

Miracles at the Cross (Part 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 May 2012

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] It was because of the cross, of course, that God's love literally poured out into our hearts.

! You can go ahead and find Matthew 27 and verse 45.

Our subject is the cross. Not just any cross. There were, as I mentioned last week and will mention here again, there were thousands and thousands of people who died upon a cross.

Of course, our subject this morning is the cross of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Matthew chapter 27, starting with verse 45.

Now, from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land. The entire earth, I believe, is the meaning here. About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?

[1:26] That is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Some of those who stood there when they heard that said, this man is calling for Elijah.

Immediately, one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and offered it to him to drink. The rest said, let him alone.

Let us see if Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened.

Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming out of the graves after the resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

So when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, truly, this was the Son of God.

[2:41] Death by crucifixion. Can you imagine it? Can we really begin to understand the severity, the horror, the pain of that kind of execution, that kind of death?

From history we understand, best we can understand, the death by crucifixion was invented by the Medes and the Persians. Carried on by the Persians, and later it was adopted by the Greeks.

And then it was perfected by the Romans. The Romans were the chief practitioners of this form of execution. And they really had it down to a science.

And they did it and performed it with impeccable efficiency. Julius Caesar had 6,000 insurrectionists led by one Spartacus, if you remember him, had 6,000 of them crucified in one mass execution.

Can you imagine that? Augustus Caesar boasted of crucifying some 30,000 runaway slaves. Nero, the infamous Nero, Caesar, had condemned thieves crucified in the arena just for the amusement of the citizens.

[4:20] Did a lot of other things as well. Of course, you remember that Nero had thousands of Christians crucified and fed to lions as the scapegoats for the burning of Rome.

Countless thousands through this period in Roman history were executed by the Romans through this horrific method, this form of execution.

And as was generally customary, their bodies would be left hanging upon the cross to rot there just as a reminder to passersby.

Even the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3.13, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. A reference to the crucifixion, to crosses.

Now, of course you know, of those crucified by the Romans, by far the most famous was Jesus.

Right? In the first place, because Jesus was the only one whose crucifixion was predicted centuries before He was even born.

[5:34] It was predicted and prophesied. For example, Isaiah, even before crucifixion was thought of, Isaiah wrote in, he said, He was wounded for our transgressions.

Don't be thrown by the word wounded. That's the Hebrew word *kalal*. And it means to be pierced through. A clear reference to the crucifixion. A little bit later, and still way prior to the birth of Christ, Zechariah would speak of how Israel will one day turn and look to Jesus and believe on Him. And this is what he said in Zechariah 12.10, They will look on Me, the one they have pierced through. Centuries before Jesus was born.

Centuries, really, at least a century before crucifixion became the primary way of execution in the dominant cultures of the day, of history. These things were said of Christ.

But now, you should know that though Jesus stands among the tens of thousands who have died by crucifixion, He stands alone because His death was predicted.

[6:55] But primarily, He stands alone, unique, in that not only was it predicted, but His crucifixion was for a purpose.

An eternal purpose. That is what His cross accomplished. It's what makes Jesus' crucifixion, of course, unique among the thousands, multiple thousands who died by this form.

There were many throughout that era who died because they were criminals. They were crucified because they were criminals. By far, I think most of them were crucified because they were insurrectionists.

And then there were those, of course, who died by this method because of what they believed. And so there were many who were martyred in this form of execution, of course.

But now, listen, you should understand that Jesus died for a completely different reason. His death was for a purpose. An eternal purpose.

[8:01] Jesus was not a criminal. Jesus was not an insurrectionist. As a matter of fact, not any time throughout His earthly ministry did He teach or promote civil disobedience.

So He was no insurrectionist. And Jesus was not a martyr either. Though there are many who would think that He was. But I want you to know that He was not whipped and beaten to the very edge of death because He would not recant a set of beliefs.

Jesus' body was not stretched out on that rough piece of timber because He believed a certain way. He did not die a martyr's death among the countless others who died in that way.

So why then was He crucified? Why? Not why did the Romans crucify Him? That's pretty easy to figure out. And also not why did the Jews turn Him over to the Romans and demand that He be crucified?

That too. Pretty easy to figure out. But I mean, why was He born to die that way? Why did He have to die in just that way?

[9:14] And a corollary question, the one I asked last week and I'm going to ask again this morning. Why do we as Christians glory and celebrate this way, His way of death?

Why do we? I mean, why in the world would we want to display the cross on the steeples of our churches and on the facades of our buildings and also as decorations in our homes and as jewelry on our fingers and around our necks and pinned to our clothing?

Why would we want to memorialize the crucifixion of the Lord of glory? Why? Well, actually, that was the question Jesus asked.

Though He asked it for a different reason than we would ask it. Jesus cried from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That was His question. And that's basically the question I just asked a moment ago. Why was Jesus born to die this way? Why did Jesus have to die this way? And then, the greater question, why would we want to celebrate that and memorialize that?

[10:25] Would it be just enough to memorialize what it accomplished? Why would we want to display the cross like the one that's being projected right behind me?

Why would we want to do that? And so Jesus asked that question. And as I pointed out last week, Jesus, of course, was not asking that question for His own information or for His own benefit.

This was not a cry of ignorance. Of course, He knew why. This was not a cry of confusion. There was no conflict going on inside of Jesus and in His mind.

This was not a cry of bewilderment. This was not a cry of despair. Though many have characterized this statement, this question of Jesus upon the cross, they've characterized it in some of these ways, but that was not it.

Jesus asked the question for the benefit of those who had gathered around His cross that day and in behalf of the countless generations of readers that would follow like us here this morning.

[11:43] And here is basically the question Jesus asked. God, give a demonstration of what my cross means. Give an open, observable demonstration of it.

That's what He asked. Or put it another way, I give a demonstration of what is to be gained by Your forsaking Me here to die in this way, the death of a common criminal.

Why, God? God does not answer with words, of course. We have no record of a verbal answer from God here recorded in Scripture. God does not speak from heaven in audible, intelligible words. He answers with works. miracles. Marvels. Wonders. Miracles. That's how God answers.

And so here is what we have in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 45 to 54. Not just simply a historical record of what happened at the cross.

[12:48] Not just that. But what we have here are seven miracles that stand as a demonstration of why God forsake the Son at the cross.

A demonstration of the eternal significance of the cross of Christ. That's what we have. Now we considered three of these miracles last Sunday.

The first one, worldwide darkness at midday. That was the first miracle. From 12 noon in the day when the sun was at its highest until 3 in the afternoon, darkness came over the entire earth.

And it was a demonstration. A demonstration of what? A demonstration of God's eternal judgment on sin. That's what it was a demonstration of. Do you want to know or want a demonstration of how God feels about sin?

How God responds to sin? Then look at the cross. Look at the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ. The second miracle. Again, we looked at this last Sunday as a similar message, similar demonstration.

[14:02] And that is God the Father's abandonment of God the Son on the cross. And this is a miracle. This is unthinkable. This has never happened before. This was supposedly impossible.

That within the Godhead, the Trinity, where there can be no separation, at that moment upon the cross, for the first time in all of eternity, God the Son was separated, totally separated, and abandoned by God the Father.

It's a miracle. And this is a miracle. That is a demonstration. A demonstration of what is in store for all those who reject the cross.

All those who will not repent. All those who will not trust in Jesus Christ. And that will be eternal separation from God. Do you want to know what will happen to all those who die in unbelief?

Look at the cross. Look at the cross. The darkness. The abandonment. And then we skipped on down to the fifth miracle because its object, its intent is for the same kind of group of people that is unbelievers.

[15:15] And that is the violent earthquake. The violent earthquake. God violently shook this earth because of sin. And one day, He will do it again.

Hebrews 12, verse 25 warns us, See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth.

But now He has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not only earth, but also heaven, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

And that, of course, would be the kingdom of God's Son. Cannot be shaken. So, three of the seven miracles at the cross. We saw this last Sunday. They're demonstrating, signifying eternal darkness, eternal abandonment, eternal wrath.

And now we're ready for a fourth miracle, but actually the third miracle in the order in which they appear. And that is the physical death of God the Son. The physical death of God the Son.

[16:35] That is a miracle. Matthew said that He yielded up His Spirit.

That's a miracle. Now actually, John in his Gospel account records that Jesus said, I'm thirsty. We don't have that appearing here.

Both John and Matthew record that someone took a sponge dipped in some sour wine or vinegar, put it on a reed, and lifted it up so that Jesus could have a drink.

But the question is, why do you suppose Jesus asked for a drink? Why do you think? Well, because He was thirsty. Right? Well, He was, I'm sure.

But primarily because He had an important announcement to make. Or He had an important declaration to make. He was about to make a victory cry. Now, Matthew doesn't tell us about it.

[17:38] But Jesus has something to speak here. And I have no doubts that His throat was dry. His mouth was dry. His tongue was dry. Probably cleaving to the roof of His mouth because of all

He had been through.

He was certainly thirsty. He needed a drink. He needed some moisture in His mouth so that He could make His cry what He's going to declare. He could make that heard loud and clear by those who stood by.

And so He needed a drink. Well, does Jesus say anything? Well, Matthew just tells us that He cried with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.

That is, He died. But what did He cry? Well, John the Apostle tells us in his account in John 19, verse 30. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, It is finished.

It is finished. And bowed His head, He gave up His spirit. Matthew said He yielded up His spirit. John said He gave up His spirit. And so Jesus was saying, when He said, It is finished, He is saying, My mission has been accomplished.

[18:46] It is finished. It is completed. The work of redemption that I have come to secure, to complete, is done.

It is accomplished. That is what He meant when He said, It is finished. But it is after this glorious declaration that we have a third miracle, as I have said.

When He said, or the Bible says, He yielded up His spirit. Now you might be thinking, what kind of miracle is that?

I mean, that's not a miracle, is it? Is death a miracle? It's not a miracle, is it? Is death a miracle? Well, it is if you are the eternal Son of God.

See, don't fail to notice how Matthew worded this. He did not just simply say, Jesus died. Rather, He said, Jesus yielded up His spirit.

[19:46] That's something different. Literally, He dismissed His spirit. Again, John put it this way, He gave up. It's an active thing.

He gave up His spirit. This was an act of His own volition. Jesus chose to die. Do you understand? Did you know that Jesus was the only person in all of history who chose to die? You say, well, Pastor, what about those who commit suicide? Don't they choose to die?

Or how about self-sacrificing acts of heroism where a person purposefully puts his or her life on the line to protect another, actually giving the life so that another can live?

What about that? Don't they choose to die? Or back there in World War II, those kamikaze pilots that flew their planes into our battleships and such, did they not choose to die?

[20:52] Or today, in our context of life, we hear about it nearly every day, how about Muslim suicide bombers? They chose to die, didn't they?

No, they did not. Now, they may have chosen the way. They certainly chose the time. But they were going to die sometime anyway.

You see, they just simply chose to speed up the inevitable. But Jesus was different. Jesus was the only one in all of history who chose to die because as God, He was the only one who did not have to die.

He didn't have to die. And so, essentially, the Romans did not kill Jesus. The Jews did not kill Jesus. The devil did not kill Jesus.

Certainly not. Absurd. Jesus Himself had said in John 10, verse 18, I lay down my life that I may take it again.

[21:59] No one, listen, no one takes it from me, He said. No one takes my life from me. But I lay it down. It's an act of His own volition.

It's purposeful. It's active. I lay it down of myself. And then He capped it off by saying I'm the only one who has the power to do that. He said, I have power to lay it down.

That is, I have not only the ability, but even more so the authority to lay my life down and I have that same authority to take it up again. And He certainly did that too, didn't He?

You see, Jesus dismissed His Spirit. This is a miracle. He gave it permission to go. Jesus released His final breath of life and He died.

And you say, how terrible. How sad. No. How wonderful. How wonderful. What love. What sacrifice.

[23:06] Hebrews 12.1 Let us run with endurance the race that has been set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

That's why we glory in the cross. And this miracle is a demonstration of His love and His sacrifice. He yielded up His Spirit and died for us.

Now, we're ready for the fourth miracle. The tearing of the veil into. This is without a doubt or was without a doubt a miracle.

It's supernatural. And it's an amazing miracle. Where the Bible says that the veil of the temple was torn into from the top to the bottom.

This is a miracle. Now, what is this temple that the Bible speaks of here? It's the Greek word naos. And, by the way, it does not refer to the temple as a whole.

[24 : 19] This word naos speaks to a specific part of the temple. The temple was a huge building. It had a number of rooms, a number of courtyards and porticos and different things.

But, we're not talking about the temple as a whole here. naos is a reference to the innermost part of the temple called the holy of holies.

The innermost part of it. You see, the Jewish temple was quite large. And, it had many different rooms. And, starting from the outside and moving in, each room became more and more sacred and, therefore, more and more exclusive.

Do you understand this about the temple? Every door leading in, inward, would have a warning posted over it forbidding certain segments of society from entering in.

It would begin with a sign on the outside that said, no Gentiles. Well, Gentiles are not welcome. That's literally what it said. Gentiles could not go in any part of the temple. Outside of the court of Gentiles.

[25 : 40] And then, coming through the main entrance of the temple, one would enter the court of women. And, I'm sorry, gals, but women could not go any further than that place.

And then, as you go in, further in, you would then enter into the court of Israel and only men were allowed there. Jewish men. Further in was the court of priests.

And only the priests could enter that part of the temple. The Levites. And then, next would come the holy place.

Now, we're almost to the most holiest, but we're not quite there. You would go then from the court of priests into the holy place. And it was very sacred.

And it was open only to the high priest and select priests according to their appointed time, their lot.

[26 : 43] Remember Zechariah, John the Baptist's father. It was his appointed time to go into the holy place. And it was there that God revealed what he was about to do and struck him dumb.

Remember? So, the high priest and select priests could enter into the holy place and it was in there where you had the altar of incense and the golden lampstand and the table of showbread.

But then, finally, you would enter through the veil into the innermost part of the temple. The holy of holies.

Or we could say the holiest of holies. The naos. And of course, in there, they had the ark of the covenant. And the holy of holies was where the presence of God dwelt in his Shekinah glory.

And nobody, but nobody, was allowed in there but the high priest. And then, only one time a year. Very exclusive. sacred.

[27 : 54] Very sacred. And the way from the holy place into the holy of holies, that way was barred by a thick veil.

And that veil represented the unapproachability of God. You could not go in there. You could not come into his presence.

It was barred by the veil. Now, the tearing of the veil in two was, in the first place, a physical miracle. It really was.

The veil, this veil, was thick. Best estimates, four to six inches thick of woven cloth. It was not just mere curtain. In fact, Josephus, the Roman historian, recorded that the veil could not be torn in two by teams of horses pulling in opposite directions.

And yet, this thick veil was torn in two by some unseen power, and it was torn from top to bottom.

[29 : 06] That's the miracle. What did it mean? What did it mean? Well, it was an answer to Jesus' question. It was a demonstration.

God, Jesus asked, give a demonstration of the significance of my cross and why you have forsaken me here. And the Bible then tells us, behold, that means suddenly, the veil of the temple was torn into from top to bottom.

And so, it's a miracle. And God is saying to us that through the sacrificial death of my son Jesus, there is now available to all who will trust him, open access to my holy presence.

What did he say? Hebrews chapter 10 verse 19, therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest, the naos, the very presence of God, we have boldness to enter into the very presence of God by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated, that is, which he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh.

That's what Hebrews says, no doubt about it. The veil represents the very body of Jesus Christ.

And for centuries, the veil in the temple was just simply a shadow of the real veil.

[30 : 38] The Lord Jesus Christ would one day come and did come. And so, the veil represents the body of Jesus and the destruction of the veil represents his sacrificial death upon the cross for our sin.

And for centuries, it was a foreshadowing of Jesus and through the cross, the shadow was removed and rather than the veil serving as a barrier to keep man from God, it is now an open way.

Praise the Lord. It's an open way for us because Jesus is the veil. And so, Jesus is the one and only way to God.

We looked at the fifth miracle last week. Miracle number six. The resurrection of some dead saints. That's the sixth miracle.

Look at how it's described here for us. Verse 52, and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep, that is, they died, were raised.

[31 : 50] And coming out of the graves after His resurrection, after the resurrection of Jesus, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. It's a miracle, right? Now, time does not permit us to delve into all of the questions about this text and there are many.

Some controversy as well. It is, I think, certain that these were true believers who died before Christ came. And I think also it is clear that these saints were resurrected and not just simply resuscitated. You know, just brought back to life to die again some other time. No, they were resurrected. And so I think it's safe to conclude that after they were seen in the city to verify, to validate the miracle, but even more so the message of it, after they were seen, then they went on up to heaven.

I think that is clear. And, of course, all of this happened after Jesus' resurrection. So this is a miracle that did not take place right there at the cross, but it was the demonstration and answer to Jesus' question that happened after His resurrection.

He's the first fruits of those raised from the dead. Now, is this also part of the answer that God gave Jesus when He asked the question, why have you forsaken Me?

[33 : 20] I believe so. I believe clearly it is. You see, the resurrection of those saints occurring after Jesus' death and resurrection was God's demonstration, really His proof of what He had promised.

Promised all believers. And what has He promised us? Life. He's promised us resurrection.

And these dead saints coming back to life are being raised and then going on to heaven. They're demonstrations to prove that God's Word is sure and that we will all be raised.

That's why we glory in the cross. That's why it is our treasure. That cross that we have displayed in all these different places is or should be an empty cross.

And the tomb where Jesus' body was laid after His death is an empty tomb. And we have this guarantee from God the Father.

[34 : 34] 1 Thessalonians 4.16 All the dead in Christ shall be raised. We have that promise. That assurance. And these dead saints being raised there after the cross and resurrection are demonstrations of that to us.

And you know, one more miracle occurred that day at the cross. And I would declare to you that this last miracle capped it all off.

And in a sense, was the culmination of all of the miracles at the cross. Look at verse 54.

verse 54. So when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly.

They feared. Saying truly, this was the Son of God. this is a miracle of faith.

[35 : 52] I believe clearly. Other gospel accounts give us some information about this as well. That this was true salvation.

Perhaps the greatest miracle that occurred at the cross and a miracle that continues to occur and has been occurring days, years, centuries, millennia later.

A miracle that has happened to many of you. hopefully all of you. The miracle of faith. The miracle of salvation.

And it is that last one that I would really like to search your soul. Has that miracle occurred in your life?

the miracle faith. The miracle of salvation. My God, my God, Jesus cried, why have you forsaken me?

[37 : 25] What is the meaning of this? Tell them, show them. What's the significance of this cross? is the salvation of soul. The is the of soul. is