebrews 10:19-22 brings it all together, ***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*** This ***"confidence"*** is again translated as coming ***"boldly"*** (NLT) and with ***"boldness"*** (KJV). Jesus opened the curtain so we can ***"draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."***

11. As we approach God, what should be the condition of our hearts? How do we do that?

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“His final piercing cry received an echoing response from the temple.” Chad Ashby

NOTES

MISSION: HIM-POSSIBLE

DEVOTION #1 - KARSEN THEEDE

As humans, we have a fascination with the impossible. It is present in the movies we watch as our favorite characters do death-defying stunts that should not be possible. It is present in sports. We love the idea of an underdog or a Cinderella story where a team does the impossible, overcomes the odds, and wins the game. Even outside of media, we see the fascination. Architects constantly push the bounds of what can be designed and built. Car manufacturers year after year do what was once impossible in years past and make cars lighter, faster, and more economic. The more and more you think about it, the more you realize we love it when humans push the boundaries of what is possible. However, if we look at Scripture, we humans do not always love it when God blows what is possible out of the water.

Right now we are studying miracles at the cross as an Easter series. We are taking a look at five different miracles that took place while Jesus was on the cross of Calvary. The first week's miracle was the darkness that fell over the land. The second miracle, and the one we are looking at today, is found in Matthew 27:51, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."***

This second miracle is the miracle of the veil (curtain). What makes this curtain so important? Two things are its size and what it was covering. Unlike the curtains we have in our houses, this one was a towering 30 feet high and 30 feet wide. To put that into perspective, that is about three stories high and it is said that it took 300 priests to hang the curtain. So, what calls for such a large curtain? The curtain

that was split was the curtain that was covering the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where the presence of God was. If someone were to enter, they had to be spiritually clean or they would die. The curtain was there to make sure that no one who was not spiritually clean entered the presence of God.

What was the miracle of the curtain? At the time Jesus took His last breath and yielded up His spirit, the three-story curtain was torn in half. In the first place, this was astounding that the curtain was even torn, but it was torn in half from top to bottom. No human could have done this. It was impossible, but not for God. After this physically impossible feat had happened, something else impossible happened: the Holy of Hollies opened, yet no one died. Now, anyone may enter God's presence by way of Jesus' blood. This impossible barrier separating us and God had been torn down by God and God alone. So remember, what is impossible for man is never out of the possibility of God.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES OPENED

DEVOTION #2 - MITCHELL HOLMES

When I say the word veil (or curtain), what comes to mind for you? Perhaps those words make you think of a wedding veil – a thin piece of fabric that covers the face of the bride on her wedding day. Maybe the word curtain makes you think of the thin pieces of cloth that hang in front of the windows at your house that can be drawn to block out sunlight. While both are accurate depictions of these words, the passage that we are going to talk about today speaks of a veil or curtain that blows these away, some might even say this veil or curtain was cut from a different cloth.

Matthew 25:51 says, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."*** This curtain was not some tiny bit of fabric. In his commentary, Kent Hughes says, "This curtain was the grandest of the thirteen curtains in the temple. It was woven with expensive yarns from Babylon in blue, white, red, and purple with representations of cherubim." This massive curtain would have been the width of a man's hand and extravagantly decorated. Its purpose was to block the Holy of Holies from sight and prevent entrance except on the one occasion per year that the High Priest would be allowed to enter to offer a sacrifice for the sins of himself and the people. For many years, I imagined this veil or curtain to be a thin piece of material that was more symbolic than practical, but please do not misunderstand what an ornate and practical piece of the temple that this was. Without this curtain, the Holy of Holies would be exposed to the world.

At the death of Jesus on the cross, God performed the second miracle, tearing in half the barrier of entry to the Holy of Holies.

Gone was the Old Covenant. The New Covenant was at hand; God's presence, the Holy of Holies itself, was open to any man that would come to Jesus. No longer was there a need for a priest or sacrifices. Jesus was and is the perfect sacrifice that removed the barrier of sin for all who would put their faith in Him.

If you are reading this and you have not placed your trust in the One who paid the price for your sins, I encourage you to turn to Jesus today. Repent of your sin, and thank Him for what He willingly put Himself through on the cross for your sake. Repent and believe.

If you are reading this and you have placed your trust in Christ, I want to challenge you with a thought and a question. Please realize that before the sacrifice of Jesus as the final and perfect Passover lamb, in order to be connected to the presence of God, you had to go through a priest. However, because of the sacrifice of Jesus, and the miracle that followed in the tearing of the temple veil, we have permanent and instant access to God's presence. Are you taking advantage of that fact? Are you taking it for granted? How often are you kneeling at the feet of the Father in worship and adoration? Romans 12:12 tells us to ***"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."*** Are you?

BARRIER REMOVED

DEVOTION #3 - SIERRA COMBS

The Bible is full of the miraculous. Whether blatantly obvious or as quiet as a whisper, you would be hard-pressed to find a page in Scripture that does not point to a miracle-working God. We see it in the very first words of Genesis chapter 1, ***"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."*** At one point in time, there was nothing, and in a moment God spoke our entire universe into being. To God, the task was nothing, but to us, it is utterly miraculous! He went on to beautify our world, filling it with plants and trees, creatures of all kinds, and finally His ultimate masterpiece - mankind. God perfectly created Adam and Eve in His image, and together they walked in fellowship and communion in the midst of complete perfection. Adam and Eve had access to everything they could ever need and want, including the very presence of God, with only one prohibition. Instead of heeding God's command, they chose to disobey Him. In an instant, everything changed. They had brought sin into the world. Their entire existence prior had only brought feelings of joy and pleasure, and now came the feeling of shame and fear. They tried to hide themselves from God to no avail. Because of their newly sin-stained soul, they were not fit to be in the presence of a perfect and holy God. While God still loved them, the complete access they once had to Him had to be removed and so it was and is for every man and woman who came after.

We are all born into a sin-stained world with sinful natures to match, separated from a perfect God. The gap between us and our Creator

is far too deep and wide for us to cross on our own. Besides that, He is so incredibly perfect and holy, that even if we could come into His presence and look upon His face, we would surely die. Therefore, there must be a veil to separate us. This veil was and is both physical or literal as well as spiritual or figurative. In all senses, the veil represents the passage into the Holy of Holies and the presence of God. In ancient Israel, we first see this literal veil in the tabernacle (the word is translated from the Hebrew *mishkan*, which means dwelling place), and later the temple in Jerusalem. Made from thick purple, scarlet, and blue material thickly woven together, this curtain-like veil stood as a physical barrier to the earthly dwelling place of God's presence. Hebrews 9:1-8 describes the scene, ***"Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things, we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing."*** To the Jews, the space behind the veil was the most sacred, and yet it was forbidden for them to enter. Their only access to God was through the high priest who would offer a blood sacrifice once a year to atone for sin.

While this system worked for the time, God had a much better, permanent solution. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to this earth as fully God and fully man. He lived a perfect life and when

His time came, He died on the cross. At the moment of His death, not only was there a huge spiritual shift, there was a physical shift as well!

The Bible records a major event that happened as He took His last breath. Matthew 27:50-51 says, ***"Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."*** Within those two sentences hold one of the most miraculous and amazing things that has ever happened. The veil was torn, both literally and spiritually. Physically speaking, the veil was huge, likely around 60 feet tall, and traditionally said to be around four inches thick. No human hands would be able to rip apart this veil, let alone from top to bottom. This could only be done by the Lord. When Jesus died, the blood that He shed was a sufficient offering to the Father. No longer would the high priest need to enter the Holy of Holies once a year to atone for sin. Jesus, the ultimate High Priest, paid the price in full, once and for all. The veil that once stood between us and God was torn.

Only through Christ can we once again be reconciled to the Father and have full access to His presence. Hebrews 6:19-20 declares, ***"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."*** We now ***"have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh"*** (Hebrews 10:19-20). The earthly veil was torn and the heavenly veil was opened. There is no greater miracle in one's life than the free gift of salvation. Outside of Christ, you stand separated from God, condemned and destined for eternity in Hell, but the work has been done, and the price has been paid. Through Christ, He invites you in. That is a miracle!

USABLE BY THE MASTER

DEVOTION #4 - DAVID HUDGENS

"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:4-5

My father was a person who possessed an aptitude to seemingly accomplish anything. He was the strongest person I have ever known. He was the smartest person I have ever known. He even had an incredible knack for seeing the repurposed potential of otherwise discarded items. One example of this occurred while growing up in our family's small, light-blue, Detroit bungalow.

At the front of the house, there was a small set of wooden steps leading down from the porch which settled upon a raised concrete footer that served as a final step before descending onto the driveway. Over time, however, this foundational support had eroded into serious disrepair. After noticing this, my dad examined the structure and concluded that a total rebuild, and not simply a spot repair, was necessary to restore the proper integrity of this principle object. Not many days would pass before he came home equipped with what appeared, to me, to be a pile of rubble, a few tools, several bags of concrete mix, and a vision.

Over the course of a weekend, I marveled at my dad as he chiseled, shaped, arranged, and anchored rocky fragments of rejected stone and brick. When finished, he created a beautiful architectural mosaic that would once again support the feet of passengers using the attached staircase.

I was amazed! Materials that were scrapped, tossed out, and abandoned, were now, in the hands of my father, given new purpose and value.

Similarly, within redemptive history, you and I were once cast off. As both victims and willful participants to sin, our species was condemned to live outside of Eden, separated, due to our own rebellion, from the abiding presence of the sovereign King of the universe. Would humanity remain in this state, defiled by sin? Would humanity ever again live within the presence of God?

Ephesians 2:4-5 gives hope, ***"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved."***

In the final moments of Jesus' crucifixion, God accomplished the restoration of humanity as image bearers and as living temples for His presence. Prior to the advent of the Messiah, it was required that sin be yearly atoned by the blood of animals, and this through a human intermediary, the high priest. It was the high priest who alone was granted the ability to enter into the Most Holy Place, behind the great curtain restricting access to the resided presence of God.

The Most Holy Place, within the Temple, was the earthly dwelling place of the Lord. It was the means and method by which the manifest presence of God would abide with humans. However, this was never to be permanent, rather the Temple and sacrificial laws were a shadow pointing to a future time when the Messiah would come and fulfill all the requirements of the Law in order to restore the communion between God and man.

As Jesus breathed His last breath on the cross, the veil (curtain) between Heaven and Earth, between God and humans, was torn. Access to the Father was won and made permanent. Through faith in Christ, the once hardened, rocky, human heart is now removed and replaced with a heart of flesh and given a new spirit (Ezekiel

36:26). In Christ, the corrupted heart is now purified by the blood of Jesus and is made well for the presence of God to make His home.

In Christ, the Lord has chosen for Himself a people once discarded and left to the derision of guilt and shame, to now be a collection of living stones. These living stones together make up the temple of the Lord Most High. For in His hands, we are reshaped and repurposed now as a mosaic image of the eternal, everlasting God, doing the will of God to bring Him glory forever. Amen!

THE NEW PATH

DEVOTION #5 - CAMERON ALDRICH

It is painful and saddening to think about all the trials that Jesus dealt with that led to His crucifixion on Good Friday. Just as those many struggles came into play for Jesus on that Friday morning, we have all had unexpected problems come about at some point in our lives. Those issues that we cannot foresee or anticipate are often the most thrilling to take on. When they happen, we often find ourselves scrambling to try to make everything work out. If we do not act quickly in those circumstances, we may not be able to avoid the consequences or negative outcomes that could be produced by not acting.

Have you ever found yourself in a stressful situation where you realized that the only possible solution is to ask someone else for help? That has happened to me many times. Of course, we ask for assistance from others in those times with the hope of either reaching a peaceful outcome or making things easier and less stressful for us. Normally, as long as lending a hand would not drastically inconvenience the helper, most people would be inclined to assist those in said situations.

However, imagine yourself in that needy circumstance - except it is far more drastic, requiring much more time and energy, something that you will need help with every day for the rest of your life. I suspect that most people, regardless of their relationship with you, would not be willing to drop everything and give all of themselves up day in and day out in order to put you and your never-ending issue at ease.

Yet, what about our sinful human nature that has been with us since birth? I find it relieving to think about the significance of one of the miracles that took place right at the time of Jesus' death on the cross. It is when the holy veil was torn in the Jewish Temple. When that happened, what specifically changed for God's people and how they dealt with their sinful situation?

Before Jesus' death took place, there was a separation between God and man as Isaiah 59:1-2 mentions. This was symbolized within the Temple as the dwelling of the presence of God was separated from the remainder of the Temple where men could dwell. This separation was the enormous, valuable, and thick veil. Furthermore, not anyone could pass through this separation, especially not whenever desired. In fact, the high priest in the Temple of Jerusalem was the only person allowed to pass through the veil to enter into the earthly Holy Place with the intent to atone for all of Israel's sins through the offering of a blood sacrifice. This happened just one day per year (Hebrews 9:7).

Needless to say, a direct connection to God was not yet established for God's faithful people. The pathway to the presence of God was very limited and restricted. Thankfully, that changed for good when Jesus died on the cross.

At the moment of His death, when the veil was simultaneously torn from top to bottom, two things were dramatically symbolized. First, Christ's sacrifice was the one sufficient and final atonement for the world's sins. Second, the pathway into the presence of God was now permanently open for all of God's people to enter in. Thankfully, this pathway no longer involved a human priest and a man-made temple.

Once the old path to the Father was destroyed, a new and superior path was established through Jesus Christ. In a way, the tearing of the veil helped signify the fact that Jesus is now, and will always be, the only way to the Father, just as He stated to His disciples in John 14:6. As long as we believe in Christ as our living Savior who died

and rose again, we are able to enter into the presence of God and rest in the arms of our ultimate refuge, peace, and comfort amidst our trials.

Through Jesus' death on the cross, the Father's heart was displayed for us. When it comes to our worst, never-ending problem of sin that we cannot rid of without help, the Lord of lords is the only One who possesses the ultimate love and compassion to step in, dwell with us, and take on that trouble without a second thought. He is able to do this because His Son paved the way for His presence to be within us by means of the Holy Spirit.

We can lean on a great instruction stated in Hebrews 10:19-22, ***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."***

INTIMACY WITH GOD

DEVOTION #6 - KENDALL HINE

Can you imagine needing to make an animal sacrifice every single time you sinned? I would need some nice supportive footwear and a big wallet because I would be getting in line to see the priest a lot! Before Jesus came and became the perfect sacrifice for us, that is exactly what Levitical Law required. Hebrews 9:22 says, ***"Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."***

When I was new to my faith, I did not really get the whole animal sacrifice thing. I mean, pardon my pun, but is it not a little overkill? The more I learned about the character of God, the more it made sense. God is infinitely more holy than man. This holiness is mighty and dangerous because sin cannot enter into the presence of that measure of perfection. When the prophet Isaiah entered into the Lord's presence, he fell to his knees in acknowledgment of his uncleanness before the spotless presence of the Lord. When Moses came down from the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai, his face shone so brightly that he had to wear a veil. So, if these interactions with God throughout the Old Testament are described with fear and trembling, why do our interactions with God look so different?

It is not that God is any less perfect than He was a few thousand years ago, but we have the opportunity to know God closely and intimately through the death of Jesus on the cross. When Jesus took our sin upon Himself and became the ultimate sacrifice for our sake, something remarkable happened. Matthew 27:51 says, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."*** Jesus

tore the veil that separates our sin from the presence of the Lord, and we were granted unparalleled access to the presence of God. How cool is that!

So, I will ask you today, do you know God intimately? I am not asking if you can recite the verses you learned in AWANA or if you exclusively listen to Christian radio. There is a big difference between knowing a lot about God and being able to say that He is your source of refuge and strength. If you are not at a place where you can confidently say that Jesus is your closest friend, I encourage you to spend time in His presence.

lesson 3

EARTHQUAKE

Dr. Randy T. Johnson





The *"Merriam-Webster Dictionary"* defines dad jokes as "a wholesome joke of the type said to be told by fathers with a punchline that is often an obvious or predictable pun or play on words and usually judged to be endearingly corny or unfunny." I appreciate the fact that an official well-respected dictionary actually defines what a dad joke is; however, I am not as keen on the word "unfunny" being used. With that being said, here are a few dad jokes to start this lesson:

- How does an earthquake get punished? It gets grounded.
- Which poet liked earthquakes? Shakespeare.
- What did San Andreas say when the earthquake hit California? My fault.
- How do foodies bring about earthquakes? By moving plates.
- What is the safest place during an earthquake? A stationary store.
- What is an earthquake's favorite song? Good Vibrations.
- What is an earthquake's favorite breakfast? Quaker Oats.

1. Have you ever experienced an earthquake? Please explain some details.

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As we continue this series on some of the miracles that happened during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, we pick up the third event in being an earthquake. I want to pause for a moment and apologize if I offended anyone with earthquake jokes as I know they can be very devastating and often take lives. I was hoping to ease into an intense topic.

At the time of Jesus' death, there was an earthquake. Matthew 27:51 records, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."*** The timing of the earthquake is precise. It is clearly not coincidental.

2. What are some of your initial thoughts about this earthquake?

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As the Creator of the Universe dies, the sun refuses to work, and the Earth rebels. Nature realizes that what is happening is not natural.

These events are even recorded in history by secular writers. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (*"The Pulpit"*) writes, "An account of it is given by Phlegon of Tralles, a freedman of the Emperor Adrian. Eusebius, in his records of the year A.D. 33, quotes at length from Phlegon, who says that, in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, there was a great and remarkable eclipse of the sun, above any that had happened before. At the sixth hour the day was turned into the darkness of night, so that stars were seen in the heaven; and there was a great earthquake in Bithynia, which overthrew many houses in the city of Nicaea." The darkness and earthquake were note-worthy occurrences. People could use them as a reference point of history.

3. Do you have an event from history (personal or national) that depicts a timeline for you?

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A.T. Robertson (*"Word Pictures in the New Testament"*) adds, "Josephus tells of a quaking in the temple before the destruction and the Talmud tells of a quaking forty years before the destruction of the temple." The temple was destroyed in 70 AD. This quaking would have been at the time of Jesus' death.

Jesus' death is obviously an earth-shaking event.

God's timing is precise.

In Acts 16:25-34, Paul and Silas are in prison when another earthquake takes place, ***"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God."***

4. What can be said of the timing of this earthquake?

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5. What were some of the results of this earthquake?

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God is able to create good out of an apparent horrible situation. He is active in the world and His timing is perfect. The God who made man out of dirt and made dirt out of nothing is not bound by our limited imaginations.

6. Do you have a painful or apparent horrible situation that God used for good?

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7. Are you going through something right now that you need to give to God? How can you refocus your thoughts to look for God's intervention?

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The response of the centurion after the death of Jesus is quite moving. Matthew 27:54 records, ***"When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"***

A.T. Robertson (*"Word Pictures in the New Testament"*) points out that tradition claims the centurion's name was Petronius. He adds, "Evidently the centurion was deeply moved by the portents which he had witnessed. He had heard the several flings at Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God and may even have heard of his claim before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. How much he meant by his words we do not know, but probably he meant more than merely 'a righteous man' (Luke 23:47). If he was won now to trust in Christ, he came as a pagan and, like the robber who believed, was saved as Jesus hung upon the Cross."

8. Why is it important to believe that Jesus was not merely a righteous man?

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9. What is the story of the robber who believed?

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The sun refusing to do its job was a message of who Jesus is. The earth throwing a temper tantrum made the statement of who Jesus is. It reminds me of Luke 19:40, ***"He [Jesus] answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"***

10. How is Luke 19:40 a challenge to believers today?

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NOTES

ROCKS CRY OUT

DEVOTION #1 - CATHY STORY

How do you respond to the loss of something or someone that means a lot to you? Think about it for a moment. Reasonably your response to that question will likely differ based on what came to your mind. We can certainly feel disappointment or sadness at the loss of favorite items like a broken vase that had been passed down from family members, or the falling apart of a childhood stuffed animal. The depth of our emotions may increase with the importance of the loss. We may feel especially sad and grieved at the loss of a family pet or a family friend. We may be completely heartbroken over the loss of family members and those friends who have become like family to us. Chances are you demonstrate your feelings of sadness, hurt, and disappointment in some way. It may be a sigh, grunt, scream, or a complete breakdown of ugly crying. We have all been there. It is only natural to respond with our emotions.

As we continue looking at miracles of the cross, Matthew 27:51 tells us, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."*** Looking at these verses we can marvel at the fact that in the moment of Jesus' death on the cross, even creation itself responded. It could be easy to overlook the miracle that took place at this moment in Scripture. As this moment at the cross unfolds and we have seen darkness fall and the tearing of the veil, Scripture allows us to see the response of God's creation. At a time when many were not in a moment of grieving what was happening, creation itself grieved, ***"The earth shook and the rocks were split."*** In Luke 19:40, we read, ***"He [Jesus] answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"*** In Psalm 24:1, we are told, ***"The***

earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."

A popular song, *"Holy (Song of the Ages)"* by the Belonging Co., has a line that declares:

> Even the rocks cry out, so I'll cry out
> Heaven and earth will sing, so I'll sing

I am not sure about you, but I would prefer to not let a rock praise the Lord before I do. While there are many things in creation that shout and show us the immense glory of the God we believe in, I choose to be the one who will shout out His praise. I hope you will choose to join along in praising Him today.

THE WATER AND THE ROCK

DEVOTION #2 - CHRIS MONTVILLE

"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" Matthew 27:51-54

There is so much that happens in this one short passage, but one aspect of this verse that stands out to me is the splitting of the rocks and the earthquake. After reading it, I am immediately reminded of a passage in the Old Testament that shares a striking comparison. In Exodus, we see Moses leading the Israelites through the wilderness, and God does something with a rock there as well. The people were thirsty and had no water to drink while walking through the wilderness, so God provides.

Exodus 17:5-6 records, ***"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.' And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel."***

Jesus, in a similar realm, in John chapter 4, claims that He provides ***"living water"*** while speaking with the woman at the well.

John 4:10-14 says, ***"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"***

Through Moses striking the rock in the wilderness, God brought forth water for the people; Jesus, through His perfect life and sacrifice on the cross, split the rocks and offers us living water! Interestingly enough, the comparisons between the Exodus passage and the Matthew passage do not end there. In Exodus, it tells us that the reason for the people's quarreling was because of their lack of faith.

Exodus 17:7 says, ***"And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'"***

God reveals Himself, again, to the Israelites through this sign involving the rock. God reveals Himself, again, by the splitting of the rocks upon Jesus' death. Similarly to the Exodus passage, we see doubt turn to belief in Matthew's passage as well!

Matthew 27:54 states, ***"When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"***

The earthquake is just another one of many signs God has given us to prove His validity. Jesus literally shook the course of history with

His coming, death, and resurrection. It is the single most important event in our human history. Through His death, our sins, past, present, and future, are paid for. Through His resurrection three days later, we have life.

Building your life on the foundation of the earth's rocks will ultimately fail. Nothing can stand to God's power, as we see in these two examples. Christ is the only rock on which our life can stand. Let us make sure to have Him at the foundation of everything we do.

The parable in Matthew 7:24-25 sets a powerful image, ***"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."***

SHAKY FOUNDATIONS

DEVOTION #3 - PASTOR PHILIP PIASECKI

I still remember the day like it was yesterday. I was standing in the kitchen of my childhood home when I felt a very slight shaking of the house. I thought to myself, I think we just had an earthquake. Sure enough, later that evening the local news confirmed it. There had been a tiny earthquake that some people were able to feel. It was the smallest one you could possibly experience, yet it still sticks out to me. Thankfully, I have never been caught in a significant one, but I know for all of you that have, it is an experience you will never forget. There is just something so jarring about the fact that the ground beneath your feet is moving, and this is exactly what all of those present at the time of Jesus' death experienced.

Matthew 27:51-54 describes the moment when Jesus died on the cross and the profound effects that it had on creation. It says, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"***

It is so easy to just overlook the fact that there was an earthquake when Jesus died, but this really was a miraculous sign from the Lord in His death that He was no ordinary man. This earthquake that occurred at the moment of Jesus' death was a physical manifestation

of the spiritual reality that was taking place. The death of a man would not shake the foundations of the world, but the death of God caused all of creation to quake. It was a sign that something monumental had occurred, something that would shake the foundations of the world. The earthquake showed that the sacrifice of the Lord's life actually has a physical impact on our world. Nothing would ever be the same after the sacrifice of Christ.

For us today, the earthquake that occurred at the moment of Jesus' death is a reminder of the magnitude of what He did for us. It is a sign of the great love that He had for us, and the incredible sacrifice that He made on our behalf. It is a call to remember that our salvation was not cheaply won but came at a great cost. It is an invitation to respond with awe and gratitude to the One who gave everything for us. We should never take lightly the magnitude of what Christ did for us through His death. We need to be constantly reminded that what Jesus did is something that should truly change the world to its core, and we have the privilege of taking that news to people each and every day.

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

DEVOTION #4 - PASTOR FERDINAND SANDERS

"When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" Matthew 27:54

Have you ever looked back on a moment or event in your life and thought about how you could have done things differently? With the information that you now have after going through it, it is not uncommon to wish you would have made a different choice, taken a different path, or said something different. The beauty of hindsight is that it allows us to learn from mistakes and make better decisions in the future. In Matthew chapter 27, we see this sense of hindsight through the perspective of a Roman centurion following the events that occurred after Jesus died on the cross.

In Matthew 27:51-54, we see the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, rocks split, and tombs were opened. These were extraordinary events that were witnessed by many, including the Roman centurion and his soldiers who were guarding Jesus. At that moment, the centurion and those with him had confirmation that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. The centurion's realization that Jesus was the Son of God was a significant moment, not only for him, but for all of humanity. At that moment, he saw the truth that many others had missed. He recognized that Jesus was more than just a man; He was the Savior of the world.

Our world today is fortunate to have all of this "hindsight." Bigger than the experience of the centurion in Matthew chapter 27, we

have the full, complete Word of God that offers us the confirmation that Jesus truly is the Son of God. Despite the hindsight available, there are many that still have not shared in the same realization or revelation that Jesus truly is the Son of God. It can be easy for us to get caught up or distracted by the daily challenges and struggles of life, and we do not see the evidence or the ways in which we are surrounded by the presence of God. These verses speak to the urgency that we have as Christians to share our experiences with others so that they can come to know the same Jesus.

Just like the centurion, we have moments of realization when we see the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done for us. We can look back on our lives and see how God has been faithful, even in the difficult times. We can have hope for the future, knowing that God is in control and that He has a plan for our lives. When we look at these verses in Matthew chapter 27, we can see how they were a fulfillment of prophecy and a sign of God's power. May we always remember that hindsight is 20/20, and trust that God is leading us on a path toward His ultimate plan for our lives.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE

DEVOTION #5 - JOHN STONE

"The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!" Psalm 99:1 (NASB)

How far does God need to go to get our attention? Isaiah 65:1-2 (NASB) says, ***"I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way that is not good, following their own thoughts, a people who continually provoke Me to My face."***

For some of us, we heard the Gospel as a child and something inside us screamed, "Yes!" All our lives it seemed we knew the Lord. Gathering with the church and Christianity were just a part of us (part of our routine) and we would not know any other way to live. For others, like the centurion in Matthew chapter 27, the Lord shook our whole world and turned it upside down. He broke through our hard hearts and closed minds with the force of an earthquake; nothing was left in its place when He was finished.

The Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth goes to great lengths to get the attention of lost sinners like you and me. He brings to bear all His power and will literally shake the world if necessary. If you are a Christian, if you consider yourself a child of God, there was a time in your life that God got your attention. You understood that you were a sinner and that there was not anything you could do to pay the penalty for your sin. You joyfully accepted the free gift of grace

offered by God, that Jesus Christ died in your place as a sacrifice to pay for your sin, and it is only by His righteousness that you can truly live (Ephesians 2:4-7). However, life then happened. You might have messed up, maybe wandered away following the way of this world (Luke 15:11-32). Perhaps you did not, but things just got busy with family, work, school, sports, and whatever else stole your affection and attention. When you look at your life now, you barely recognize who you once were. The little kid (literal or figurative), who heard the Gospel and screamed, “Yes,” from the depth of their soul, and clung to Jesus for all they were worth, is gone.

If this is you, pray that God sends an earthquake. Ask Him to shake up your life and reduce it to what is truly important - Him. Come back to the foot of the cross and remember who He is and what He did for you. There is no shame in repentance (1 John 4:9) and second chances. Our Father is waiting with open arms.

THE FATHER'S TEAR

DEVOTION #6 - PASTOR JOSH YATES

"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" Matthew 27:51–54

As you read the words describing what happened immediately as Jesus died for you and for me, what comes to mind? It can be very easy to read over this passage of Scripture because it seems as though it is just describing what happened while the main thing is that Jesus has died. You would not be wrong in reading it that way. Jesus' death is the main thing you should be focusing on here.

However, you would miss something as well. Jesus had died. The Son of God, King of kings, Lord of lords, Messiah, Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace was killed on a cruel cross. Sit with that for a minute. Seriously, take a few minutes and consider what happened to Jesus.

As I really think about this scene, my mind goes back to the movie, *"The Passion of the Christ."* As Jesus is dying and taking His last breath, the camera goes to a wider view into the heavens as though God the Father is viewing his Son dying. The camera gets a "fisheye" look and then we see a single tear falling from Heaven itself, from

the eyes of the Father. As soon as that tear hits the Earth below, the very Earth itself trembles. It shakes. It tears apart. Rocks split. Tombs open.

It is as though the Earth itself feels the terror of what is happening. Its Creator has died. It shakes in horror. It shakes in sorrow. The creation mourns its Creator.
The Father sent Jesus to earth for this purpose. He was to die and pay the price that you and I could not pay. He would restore the relationship between us and Himself. Though a tear very well may have fallen from the eyes of the Father, Isaiah 53:10-11 says, ***"It was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."***

He was crushed for you and me. He gave His life so we can have life. It is a life that is full, rich, and free from sin. He gave it all so we could have a relationship with Him.

That should cause us to shake as the Earth did at Jesus' death. It should cause us to mourn. It should cause us to tremble. It should cause us to rejoice. It should cause us to be forever grateful. It calls us to give our lives to Jesus and accept His free gift of eternal life. It calls us to live and share the Good News of Jesus with everyone we can.

The Earth shook at the death of Jesus. What is your response today?



lesson 4

GRAVES OPENED

Dr. Randy T. Johnson



I chuckled when I read what Steven Wright said, “When I die, I’m leaving my body to science fiction.” Death is a heavy topic. Many can relate to the thoughts of Woody Allen, “I am not afraid of death, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” We want to avoid talking about it with family or even a doctor. However, it is real and we will have to face it.

1. Have you had a bad diagnosis or a near-death experience?

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2. Why do you think God prolonged your days?

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David Jeremiah shared an epitaph that was written on a tombstone.

Pause stranger when you pass me by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now so you will be
Prepare yourself to follow me

He continues that someone left a note adding a key element.

To follow you I am not content
Until I know which way you went

The key to handling death is to know what happens next. Max Lucado wrote, “If we can understand that death is not the end but is really a transition into the next life, the great part of life, that frees us up into receiving God’s courage and his help.” However, it is important to realize that the next step is not the same for everyone. George Whitefield adds, “Take care of your life and the Lord will take care of your death.”

3. What do we need to do to assure our next step after death is secure?

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There are some amazing miracles that take place at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We have already discussed darkness, the tearing of the Temple veil, and an earthquake. The next miracle has to top them all. It can only be from God!

Matthew 27:51-54 records, ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"***

4. What happens after the earthquake?

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Although the New Testament was written in the first century, verse numbers were not added until the sixteenth century. They are very helpful when trying to find a specific passage, but they are not an actual part of Scripture. Matthew 27:52 contains two separate parts:

- ***"The tombs also were opened."***
- ***"And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."***

These seem to go together until you add verse 53, ***"And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy***

city and appeared to many." This leaves too many questions. Besides the normal questions of who they were, what kind of bodies they had, and how long they lived, one has to wonder why they were resurrected at the death of Jesus but waited three days to go anywhere. What did they do in the cemetery for three days? Why would they not go see loved ones? Could they be resurrected before Jesus?

5. If you could see someone who has already passed, who would it be and what would you say?

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It makes more sense to add the first part of verse 52 to verse 51 and keep the second half of verse 52 with verse 53.

- ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened."***
- ***"And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many."***

The tombs were not six feet deep. They were above ground and would naturally have been broken open due to the earthquake. However, Matthew adds an interesting fact here that happens three days later. Jesus is raised from the dead and He brings some friends back with Him! Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*"Preaching the Word"*) writes, "Note that the actual event happens after Jesus' resurrection, not after his death. Yet Matthew places it here to open our eyes to the resurrection power of Jesus' death." J.W. Wenham agrees saying, "A full stop should be placed, not after 'split' (verse 51), but after 'broke open' (verse 52). The resurrection of 'the holy people' begins a new sentence and is tied up only with Jesus' resurrection. So Matthew does not intend his readers to think that these 'holy

people' were resurrected when Jesus died and then waited in their tombs till Easter Sunday before showing themselves."

Matthew's one main statement is that Jesus can and will raise the saints from death!

Dwight L. Moody said, "As I go into a cemetery I like to think of the time when the dead shall rise from their graves....Thank God, our friends are not buried; they are only sown!"

6. What pictures are conveyed here by the word sown?

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Josh McDowell says it well, "No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary. No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the Resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good."

Matthew chapter 27 does not document the first time Jesus resurrected someone from the dead. Each of these individuals physically died (not just a few minutes or even hours), were brought back to life, and died again.

The widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:13-15)
"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."

Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:52-56)
"And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, 'Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand

he called, saying, 'Child, arise.' And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened."

Lazarus (John 11:43-44)
"When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

7. Does anything stand out in these passages?

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Matthew chapter 27 says that ***"saints"*** were raised from the dead. A saint is someone who recognizes their sin and trusts God for a Savior (Jesus the Messiah). Today, a saint is someone who is a follower of Jesus Christ. We are not told who they were or how many there were that were raised physically. That is not the main point. Matthew's one main statement is that Jesus can and will raise the saints from death! Believers in Jesus will be raised again.

8. How can one become a saint today?

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I appreciate how the death of Jesus Christ has been succinctly explained.

"The Death of Death in the Death of Christ." Puritan John Owen

"Jesus' death defeated death." Douglas Sean O'Donnell

"His death…kill[ed] death." Augustine

“Death stung himself to death when he stung Christ.”

9. Does one of these phrases summarize it well for you? How would you phrase it?

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Finally, Dwight L. Moody says it so well, “Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal - a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.”

NOTES

TRUSTWORTHY

DEVOTION #1 - GARY WRIGHT

"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Matthew 27:52-53

When my wife Kim and I first got married, we could not afford a trustworthy vehicle. Our car was 20 years old and needed some work. Whenever we had to travel any distance at all, we were very anxious. We did not know if our car would make it to our destination or would break down. We looked forward to a time when we could afford a car that we could trust.

After the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, a very unique miracle happened. Some of the Old Testament saints who had died came back to life. These saints went to Jerusalem and many people saw them. The Old Testament saints were people who lived before Jesus died on the cross, and who had trusted that God would provide a solution for their sin. They were saved the same way we are today, through faith. The Old Testament saints were looking ahead to the cross. Today, we are looking back at the cross.

There are a few things from this miracle that proves Jesus is 100% trustworthy. Because of this miracle, we can trust that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection gave Him victory over death. John 11:25 tells us, through faith in Jesus we can have victory over death as well, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."*** Next, we can trust that Jesus truly is who John the Baptist said He was. John 1:29 describes

Jesus as ***"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** Lastly, the Bible also teaches us that during the Rapture of the church, Jesus will resurrect the bodies of those who have put their faith in Him. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we read, ***"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."*** Since Jesus raised the Old Testament saints, we can trust He will raise us as believers in the future.

After several years, Kim and I were finally able to buy a trustworthy vehicle. What peace of mind it was having a reliable vehicle to get us to our destination.

Through faith in Jesus, we can trust that we have been forgiven of our sin, we have life, and He will get us to our destination, eternity with Him.

Have you trusted Jesus as Savior?

In 1 John 5:12, we are told, ***"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."***

COMING SOON

DEVOTION #2 - PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

I have a confession to make. I am not much of a movie person. If I am at home, I do not mind a movie every now and then, but I am not a fan of going to the theaters. The combination of sitting still for so long, not being able to lounge on a couch (unless you are at the fancy theater), and paying so much for food and drink, tends to keep me away. However, I do love a good movie preview. Growing up, I remember the anticipation I felt when I saw a great preview of a movie I wanted to see. It left me on the edge of my seat. Like a good movie preview (short, action-packed, and attention-grabbing), the third miracle of the cross that we are looking at draws you in, leaving you wanting more and looking forward to seeing the whole story.

The Gospel writer Matthew tells us in chapter 27, verses 52 and 53, following the death of Jesus Christ, ***"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many."*** Just picture this for a moment. Many in Jerusalem, having just witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, turned around and a group of people who had been clearly dead, just wandered in. Can you imagine the reactions of those that saw this? There would be disbelief, fear, excitement, and awe, to name a few.

The timing of this miracle is especially interesting. Matthew tells us that this happened at the time of Jesus' death. It is His death, as Donald Senior puts it, that "triggers the resurrection of the saints." This is a reminder that Jesus died to save others, not Himself. Additionally, like a movie preview, this miracle is also a picture of

what is to come for believers. Paul talks about this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16, ***"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."*** Jesus' death is the hope of eternal life for Christians today. This life is not all there is. Paul concludes this section with these words in verse 18, ***"Therefore encourage one another with these words."***

THE TRAILER

DEVOTION #3 - PATRICK BICKNELL

Have you ever read something that, after you read it, it made no sense, and then you read it again and it still made no sense? This happened to me all the time in high school, but particularly happens to me when I read this passage in Matthew chapter 27. Here we get the events that took place at the time of the death of Jesus. Matthew is giving us a beautifully detailed picture of how the death of Jesus happened and what subsequently followed in the world around Him. In verse 50, we see the final moments before Jesus dies as it says ***"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit"*** (Matthew 27:50). As this happens, some incredible things take place, the veil is torn in two from top to bottom and the earth shakes as a great earthquake takes place. Then the interesting and confusing part of this text happens as the tombs were opened nearby, their bodies were raised, and at His resurrection, they went into the city and appeared to many people. How did all of this happen? I do not know but I think I can help talk through what this means.

Jesus' death on the cross was the means by which these physical bodies were resurrected. Once Jesus cried out, ***"It is finished,"*** (John 19:30) many bodies within these tombs were physically resurrected. Notice that Matthew makes it clear that these were bodies that were raised. I believe what our sovereign Lord was doing here was giving us a trailer for the future resurrection of God's chosen people. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, we read, ***"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"*** (1 Corinthians 15:20). Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is the means that one day believers will have physically

resurrected bodies and will spend all of eternity with our Lord. This confusing event is a foretaste of what we can expect when Jesus returns. What is amazing about these details is that God was essentially giving us a trailer of what is going to happen when Jesus comes back. We are going to be physically resurrected just as He was and just as the bodies of those saints who had fallen asleep. I am a person who does not like to watch movie trailers, I feel like too often they spoil the movie for me. However, this is a trailer that gives me hope, and one that I look forward to seeing when our Lord returns.

THE FUTURE RISING

DEVOTION #4 - JAMES MANN

"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Matthew 27:52-53

When it comes to the miracles that occur around the time of the cross, this is often one of the ones that I forget about first. It is interesting to say this because this one is a direct sign of things to come. When researching this passage, something that every single person will quickly point out is the phrase ***"many bodies of the saints."*** This concept of many but not all stands out. I view this as a movie trailer or just a tiny snippet of things to come. God is showing us His mighty power and the victory over death and the grave here, but He is also showing us that this is just the beginning of things to come.

I want to encourage you to take a quick moment to read through Revelation 20:4-6, ***"Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years."***

When I read this passage, I see a promise of the rise of those who followed God in their life, just as some of the bodies of the saints that rose during the death of Jesus did. God already established His power of being able to do this in Matthew, so to believe that He can do this once again is not too crazy to believe. The passage in Revelation shows us this idea of reigning in power next to God for those who actively followed after the Lord. I believe the concept of actively following the Lord should be emphasized. This is not crossing off the checklist of things you begrudgingly do for the Lord but for those fighting on the front lines and pursuing the Lord's plans. I read this passage, and it is a call to action. We should feel a fire stoked inside of us chasing after the promises of God, coming back again, and once again, raising His saints. The final thing to note is that we are not just following the Lord, but in doing so, we are actively turning away from the Beast. We are not falling into his evil claws trying to tear us away from the Lord. This may mean a need to evaluate the priorities you have in your life and make sure that they are focused on the Lord and the future and not the Beast and his temptations.

COME OUT

DEVOTION #5 - ZACH HONNEN

"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Matthew 27:52-53

As we continue through our series of miracles at the cross, we have now come to the opened tombs. For many Christians who have grown up in the church (myself included), the opening of the graves is a small detail in Matthew's Gospel account that does not get much thought. Today, however, I want us to take a good, deep look at this detail in Scripture and try to understand why Matthew (through the Holy Spirit) included it in his account.

In Matthew chapter 27, we see a chain reaction that all starts with the death of Christ, ***"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit"*** (Matthew 27:50). With that, it began. We first see the split of the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. Then Matthew describes the earthquake, which most scholars agree in speculating that this is what would have opened the graves for the risen saints to walk out of their tombs. So, let us look at the breakdown of this passage and see what God has for us today in His Word.

"The tombs also were opened." We first see that, at the death of Christ, the tombs were opened wide and the opportunity for freedom was given to the saints, but they were still dead and unable to walk out. Much like Lazarus before, Jesus had told him to ***"come out"*** (John 11:43). We see in this example with Lazarus that without

the power of God we, in and of ourselves, can do nothing. Without Christ we are ***"dead in the trespasses and sins"*** (Ephesians 2:1). However, when Christ steps in, He changes everything and we then can walk out of the graves of our old life into a new life with Him.

Continuing on in Matthew 27:52, we read, ***"And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."*** Who were these saints? Truthfully, we do not have a definite answer, but we know that these were people who had fully given themselves to God and had trusted in Him for salvation. Next in verse 53, we read, ***"And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many."*** Here we find our final detail. These fallen saints did not rise until after Christ had risen, and when they had risen, they wasted no time in going out to their brothers and sisters in the flesh to reveal to them what God had done.

So, to recap, we see a physical picture of a spiritual reality as well as a confirmation that one day we will be raised by the power of Christ and glorify Him forever. Finally, I want to leave you with a few questions.

- Do you have faith in Christ? Has Jesus done the work in your spirit of raising you from the dead?

- If yes to question one, are you going out to your family, friends, and neighbors and showing them what Jesus has done for you?

- If no to question one, what is keeping you from asking Jesus for salvation from death? As we see in Romans 10:9, ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*** So, if you have not, repent and believe today.

POWER OVER DEATH

DEVOTION #6 - JILL OSMON

"The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Matthew 27:52-53

We have been looking at the miracles of the cross in this series and the incredible happenings surrounding the death and eventual resurrection of Jesus. Matthew 27:52-53 has a miracle that is quite interesting, awesome, and leads to a lot of questions quite frankly, but can you imagine? Jesus has been crucified, and after the chaos of an earthquake, darkness, and the veil tearing sits this miracle declaring God's power over death.

As we read these two verses, we see that people are raised from the dead and walk around after Jesus' resurrection. Barnes' commentary says, "It is not improbable to suppose that it was, amid the other wonders attending the death of Jesus, to convince the Jews that he was the Messiah." I am sure this time had to be so overwhelming for the followers of Jesus. The King they believed would rescue them had died and had resurrected; was it real? Could they believe that Jesus was who He said He was? God provided miracle after miracle to punctuate the truth of His Son dying and being raised from the dead as the ultimate sacrifice for all of our sins. It amazes me that God can be so patient with us and provide so many signs and miracles to help us along with believing He is who He says He is.

As I studied these two verses, this idea of God's complete control over the seemingly finite act of death reminds me that His victory

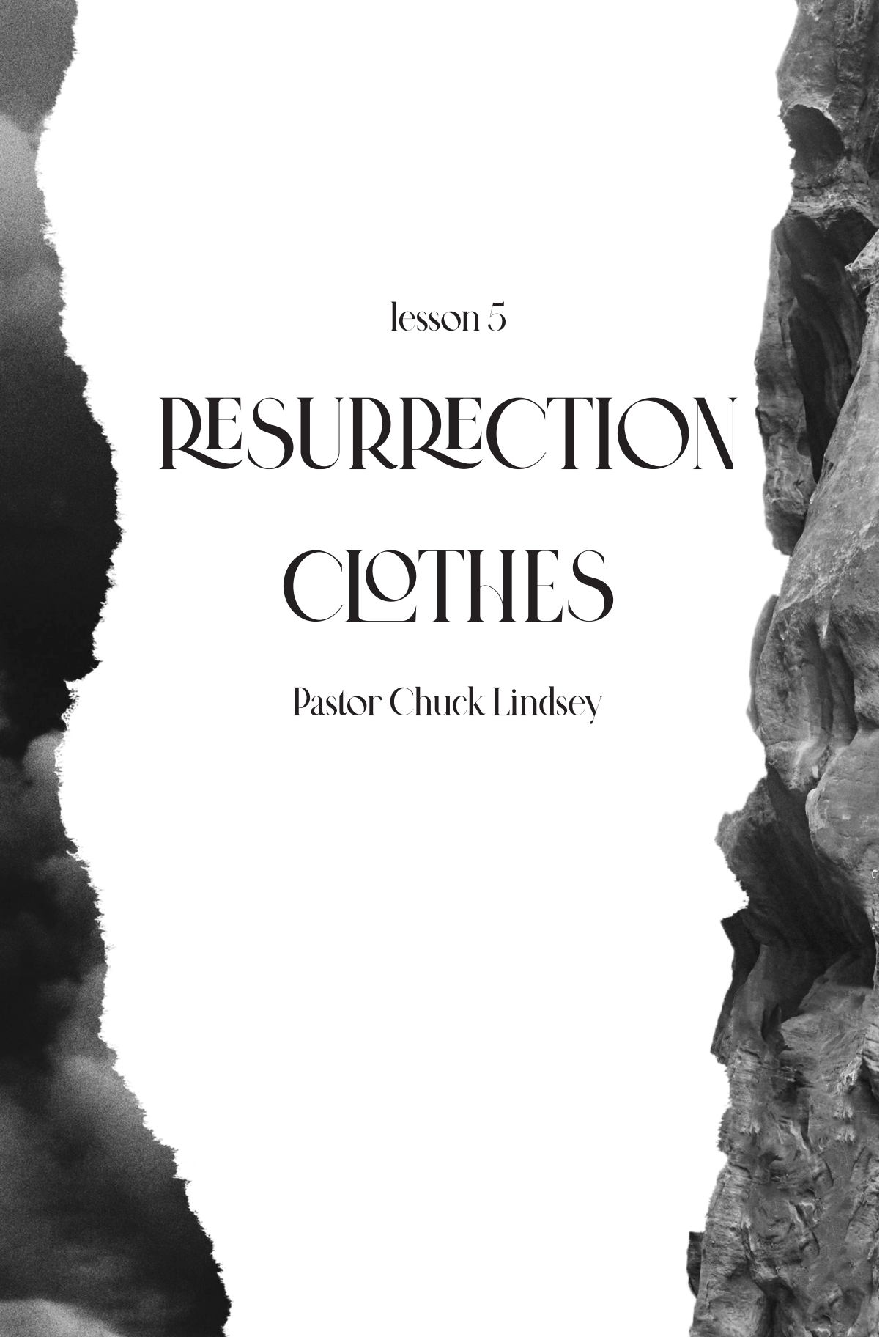
over death means that I can rely on Him for victory over my worries, my shame, my sin, and every little thing in my life. Greg Lanier says, “The insertion of this peculiar scene between Jesus’ death and resurrection shows the power of both: his death breaks our tombs open, bringing us out from death’s curse; and his new life makes possible our new life. Indeed, the foreshadowing of resurrection in this scene - immediately after Christ breathes his last - connects victory to the seeming defeat.”

I am thankful for His victory over death because His victory over death gives me new life through salvation, and through salvation we have eternal life with Him. Hallelujah!

lesson 5

RESURRECTION CLOTHES

Pastor Chuck Lindsey



"Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." John 20:3-9 (NKJV)

1. What observations jump out to you in this passage?

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A few years ago, my wife and I traveled to Israel and saw many biblical sites. We experienced the peaks of Mount Carmel where Elijah battled the 450 prophets of Baal, the stream that Gideon and his men would drink water from, the synagogue in the hometown of Mary Magdalene where Jesus would have preached, the valley that David fought Goliath, and the pool of Bethesda where Jesus would have healed the blind and lame. The trip was breathtaking! The highlight, by far, was our last day there. The best was truly saved for last! The trip culminated at a relatively small "historical site." It would be easy to miss if you were walking by. It was an enclosed garden with walking paths. One path led to a spot that puts you face to face with the highest hill in the area. The hill is called "Calvary." It is the place of Jesus' crucifixion. I stood there, in awe. "There it is," I stammered to my wife. The place He died; for me, for my sin. It is the spot He conquered all of our enemies: sin, Satan, death, and Hell. It is the place He suffered, agonized, and yet proved His love for us all.

2. Where is one of the favorite places you have visited? Why is it a favorite?

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3. What makes Calvary special?

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As amazing as that was, what we were about to experience next was even more fabulous. Just a few hundred yards from that hill, there is a wall with a (roughly 4-foot) hole carved into it. Inside are three small rooms. It was a tomb. It was not just any tomb, this was the garden tomb of our Lord Jesus. This is where His body was laid. This is where His body had been lovingly wrapped and placed to rest. About 2000 years ago, a large stone door had been rolled over that opening shutting in the Savior of the world, the Sovereign King of all, the Giver and Sustainer of life. There, His lifeless body would lay from Friday afternoon, through Saturday, until early Sunday morning.

4. Why is the death of Jesus highlighted and even celebrated?

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We know that the story does not end there. The Scriptures tell us that early Sunday morning our Savior arose. At some point that morning, His body miraculously began to flush with fresh blood and oxygen as His organs began to pump both throughout the body. His color returned. There was a warmth to His skin. His muscles began to move. His ears picked up every sound. His eyes opened.

5. Why is the resurrection of Jesus important?

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There was just one problem. John 19:40 tells us that He was wrapped with strips of cloth that had been soaked in burial spices for preservation. It is right here that we see another miracle. Those strips of cloth would have been dry and rigid by that point. That was their purpose. They were designed to keep air from getting to His body, slowing the process of decay. This would have made "sitting up" impossible.

6. Have you ever worked with plaster or paper mache? What was the project?

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Jesus did not sit up and unwrap Himself. The way the passage reads (especially in Greek) is that the rigid wrap of cloth remained in its position there on the burial stone as it had been when He was placed there, but His body was not in it anymore. John 20:5 says, ***"And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there."*** When the disciples looked in, they saw the burial shell but not Him! His body was gone. This would have been shocking to see.

7. If someone stole the body of Jesus but His clothes were still there, what would that mean?

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8. If someone stripped Jesus before they stole His body, would they take the time and care to carefully reposition the clothes?

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There is another detail that we are given. When they looked in, they saw something else. It was something odd. Our attention is drawn to the head cloth. John 20:6-7 adds, ***"Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself."*** The ***"handkerchief"*** would have been a larger strip of cloth that would have been wrapped in such a way as to cover Jesus' entire head, face, and neck. Here we are told that it is not with the rest of the clothes, but is separate and has been folded neatly.

9. Why do you think this wrapping was separate from the rest?

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Why are we given this detail about the head cloth? Very simply, it told them that He was alive and real. Allow me to explain. The burial clothes in their (rigid) position told them that no one took the body. For if someone had taken the body, they would have taken the burial clothes with the body or they would have had to remove the burial clothes in some way. There would be no way to remove His body without removing the burial clothes. Ripping or cutting the burial clothes to get them off of Jesus's body would have been obvious as soon as they looked in. The fact that they are intact if you will, told them that a genuine miracle had occurred. Jesus' body had not been stolen! Somehow, supernaturally His body was out of those grave clothes.

The next detail, that of the head cloth, would tell them that He was not a spirit or ghost. To see the grave clothes the way they were could have easily led to the conclusion that Jesus transformed into some sort of apparition or ghost, some kind of spiritual body, and vanished away. It would have said that He was not risen bodily but rather spiritually. The head cloth would convey the opposite. The head cloth being folded and set aside would have also put to rest the idea of body snatchers or grave robbers. Who takes a body but makes the time to remove the head covering and fold it neatly? No, the head cloth details told them (and us) that something real, something physical did this. This was no ghost. If Jesus had transcended or transformed into a ghost and disappeared, the head cloth would be in the same position that the rest of the clothes had been. However, it was folded neatly and by itself. It said that someone physical had done it. The detail tells us that He rose physically. It was He who neatly folded the head cloth. He was alive!

10. Please summarize those paragraphs in your own words.

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His being real is so important doctrinally as seen by Jesus confirming it several times for His disciples. Telling Thomas to touch His wounds, asking for food to be given, and eating it in front of them are details that told them that He did not rise spiritually or ideologically, but rather that He was real. This is the point of John later saying, ***"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life"*** (1 John 1:1).

11. Why is it important that Jesus physically rise from the dead?

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The head cloth detail is easy to miss but is an extremely important detail about the way in which our Lord rose from His grave. He rose from the dead in every real way. In so doing, He conquered all of our enemies in every real way!

NOTES

SIGNATURE FOLD

DEVOTION #1 - DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

When we were adding a deck to the back of our house, both of our dads and Angela's brother came to help us. One of them was drilling a hole in a post he was holding when suddenly he exclaimed, "Oh, that is warm." He then took off his work glove and realized his hand was bleeding. He had drilled into his hand. I quickly handed him a small towel.

The situation reminded me of a message I heard from John 20:6-7. The passage records, ***"Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself."*** The preacher stated that when a carpenter was working on a project, he would have a towel nearby. It was his sweat towel. He would wipe sweat and dirt off his brow, remove dust from his project, and hold it on a bloody wound. When he would sell the item, he would have a signature fold of his sweat cloth that showed the sweat and blood that went into his project. The special folding of the towel meant that it is finished. Simon Peter would have known Jesus' signature fold.

Jesus said, ***"It is finished,"*** while on the cross (John 19:30). He paid the price for our sin. However, He went an important step further. He conquered death, Hell, and the grave. He rose from the dead. He is alive and offers us eternal life. It is finished. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:14, ***"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."*** The resurrection is so important.

Paul also states the promise that Jesus' resurrection brings for us. In Romans 6:5, he says, ***"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."*** It is fair to say that only one who is alive can give us life.

This lines up perfectly with John 3:16, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

DEVOTION #2 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

On the morning of our Lord's resurrection, three women went to the tomb of Jesus. They went to the tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. When the women arrived, they were met with the unexpected. First of all, the closed tomb was now open because somehow the heavy stone was rolled away. Secondly, the body of Jesus was no longer there. Thirdly, the moment the women went into the tomb two men in ***"dazzling apparel"*** appeared before them (Luke 24:4). Luke 24:5-8 reads, ***"And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.' And they remembered his words."***

The angel's question has been something I have been pondering, "Why do we look for the living among the dead?" I feel too often we look for the amazing power of Christ in dead things such as religious traditionalism, human effort, man's rules and regulations, and man's creative ingenuity. None of those have the power to save, and yet we hold on to those dead things as if they give us life and purpose. I love my effort. I am a man who tries hard in most areas of my life. However, no effort I ever put in will help my marriage grow. I love my rules, but none of those will change my children's hearts. Maybe you can relate, but so often I have the urge to cling to dead things and hope they bring about a godly change.

In reality, the only thing that brings change is the resurrection of Jesus. At the center of the Gospel is the fact that Jesus did not

remain dead. Death could not hold Jesus. At this moment, because Jesus went from death to life, when I put my faith in Christ's work on the cross, so can you and I.

The three women who visited the grave on the morning of Christ's resurrection were doing the same thing I tend to do. They were looking for the dead. They had the traditional spices, and if they somehow managed to figure out how to roll the stone away they would have tended to the aromatic offensiveness of the post-mortem body of Jesus. Their original plan was to do so and go on with their life. However, on this day the living would not be found among the dead. The moment they saw the stone rolled away, went into the tomb, and the angels proclaimed Christ's resurrection a light went on. At that moment, the women ***"remembered His words"*** and ***"told all these things"*** (Luke 24:8-9). The resurrection of Jesus was what brought the change.

BELIEVE

DEVOTION #3 - PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD

Maybe it is just me, but many times throughout my life, it does not matter how many times I am told something or warned about something, until I experience it or find out for myself, I do not fully believe the gravity or outcome of what I am told.

In John 20:1-9, we read the account of the disciples' revelation of Christ's resurrection. ***"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead."***

Before Christ's crucifixion, He had told them many times that in order to fulfill the scriptures and the Father's will, He must die, but would raise from the dead. This was not a parable or hyperbole, Jesus taught, and the scriptures as well, that He would physically

rise again. Yet, as the disciples heard, were taught, and even saw the linens lying alone, they were still left in a state of awe and doubt; but this was the moment, they saw and believed.

As we come to the close of this Easter series, I want to encourage you to remember the truth of the Gospel. While it can be so easy to say, "When I see it, then I will believe it," we are called to have faith and trust without physically seeing. Jesus has an interaction with Thomas just a little while after this passage. He reminds Thomas of the importance of true faith without prerequisites. In John 20:29, we read, ***"Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"***

WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

DEVOTION #4 - PASTOR JOHN CARTER

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.' And they remembered his words."
Luke 24:1-8

The *"Oxford Dictionary"* defines a miracle as "a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency."

Death has a sense of finality. It is not an unusual thing to consider someone who has experienced death and been laid to rest to be visited by loved ones. Friends and families will often be in the process of grieving and visiting where a beloved has been laid to rest.

In the account of Luke, we are posed with a rather surprising yet unexpected question that confronted the women who followed Jesus, ***"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"*** Let this question simmer in your mind for a second.

There are many historical accounts that by all natural and scientific law and explanation prove and determine that Jesus died. The roman crucifixion was not meant to ever allow someone to come down that had not experienced the pain and suffering of a complete death. Historian Flavius Josephus records the account as does the very detailed accounts of the Gospels. Jesus died and the disciples saw it as did the women to whom this question was posed. They are doing what any normal, rational human would do when a dear loved one has experienced the finality of death. They are visiting Him where dead people are laid to rest, at the grave site, the tomb.

Back to the question, ***"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"*** Is Jesus dead? I am not asking if He died, we have plenty of accounts that verify that He died. However, is He dead? This is one of the most peculiar parts of this season that we have to really rationalize in our minds. Are we celebrating a dead guy? Is this just a memorial of a really influential person that did great things and taught great moral truths?

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" If this is just a memorial, something we are commemorating because there "once was a guy," then we are the recipients of this question today. It just sits there with all the other things we do with people who died before us. We recognize Presidents Day, Martin Luther King Jr., and Memorial Day. We honor those who have gone before us and have, to some degree, died for us to have the world we have, but the harsh truth is in every one of these memorials we commemorate dead people. They are still dead!

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Let me encourage you today to not look for a dead person to show honor to. These are good things we do as traditions. In contrast, if you are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, know you are praising and worshiping a living Savior. He is One who is not dead! That defies all scientific logic or law, so by definition, it is the work of a divine agency. It is a miracle! Think about this the next time you are asked if you have ever seen a miracle. When you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your

Savior, and have a daily relationship with Him, you can confidently say, “Yes!” I have seen a miracle. I know His name and He knows me. His name is Jesus and He lives! Maybe you need to answer that question for yourself, “Are you seeking a dead guy?”

MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

DEVOTION #5 - PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

What could be the miracle of miracles? We are very accustomed to hearing certain phrases within the church. At Christmastime, we hear that Jesus Christ is the ***"King of kings"*** and ***"Lord of lords"*** a lot probably because of Christmas music. However, we find this wording in Scripture also. In 1 Timothy 6:13-15, we read, ***"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time - he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords."***

Now, what could make the resurrection of Jesus Christ the miracle of miracles? Luke 24:5-8 records, ***"And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.' And they remembered his words."*** This sounds like an amazing start to the narrative, to begin with, an angel is there at the tomb and asks them a question, ***"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"*** Then the angel reminds them that Jesus told them that He must be crucified, die, and rise from the dead. Wow! His followers are there and they remembered that Jesus had foretold or predicted His death, burial, and the miracle of miracles, His resurrection.

Many ask, "How did they miss that?" Well, it was difficult to understand, but the Jewish followers of Jesus had a belief that the

Messiah (Christ) would come and overthrow the Roman government. So, His early followers supported Him fully expecting Him to establish an earthly, governmental kingdom in Jerusalem. We can see this when He first begins to teach the resurrection. Mark 8:31-32 says, ***"And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."*** We can see from this Scripture that the resurrection was taught and that one of His closest disciples, Peter, did not agree with or fully understand what Jesus was teaching.

So, there are many miracles in the Scripture and many miracles that we get to see as followers of Jesus Christ, but one aspect of this being the miracle of miracles is that it was foretold in Scripture and taught by Jesus Himself. However, some will say there are quite a few miracles that were prophesied by Old Testament Scriptures, so what makes this the miracle of miracles? We must realize that everything that a follower of Christ believes about salvation (eternity with Christ) is linked to this miracle of miracles - the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:16-18, the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth, ***"For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."*** Some translations read that your faith is "useless," "vain," "worthless," "mere delusion," and "futile." Without this miracle, we will have perished because there is no forgiveness for sin.

Paul goes further in this section of Scripture in verses 19-20 saying, ***"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*** Therefore, we know that this is the miracle of miracles because unlike any other belief system, religion, or miracle, this miracle is Jesus Christ, God the Son, sacrificing His life for us. If He had stayed dead, in the

grave, we would be ***"pitied"*** or most miserable. However, we are not because of the miracle of miracles, the resurrection of Christ.

HISTORICAL JESUS

DEVOTION #6 - NATHAN ELLIOTT

Have you ever heard of the term “historical Jesus”? This term refers to the reconstruction of the life and teachings of Jesus by critical, historical methods. The conclusions of these analyses reveal that Jesus was indeed a real person who walked this earth just like you and me. So, if many atheistic historians believe Jesus existed, then why are they not Christians? Ultimately, it requires faith.

Recently, a friend and I were moving some furniture into my home. As we were carrying a table into the house, I pointed out a large stone for him to avoid because he was walking backward. At that moment, my friend had two choices: 1) to step aside, dodging the stone, or 2) to continue to walk backward into the stone and potentially stumble and hurt himself. There was no third option for the stone to magically disappear. The same is true for our belief regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we either choose to believe He was resurrected or not. There is no third option.

Luke 24:5-8 says, ***“And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’ And they remembered his words.”*** I love the question posed here, ***“Why do you seek the living among the dead?”***

This is the same question we need to be asking those around us who do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Lost souls

search anywhere and everywhere for satisfaction and peace, but they will not be found without Jesus. In 1 Peter 2:6, it says ***"For it stands in Scripture: Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*** Peter is referring to Jesus Christ, and more specifically, the resurrection of Christ. This is our hope as Christians! In John 11:25, Jesus says, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."*** Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are clear throughout the New Testament. I encourage you to choose to have faith today to believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again from the grave so that you may also have new life and hope in the Gospel. If you have already made that decision, I challenge you to share it with someone else this week.

OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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