

The Six Miracles of Calvary

Matt. 27:45-54 & John 20:3-9

Introduction:

The reason we are here tonight to reflect on the death of Jesus Christ is not because He died only, but because He was also resurrected from the dead and is alive forevermore. This was no ordinary execution, and Heaven declared the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection by these six miracles. We are at the point in following the Passion story where Jesus has been crucified and is on display before many who have gathered for this event. Many were mourning, but many were angry and glad to see Him go. The scene is set from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. During this time there was much going on: commotion, noise, busyness, people crying, people jeering, soldiers mocking and dividing His clothes among themselves, Jesus recognizes His mother – Mary, He assigns John as her guardian, thieves mocked and dialogue with Jesus. Then at 12:00 noon – high noon, something dramatic happens. Let's pick up the story from Matt. 27:45-54.

Matt 27:45-54 (NIV)

*45 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour **darkness came over all the land.** 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

*51 At that moment the **curtain of the temple was torn** in two from top to bottom. **The earth shook** and the rocks split. 52 **The tombs broke open** and the **bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.***

53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Miracle 1 – Darkness

*45 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour **darkness came over all the land.***

We see a simple line that spans three hours in time. The same phenomenon can be seen in each of the synoptic gospels. Amid all the busyness and noise, a sudden and frightening complete darkness falls upon the land. Everything stops during this period – followers as well as persecutors of Jesus stand in awe, and nothing else is recorded anywhere about this three hour period except that darkness came over all the land.

What could this darkness mean and what caused it? It is NOT an eclipse as many have speculated; it lasted three hours and covered the same area for that time period. The people demanded a sign? Here is God's response! This was a supernatural and miraculous event. It also declared to all the purpose of Jesus' mission. In His perfect, sinless righteousness, He took upon Himself the sins of all humankind – once, for all. It was never intended for humans to gaze upon the Christ in such a state – bearing sin upon Himself. It was as if God had blanketed Him with a veil of darkness to hide Him from our eyes. In the darkness, Jesus took the punishment and abandonment for sin on our behalf. God – whose eyes are too pure to look upon sin – had to turn His face away, and God hid Jesus' anguish from our eyes in this same darkness.

Jesus' birth was announced by shining light, but His death by total darkness. God's love is far stronger to save us than our sin is to destroy us. Redemption was accomplished and accepted. Sorrow, suffering, and

death were swallowed up in victory in the darkness of Calvary. Then Jesus Himself interrupts the silence and darkness. He cries out, “My God, My God. Why have you forsaken Me.” The action resumes in the scene with Jesus’ words as He gives up His life to pay the final price personally and in full. This event triggered the next several miracles of Calvary.

Miracle 2 – The Tearing of the Temple Curtain

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

*51 At that moment the **curtain of the temple was torn** in two from top to bottom.*

This massive single tapestry was torn in half, down the middle, from top to bottom. What could have caused such an occurrence? Could it have been the earthquake? NO! First, an earthquake strong enough to cause this to happen would have also shaken the very foundations of the temple causing it to topple. Second, the order of the events in our text show us that the curtain was torn first, followed by the earthquake. So what happened and what was God trying to reveal by it?

The curtain in the temple was designed after the Tabernacle in the wilderness and laid out by God Himself. The curtain was designed to conceal what was behind it from view and access. Beyond the curtain was the Holy or Holies – the place where the very presence of God was manifest. Access was strictly prohibited and never violated by the Israelites. Once per year the High Priest would enter to bring the blood of the sacrifice made for the sin of the people. Now Jesus, the great High Priest, took the sin of the people upon Himself and spilled His precious blood as the ultimate sacrifice for that sin. It is only through that blood sacrifice that we have access to the presence of God. Once accepted, there is no longer any need for an animal sacrifice; His blood was shed once, for all. There was no longer a need to separate the people from God’s presence. All now have access to the very presence of God through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Notice the time ... 3:00 pm – the time of the evening sacrifice at the temple. God caused the great curtain to tear at a time when the temple would be full of people and priests. It tore from top to bottom as if torn by the very hands of God. All there could look into the Holy of Holies and not die – a miracle had occurred. Would they understand the meaning? Later we learn that many priests came to believe the faith. The perfect sacrifice was made. His victory shout and death removed the veil to the presence of God, never to be required again. God purposely and carefully planned this event to confirm the purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and it symbolized the very gospel itself. Jesus carried His own blood into the actual presence of God, and this perfect sacrifice was fully accepted. The torn temple curtain attested to it.

Miracle 3 – The Earthquake

*51b **The earth shook and the rocks split.***

God communicated the importance and true meaning of Jesus’ death in supernatural ways. The earth shook as soon as Jesus died. His great victory shout from the cross, “It is finished!” reverberated in the earth from that location out. The cross was the epicenter of this quake, and yet it didn’t topple or falter, but remains a steadfast symbol of that moment for all eternity. The earthquake caused rocks to split, Roman soldiers to tremble in fear, graves to be opened, and it bears witness to the death and victory of Jesus Christ. It was both supernatural and miraculous.

It coincided with Jesus’ death, and would not have happened otherwise; it occurred the same time as His victory cry from the cross; it coincided with the splitting of the rocks, and the opening of the graves. Yet, it did not cause all graves to open, but only selected ones, as we will see in a few minutes. The only things that were disturbed by this earthquake were those that would affirm the purpose of Jesus’ death. It was also an answer to Sinai. There, an earthquake testified to the wrath against those who break the Law. Here it testified to the mercy available to all who believe and trust in what Jesus did for us - that we could not do for ourselves. Sinai was God’s voice of condemnation, while Calvary is God’s voice of pardon and peace.

One earthquake answered the other. The Law was given to expose the sinfulness of humankind and render us helpless and ruined. It creates in us a desire to be saved from God's punishment. This earthquake was the earth's reaction to the fulfillment of the Law of Sinai. Jesus died to redeem us from the Law of sin and death. This was such an awesome act of love and grace and victory that the earth shook in response.

Miracle 4 – The Opened Graves

52 The tombs broke open...

One of the results of the force of the earthquake was the splitting of the rocks as mentioned in the previous verse. Graves were opened in this area, the same area where Jesus' would be laid in a "nearby" tomb. Large stones were placed at the entrance of these graves. It was these "rocks" that were split at the time of Jesus' death. The splitting of the rocks did not foretell anything, but the open graves foretold the coming resurrection glory. Whose graves were opened? It was NOT all graves in the area, and it was not arbitrary. Only selected graves of "holy people" or "saints" were opened; those who were waiting for the Messiah. The splitting of the rocks was evidence of force, but the opening of the graves was evidence of God's design.

The graves were opened at Jesus' death, but the bodies did not emerge until His resurrection. The graves were opened in anticipation of life coming from death – a sign of redemption. Jesus would model the true resurrection to a glorified body. Those who were raised in the graveyard were restored only to their mortal bodies. This was a sign from God of the reality of the promise to all who are believers. This was an attention grabber by God so people would wait in anticipation of Jesus' resurrection first and then ours also.

This was a sample of what was to come to make a statement to the people there of the purpose and meaning of Jesus' death – and soon coming resurrection. At His death, the power of sin that brings spiritual death was broken and symbolized by the open graves. At the moment of His death, the graves were opened; at the moment of His death all our sins were completely answered for. Thank you Lord! And so we pause tonight to remember.

Miracle 5 – The Undisturbed Grave Clothes

To get a better idea of this miracle we are going to flip over to John's gospel. It was now Sunday, resurrection morning, before daylight, and Mary comes to the tomb to find it opened. She goes back to the disciples to tell them what she found and that someone must have taken the Lord's body away...

John 20:3-9 - *So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)*

John notes the arrangement of the graves clothes for all to realize that Jesus had to rise from the dead miraculously. There was something especially noteworthy about the arrangement of the tomb scene that was important enough that John "saw and believed." What could have caused such an impact on him that he would, at this point, get the revelation of Jesus and be spiritually revived? This was the moment that John "believed." It's not enough to know who Jesus is, and it's not enough to recognize that He died. The Bible teaches us that we must believe in our heart that He died and that He rose again in order to be saved. That Sunday morning became John's spiritual birthday because he "saw and believed." Let's look at the situation more closely.

The disciples could not have taken Jesus' body. The Roman guard was posted specifically to prevent that. Here, two of the disciples are coming to investigate the report that the body was missing – maybe taken. Yet, inside the tomb, they find the arrangement of linens and the head cloth in such a way that they realize that humans could not have taken the body and left the scene in this state. You see, the linen grave cloths were left in the exact position and placement as when the body was still wrapped in them. And, the head cloth was still wrapped and folded in the exact way it was around His head. Don't think of the cloth as being purposely folded neatly and placed separately from the linens. Think of it as if the body and head were still wrapped exactly as they were when He was laid in the tomb, but that the entire body was vaporized from within the cloth strips, and they fell in place, exactly as they were when the body was in them. Now, do you understand how this would make a lasting and life changing impression on John, and on us as well? He noticed something very special about the arrangement in the tomb and he saw and believed.

This was another sign from God Himself, to draw attention to the reality of who Jesus is and why He came. The undisturbed grave clothes bore witness to His glorious resurrection, in overcoming power and victory over sin and death. He had risen just like He said. He was not just revived, like Lazarus who came out of the tomb still wrapped with the grave clothes. He was transformed out from the linens. They may not have understood yet why this was necessary, but they certainly realized it had happened. God's miraculous power had been there and left convincing evidence behind that caused John to believe.

Miracle 6 – Revivals to Life in the Calvary Graveyard

52b ... the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

There are six other examples of revivals to life from death in Scripture. All were raised to their mortal bodies and all died again. The revival to life of these "holy people" is significant especially because this event is directly tied into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though these people were not resurrected to their glorious bodies, this event is a deposit to us toward the glorious resurrection of all those who are His in the future. At that time, the entire Body of Christ will be raised at one time to a new glorious body as He has. God will not raise people in dribs and drabs, here and there. Just as the Body is one, so the resurrection of the Body will be one, and at one time. This was a demonstration of the resurrection power of God at work, and foretells symbolically of the greater resurrection yet to come. Jesus had spoken about the resurrection and even about having to die and be raised from the dead, but this was a tangible, visual demonstration of His words. At the final resurrection, stones would not have to be split and graves will not have to be opened. The final resurrected spiritual glorious body will not be hindered by physical boundaries. We will have bodies like Jesus' resurrected body.

We don't know much about these people, except that they were recognized as people who were raised from the dead. We also know that only "holy people" were raised – not just anyone. These restored humans were now representatives of and a foreshadowing of immortality and eternal glory that was now even more sure to come. This miracle was deliberately placed in view following Christ's resurrection – they followed Him. This miracle brought the previous ones to a logical conclusion. The Darkness (in horror and judgment) gave way to the Victory cry from the cross that caused the temple curtain to tear, the earth to quake, the rocks to split, the graves to open, Jesus to be resurrected, and the revival to life of holy people in the Calvary graveyard. Each has individual significance and all testify to the purpose and mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His mission to redeem humankind from the curse of sin and death.

Conclusion:

Each miracle is an actual event that took place and is also a symbol of a future event that is promised. They produce in us more faith, more hope, and more assurance that the future events will happen as promised. All are as a result of what Jesus came to accomplish. All are directly tied to His death and resurrection. All bear witness to the mission and purpose of His ministry. All are miracles of God purposely created to draw attention to this greatest event of all time. Only once did God send Jesus to live a sinless life so He could

become sin for us and pay the penalty of sin, death on the cross. We are here tonight to remember, reflect, and be thankful to God for His Messiah, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by His own death and resurrection, by shedding His own precious blood as the perfect Passover sacrifice. Surely He is the Son of God!