

Matthew 27G

- In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes:

[1Cor. 15:3](#) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

[1Cor. 15:4](#) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- Paul tells the church that the thing of first importance for every Christian, the thing we must understand, is a very simple idea
 - Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures foretold
 - He was buried and He resurrected to life on the third day, all according to what God foretold in the Scriptures
 - These simple truths are of first importance for every believer
- By our faith in these things, we are reconciled to God, our sins are forgiven, and we receive eternal life...things of first importance
 - And now in our study of Matthew's Gospel, we have reached the point where these are the thing in view
 - Last time we met we stopped at v.50, at the first step in these things: Jesus dying
 - As we learned last time, no one took Jesus' life from Him...He lay His life down as an act of sacrifice in obedience to the Father
- Jesus hung on a cross for a total of six hours; three hours to receive the wrath of men and three hours for the wrath of God
 - Jesus neither invited the wrath of men nor deserved the wrath of God, yet He willingly took both to stand in our place on that day
 - And after experiencing three hours spiritual separation from the Father in total darkness, Jesus declared "it is finished"
 - He had satisfied the wrath of God, He has paid the price for our sin, and now He could be released from His suffering
 - So Jesus bowed His head and yielded up His Spirit to the Father, and His body died

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- Now at this point, we move into the final three hour period on this day of Passover, the events leading to Jesus' burial – the next essential thing
 - Jesus' body must be prepared for burial before being placed in a tomb, and these events must be done quickly
 - Because at sundown, approximately 6 PM, the Passover day ends and a Sabbath day begins
 - As we learned in an earlier lesson, Passover is always followed by a week-long feast called Unleavened Bread
 - And according to Exodus 12:16, the first and last days of this feast are to be Sabbath days regardless of which day they fall
 - Jews called these special Sabbath days High Sabbaths to distinguish them from the usual weekly Sabbath that came every Friday evening
 - And they called the day before any Sabbath a day of preparation because certain preparations had to be made for a Sabbath
 - Since work couldn't be done on a Sabbath day, Jews spent the day prior completing essential chores
 - They lit fires, drew water and prepared food so they could rest on the Sabbath day
 - And if someone died, they rushed to bury the person so their body didn't remain unburied over the Sabbath day
 - John records that the Passover day was a day of preparation because the next day would be a High Sabbath day
 - But this year, Passover fell on a Thursday, so that meant there would be not one but *two* Sabbath days in a row
 - First the High Sabbath on Friday followed by the usual weekly Sabbath on Saturday
 - Therefore, if Jesus' body were not buried before sundown, He would remain unburied for two days...a great dishonor!
- So the next three hours will be a scramble to get Jesus in a tomb, and that period begins with a series of supernatural signs

Matt. 27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

[Matt. 27:52](#) The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;

[Matt. 27:53](#) and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

[Matt. 27:54](#) Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

- Matthew gives us the most detailed account of these events reporting there were three types of supernatural signs to announce Jesus' death
 - The veil in the temple was torn, dead bodies were resurrected out of tombs and a great earthquake shook the ground
 - Let's start with the earthquake since it's the simplest to explain
 - As Jesus died, God shook the earth resulting in rocks breaking and structures falling down scaring everyone who experienced it
 - The Lord commonly uses earthquakes to announce important events during His plan for the Creation
 - Jesus told us in Chapter 24 that the occurrence of earthquakes increasing will be a sign of the last days and the approaching end of this age
 - And in Tribulation God uses earthquakes to devastate the earth and as signs that judgment is near
 - So God announces the death of Messiah with an earthquake...why an earthquake? Because it's hard to ignore an earthquake
 - There are few experiences in life more humbling or better at reminding us of our insignificance and of God's power
 - And that's the point here: it was an awesome display of the power of God to redeem mankind from sin and death
 - Jesus' dying wasn't God's plan failing or God being powerless to save His Son...it was exactly as God planned
- And the sign worked...notice in v.54 how a centurion and the others who were at the cross standing guard react to the earthquake

- After 3 hours of unexplainable darkness, then suddenly the sun begins shining again and exactly at that moment Jesus says it is finished
 - Then Jesus gives up His spirit, selecting the precise moment of His death, and the earth shakes with a massive earthquake
 - These guys didn't need to be theologians or geo-physicists to put 2 and 2 together – clearly Jesus was in control
- So they became frightened as they recognize they were watching the Son of God dying voluntarily
 - Because of these powerful events their hearts were moved, and in response they confess faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - Of course, their positive response is evidence that God extended His grace to them
 - And they receive grace because of a prayer request Jesus had offered on their behalf earlier
- As Jesus was nailed to the cross and the soldiers stood below gambling for His clothes, Jesus prayed this:

[Luke 23:34](#) But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

- Jesus knew they were just soldiers doing their jobs that day, so Jesus asks the Father to extend forgiveness to them that day
- And when Jesus asks the Father to forgive someone, the Father hears the Son, and they receive forgiveness
- They weren't just forgiven for the sin of crucifying Jesus...they were forgiven of all their sins just like any believer
- So the first sign was an earthquake, and the second sign was saints (i.e., believers) resurrected from the tombs
 - But notice carefully how Matthew says this happened...starting in v.52 Matthew says first the tombs were opened
 - A tomb is an above-ground burial place, usually a cave or a sarcophagus
 - A body is wrapped and placed inside the tomb, then the entrance is sealed with a large bolder or cut stone

- As Jesus died, many of these tombs were opened, which means the stones sealing the entrance were miraculously moved out of place
 - But this event was just a prelude to the real miracle
 - In the second half of v.52, Matthew says many saints were resurrected, meaning their dead bodies returned to life
 - But in v.53 Matthew says these saints didn't walk out of their tombs *until after Jesus was resurrected on the third day*
 - So the Lord opened the tombs at the moment Jesus died, but He didn't resurrect the saints until the three days later
- The odd way in which these resurrections took place – first the tombs opened and later bodies walked out – is a illustration of the Gospel itself
 - As Christ died, He paid the price for sin, declaring “it is finished”
 - Jesus' atoning work on the cross opened our tomb, so to speak, making a way for everyone to escape the penalty of death
 - The stone blocking our escape was rolled away, the seal broken, the way out prepared
- But before we can leave our sentence of death, we must first accept the truth of Jesus' resurrection
 - As Paul says plainly:

[Rom. 10:9](#) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- To be saved...to walk away from your death sentence...you must first believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead
- You need faith in His resurrection before you can experience your own resurrection
- As Paul told us...the thing of first importance is to know that Jesus died, He was buried and He was resurrected
- Speaking of resurrection, these saints were resurrected in a manner similar to the way Lazarus was raised in Bethany during the week prior to Passover
 - As John tells us, Lazarus died and after three days, Jesus came to Bethany and called Lazarus out of his tomb

- Lazarus returned to life and walked out, but as he did he emerged with the same, earthly, sinful body as before
- He wasn't resurrected into a new eternal, sinless body like the one we will all receive in preparation for the Kingdom
- Lazarus was probably disappointed to learn he would have to die again someday, because Lazarus experienced a temporary resurrection
 - And that's the same situation for these saints as well...they are being resurrected into their old bodies as a sign or testimony
 - Those who knew these saints before they died would recognize them, and seeing them alive would be an undeniable miracle
 - But in time those resurrected saints died again, and they now wait for a future day to be resurrected for life in the Kingdom
- So there was an earthquake and resurrections to announce the Messiah's death, and then finally in v.51 Matthew says the temple veil was torn
 - This final sign is perhaps the most important, but it's also one of the most misunderstood details in the story of Jesus' death

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- To understand this sign properly, we need to start with some background on the temple and the veil itself
- Remember, the temple was modeled on the tabernacle which came before it, though much larger and more ornate

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- Both structures were divided into three sections or areas
 - The first area was an outside courtyard created by a fence or wall that encompassed the tabernacle or temple building proper
 - Then the inside of the building itself was further divided into two sections
 - The larger of these two sections was called the Holy Place and the smaller was called the Most Holy Place
 - These two sections were also sometimes called the outer sanctuary and the inner sanctuary
- The Holy Place or outer sanctuary held furniture like the menorah lamp and the table with showbread and the incense altar

- This space was only accessible by the priesthood of Israel, who entered this place daily as part of their service in the temple
- They burned incense and applied the blood of daily sacrifices to the altar of incense, kept the lamp lit and set out the bread
- The third section of the temple, the Most Holy Place or the inner sanctuary, was divided from the Holy Place by a curtain called the inner veil
 - Behind the inner veil sat the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat, upon which the glory of God dwelled perpetually
 - Josephus reports that in Jesus' day, this space was completely empty, since the ark disappeared during the Babylonian invasion
- Nevertheless, the Holy of Holies remained a protected space reserved for the presence of God and inaccessible behind a large veil
 - The only exception was on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest of Israel entered to make atonement for the nation
 - Apart from that one day a year, the Most Holy Place remained off-limits

27G-5

- So back to the text, when Matthew reports the veil of the temple was ripped, most assume Matthew was speaking of this veil, the inner veil

27G-6

- But there were two veils in the temple, not just one, since Exodus 26:36 required a veil to cover the entrance to the Holy Place as well
 - We call this veil the outer veil to distinguish it from the inner veil
 - Listen to Josephus' description of the temple and its outer veil from *The Wars of the Jews*

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[War 5:209](#) (5.5.4) but then, as the entire house was divided into two parts within, it was only the first part of it that was open to our view. Its height extended all along to ninety cubits in height, and its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty;

[War 5:211](#) (5.5.4) but then this house, as it was divided into two parts, the inner part was lower than the appearance of the outer, and had golden doors of fifty-five cubits altitude, and sixteen in breadth;

[War 5:212](#) (5.5.4) but before these doors there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful...

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- Josephus reports the entry to the Holy Place was protected by two huge doors covered in gold and before these doors was a purple veil
 - In Jesus' day, this outer veil was even larger and more ornate than the inner veil
 - Elsewhere Josephus describes the outer veil as 60 feet high, 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick, which means it weighed 3,100 lbs
- This is the veil that could be seen by everyone since it hung outside the building entrance, especially if standing up on the Mt of Olives
 - But for the same reason, the veil prevented anyone from seeing into the Holy Place even when the doors were open
 - That was the point...the veil obscured the way into the Holy Place and in doing so it sent a message to the world
- The writer of Hebrews explains it this way, speaking of the outer veil of the temple

27G-10

[Heb. 9:8](#) The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, [Heb. 9:9](#) which is a symbol for the present time. ...

- The writer says the way into the "holy place" was not revealed while the "outer" tabernacle was still standing
 - He was referring to this opening into the structure which say its very design became a symbol
 - By its very design – complete with doors, veil and priesthood – it symbolized that the way to God was restricted
- It was only open to the Levitical priests, so if you wanted to worship God, you had to go to God through the priests
 - You had to bring your gifts and offerings and petitions and sacrifices to a priest who carried them into the Holy Place for you
 - The priest worshipped on your behalf while you stayed outside

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- You couldn't even see what was happening inside because that heavy veil covered the doorway and blocked your view
- But as Jesus died, the Lord sent another, unmistakable message for all to see by announcing things were about to change
 - And God ripped the veil from top to bottom, from heaven to earth, to say this was a change instituted by God, not men

27G-12

- And the message was clear: we no longer stand outside while priests represent us before God out of view and behind a veil
- A new covenant was being established with a new priesthood that would function in full view of the world
- I imagine crowds must have gathered on the Mt. of Olives for days and weeks after this moment to get a glimpse
 - The priests who served in the Holy Place on that day had no choice but to work in full view of everyone for the first time
 - And although they probably replaced that veil in time, it didn't last because the end of the temple was coming soon
- So why was it important to understand the outer veil was torn and not the inner veil?
 - Because it makes a fundamental difference in how we respond
 - If we believe that the inner veil was torn, then we might assume that the way to the Father and the mercy seat has been revealed
 - But that isn't true...we don't have direct access to the Father except through our High Priest, Jesus Christ
 - We serve a great High Priest Who has entered the Holy of Holies on our behalf to reconcile us with the Father
 - We depend on Jesus' intercession everyday, His atoning work, His word, His plan, His grace

27G-13

Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

- Christ is our High Priest and the only One qualified to enter into the presence of the Father and to make atonement for us

- As Jesus said, if we do not abide in Him we can do nothing
- But if we understand that the outer veil was removed so that we might enter the Holy Place, then that changes everything
 - Because who can enter the Holy Place? Only a priest, and so if the outer veil has been torn down, then it means we're all priests
 - And if we are all priests, then we are all called to serve Jesus in an important way
- The Bible says we are now priests, and we enter the Holy Place to worship and serve God everyday
 - As Peter says:

1Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- Everyone who places faith in Jesus Christ is part of a royal priesthood serving our High Priest, Jesus
- So just as the priests of the temple made daily sacrifices and offered up incense and tended to the light and bread, so do we
- Where is our temple, our Holy Place? Paul says it's our very body

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- As a priest of Christ we make daily sacrifices too, but not with animals...we are called to make ourselves living sacrifices
- We sacrifice our desires, our priorities, our resources...we crucify our flesh and its sinful desires as our service of worship
- We are supposed to set aside anything that gets in the way of Christ's priorities and the needs of the Kingdom Program
- We also make intercession, just as the priests of Israel lit incense on the altar in the Holy Place each day

- We are called to intercede through prayer everyday, and our prayers rise to God like incense, the Bible says
- And we also attend to the light and the bread just as the priests of Israel attended to the menorah and the show bread
- Our light are our good works, Jesus said, and our daily bread is the word of God
 - We are to shine our light before men so they may see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven
 - And we share the bread of life from God's word with everyone we meet by teaching the good news of Jesus
- But if we are all priests, who are we ministering to by these things? Who are we representing before God?
 - We are priests to those who have no access to God...to all unbelievers who cannot approach God even through prayer
 - As Peter says, we proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness, so we may lead others to Him
- So in every way that the priests of the Old Covenant served God in their Holy Place, we serve Him even more in the New Covenant in our Holy Place
 - They served God in a building, behind a veil and out of view, but we serve God with our lives, in the open and every place we go
 - Knowing that Jesus tore the outer veil tells us that we may enter the Holy Place
 - And if we may enter the Holy Place, then we are priests, and if we are priests, then we are called to serve Jesus sacrificially
 - Again, Hebrews says it this way

27G-14

[Heb. 10:19](#) Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

[Heb. 10:20](#) by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

[Heb. 10:21](#) and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

- The signs at Jesus' death indicated that the Messiah had finished the work of redemption

- But those signs also declared that Jesus' death was about much more than avoiding Hell
- It meant you can have a new life serving the living God, a new purpose as a priest of the Almighty God
- Not someone strutting around in robes or acting pious...just ordinary men and women saved and empowered by grace
- I know this year has made serving God harder for many of us, but not impossible
 - And in many ways, it's opened up new opportunities and created new needs
 - Do you understand the significance of that veil being removed?
 - Are you taking advantage of all that God has placed in front of you to serve Him?
 - Do you carry yourself as a priest of the Living God?