

Matthew 27:51-66
"An Open Invitation"

The ancient temple in Jerusalem was composed of only 2 compartments. The Holy place & the Holy of Holies (or most Holy place) & between the 2 was a barrier. The temple *complex* was a magnanimous & magnificent site to behold. But when you got past the court of the gentiles, the court of the women, the Israelite courtyard & the priestly courtyard into the temple itself, there were only 2 rooms. *The holy place (in which you would find the lampstand, the table of showbread & the altar of incense) & the most holy place (or the Holy of holies) in which at one time was the Ark of the Covenant but in Jesus' day there was nothing but the stone pedestal (if you will) upon which the Ark would've sat. (The Ark itself has been M.I.A. since the Babylonian captivity in the days of Jeremiah).* But it was in the most holy place where the presence of God (the shekinah glory of God) was made manifest.

The holy place housed daily priestly duties, however the Holy of holies could be entered into only one time a year (on Yom Kippur, the Great Day of Atonement) & at that only by the high priest, & at that only after an intensive personal ceremonial cleansing prior to robing himself in his priestly garments. *He would then take the blood of a bull that had been sacrificed beyond the Holy place, into the Holy of holies & offer it there before the Lord sprinkling it on the Mercy Seat (the lid of the Ark of the Covenant [or in Jesus' day the area where the Ark was supposed to have been]) & then he would go through a similar process w/the sacrifice of the blood of a goat. What he was doing was interceding on behalf of the people of the nation.*

God had made clear in Lev 17 that sin was deadly serious. You see, it's not that sin is forbidden, therefore it's bad. It's that sin is bad; therefore it's forbidden. God sees the sorrow, the suffering, the pain, destruction, depression & devastation that sin leaves in its wake. But in Lev 17 God declared, *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."*¹ So the high priest would enter into the Holy of holies, interceding on behalf of the people in order to make atonement for them.

However, if the priest himself wasn't right w/God when he went in, God would strike him instantly dead... & We could go on but suffice it to say that it was an incredibly powerful, awesome, intense, & truly terrifying moment when the high priest would enter the Holy of holies, this place where the presence of God dwelt, to intercede for the people. Would he live? Would he die? Would the sacrifice be accepted?

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Le 17:11-12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I mentioned to you the barrier between the holy place & the Holy of holies. It was a veil (30' wide, 60' high & about a handbreadth thick). Its purpose was to make a very definite distinction, a separation between God & man. By the means of that veil God was saying (in essence), I'm here, you're there, I'm Holy, you are sinful, to pass through the veil was to invite your own death, the wages of sin is death.

You couldn't just approach God anytime you felt the need. As a matter of fact you or I couldn't approach God at all! We'd need a mediator, a representative, the high priest, & he could only do this one day a year... & This was the rite (the ceremonial ritual) that Israel went through for hundreds, & hundreds, & hundreds of years. Year after year, sacrifice after sacrifice, shedding more & more blood, seeking to atone for their sins...

When we left off last time, Jesus was upon the cross. He had suffered for 6 hrs, His own blood having been shed, not only for the sins of Israel, but for the sins of the world. For the last 3hrs, having rejected the light of the world, the land was shrouded in darkness. At the end of that 3hr period Jesus cried out w/a great cry, "It is finished!" & He yielded up His spirit. He surrendered to death.

Question: what was finished? Every prophecy concerning His 1st coming had been fulfilled (it was finished). The goal of His incarnation had been reached (it was finished). The perfect fulfillment of the law was completed (it was finished). His work on earth was done (finished). The destruction of Satan's power was complete (he's been sentenced, but not yet executed [finished]). The completion of His suffering was at hand & atonement for our sins was paid (once for all) in full, the bonds of sin & death had been broken, it is finished...

There's some bad theology out there that purports that after Jesus died that He went to hell to suffer further for our sins. Jesus didn't say, "It's almost finished, I just have to complete this after I die." He died *after* the payment in full was made. Jesus did not suffer in anyway in hell. **He did descend into the lower parts of the earth (to Paradise/Abraham's bosom [Luke 16] as He'd promised the thief who believed in Him), but that was to minister to the righteous who'd died in faith & ultimately lead them into heaven (Eph 4), not to make further payment for sin, that work was finished on the cross.**

Vs 51-56

Look back to Vs 51 (read). Listen: when we read of the veil of the temple being torn in two from top to bottom, this should cause our hearts to leap for joy!

This was no coincidental happenstance. This veil was woven fabric some 4" thick!

Josephus (the ancient Jewish historian) writes that this thing couldn't be torn in 2 by a team of 4 horses on either side of it! & We notice that it wasn't torn from bottom to the top (as though man did it). It was torn from the top (some 60' high) to the bottom. Ladies & Gentlemen, God (as it were) supernaturally reached down from heaven & tore this veil in two, broadcasting the message that through the blood of His Son (the atoning work of His sacrifice on our behalf) access into His presence has been made for all!

There's a reason that the veil was to be there & never removed. It's because the blood of bulls & goats was not sufficient to truly atone for the sins of man therefore there remained a separation between God & man. If it were, once that 1st sacrifice was made, the veil would've come down, man would be right in the sight of God on the basis of that sacrifice & all would be right w/the world. But the fact that every year they had to go through this ritual again & again (not to mention the daily sacrifices on top of the annual sacrifice) only testified to the *insufficiency* of the sacrifice. Does that make sense?

The author of Hebrews picks up on this & points it out in **Hebrews Ch 10**, let's look at it together (Vs 1-10;19-22) (maybe back up to 9:24-26).

***Here's the short of it. God never intended the sacrifice of bulls & goats & lambs to cleanse mankind of their sin. Those sacrifices (demanded by the law) were a foreshadow, a testimony of the sacrifice that was to come in the Lamb of God (J.C.) who would shed His blood (once for all) that He might take away the sins of the world.**

The rending/tearing of His body has opened the way & made access for you & me (through Him, He is the door) to come to God. In Christ there's no longer a *separation* between God & man, but God has provided *reconciliation*. Every individual who believes in the Lord J.C. can come boldly into the presence of God. That's radical! **It's not only the high priest, the pastor, a bible teacher, a prayer warrior or a worship leader who can come, whosoever will may come by the precious blood of J.C. When the veil tore in that temple at the death of J.C. God was saying, "The price has been paid, so come to Me! Not hesitantly, not fearfully or reluctantly. Come boldly through the sacrifice of My Son! It's an open invitation."** You don't need a priest or a preacher to go to God for you... You can go directly before the throne of God through Christ. Paul said that like this, **"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,"**^{2*}

It's interesting that in Acts Ch 6:7 we read that a great many priests were obedient to the faith. No doubt the rending of this veil @ the death of J.C. made a tremendous impact on them.

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). **(1 Ti 2:5)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Can you imagine? Christ is on the cross, darkness covers the land, He cries "It is finished!" The earth begins to quake, the sun again begins to shine, & when you look into the temple the way into the presence of God (which you have never seen with your eyes) is suddenly open for all to enter in...

But let's not move on w/out noting the convulsing of creation over the death of the Creator. The earth was moved, the stones were split... It blows us away; earlier that week He had said that the rocks would cry out if the people weren't praising Him (during the triumphal entry) & now that the hearts of men aren't moved at the death of their Redeemer, the rocks are responding (as it were). The stones were more tender than the hearts of men. Stones being torn in two, the hearts of men (for whom His blood had been shed) remaining unmoved...

Vs 52-53

Well, we didn't see that coming, did we! 😊 This is radical! & Matt is the only one who records it for us. It peaks our curiosity & we wish we knew more, but we don't. & I'm going to be honest w/you, there's even debate as the nature of this happening. Was it a resurrection or a resuscitation? Meaning, did these saints raise to life in their resurrection bodies (like Christ), or were they brought back to life (like Lazarus, or Jairus' daughter) only to die again at a later date?

Some would say that this was a testimony to the radiating power of new life on the resurrection morning of J.C. That when He rose from the dead, the power that was radiating from Him in that moment quickened other saints who'd died & they themselves were brought back to life! It's not beyond plausible.

There's an interesting event that takes place in 2 Kings 13 where some people are burying a man & as they are a band of raiders from Moab begin invading the land. & So they quickly lower the man into the tomb of Elisha & when he comes into contact w/the bones of Elisha, he revived & stood back on his feet! It would be an awesome/terrifying event rolled into one! My point is that if one were revived by touching the bones of Elisha, how much more can we envision lives being revived at the resurrection of J.C.!

Others would say that they were resurrected never to die again as part of a 1st fruits of the resurrection. & They suggest that this is what Paul may've been hinting at in Eph 4:8-10 where he mentions Jesus descending into the lower parts of the earth (Paradise) then leading captivity captive when He ascended on high. It won't incriminate your theology however you choose to see it.

However, since the bible doesn't give us any more info about it, all we can do is speculate... Look at Vs 54 (read)

So radical were the events surrounding the crucifixion that even this hardened centurion (who'd seen/supervised dozens, if not 100's a crucifixions before) was stricken w/fear & brought to realize there was something truly unique about Jesus. We might say that the cross was already at work in the hearts of men. Was this man saved? We don't know, it's certainly possible. He definitely recognized something in Jesus that he'd never seen before.

Vs 55-56

I don't think we should envision these women were far off because of fear, it was probably w/respect to the parameter the soldiers had established around the cross. We know that John was there (we read of that in his gospel). Beyond that none of the other apostles were present that we know of, they'd all fled, scattered from their Shepherd. But these women were faithful to the very end...

But we gain a glimpse here of the work of the cross in the audience that was present at the cross. There were men & women, Jews & Gentiles, rich & poor, religious & irreverent, guilty & innocent, oppressors & oppressed, haters of Jesus & lovers of Jesus. There were weepers & mockers, educated & uneducated, those deeply moved & those indifferent. Different races, nationalities, languages & social classes... This is what Jesus was speaking about when He said, *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, (not a reference to being lifted up in praise, but lifted up on the cross) will draw all peoples to Myself."*³

But these women were of those who supported the ministry of Jesus, practically & financially. Mary Magdalene was the woman out of whom Jesus had cast 7 demons. We read in Luke's gospel Ch 8 we read of those who were traveling w/the Lord. & We read there, *"...and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance."*⁴

That's just the testimony of those who get it. When you truly understand what Jesus has done for you, all that He's given to you, you won't have any problem giving to Him. It's the simple overflow of your love for Him, your devotion to Him, your faith in Him. He's given all for you, for me. It's our joy to give out of love, to Him. I don't see it as responsibility, it's simply a response.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 12:32]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 8:2-3]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He has torn the veil from top to bottom. Has given an open invitation into His presence anytime, anywhere, to anyone. He's forgiven us of all our sin. I don't *have* to love on Him & give to Him. I *get* to love on & give to Him; it's my honor.

Vs 57-61

That detail is important because it assures us they went to the right place Sunday morning. They knew right where Jesus had been lain, they were present at His burial.

But here we have Joseph sort of emerging out of the shadows to tend to the body of Jesus. Again, His disciples nowhere to be found. But Joseph steps up & tends to Jesus.

When you read the other gospels you discover that not only was he rich, he was also a member of the Sanhedrin & that he *did not* consent w/the council to have Jesus crucified. He'd actually become a follower of Christ, but secretly for fear of the Jews. But now that the chips are down, he's done being intimidated & he identifies openly w/his Lord... Again, it seems the realization of Jesus dying for him gave him the boldness to identify publicly *with & live openly for Him*.

& Again it fulfills biblical prophecy. Isaiah writes, "*And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death,*"⁵ 700 yrs prior to this event... We also learn from the other gospel writers that Nicodemus (remember that event we talked about last week in Jn 3?) he had also become a believer in J.C. & was a part of this burial process. Nicodemus showed up w/about 100lbs of burial spices & after Pilate confirmed that Jesus was dead he released His body to these men.

Now, these details are important. Why? Because Pilate doesn't give anyone permission to do anything w/anyone's body unless he's certain they're dead. & You don't wrap a body in burial cloths unless they're dead. & You don't intertwine 100 lbs of burial spices in between the wraps on someone who isn't dead. & You don't bury someone who hasn't died... So all these things only add further validity to the reality of the resurrection.

But what they did, they did quickly because the Sabbath was upon them & that's why the women followed them to the tomb, so they would know where to go Sunday morning & finish the process.

It's also important to note that the tomb Jesus was placed in was *new*. Meaning no other body had ever been placed in it before. The reason that's important is because it affirms to us that no other body had the chance of coming out of that tomb Sunday morning.

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Is 53:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus alone was in that tomb, therefore it could only be Jesus who had risen from the dead... There would be no confusion on that point.

Vs 62-66

The hypocrisy continues to abound... They go to Pilate “on the next day” which is what day? The Sabbath. They’re breaking the law of the Sabbath in order to try & contain the body of J.C.

But 63 is more proof He was actually dead. Even His enemies said, “We remember, *while He was still alive,*” they didn’t believe He had passed out & had the chance of somehow reviving in 3 days. They saw Him scourged, beaten, crucified & killed. They knew the soldier ran a spear through His side before they allowed Him to be taken down from the cross. He wasn’t unconscious, He was dead...

& It kind of intrigues us that they seem to remember the words of Jesus more than His disciples, doesn’t it? They noted His promise to rise again in 3 days. & They wanted to do everything they could to ensure the fact that His body stayed in that tomb.

& We love it because everything they did to keep Him there only adds confirmation to His resurrection! & Honestly, I’m not sure that they really thought the disciples would try to steal His body... maybe. But the truth is the disciples were cowering away in fear of the same fate... I think those religious leaders feared the resurrection power of J.C. & were trying to make sure He didn’t come out of that tomb!

So they implore Pilate for a guard (somewhere between 4-16 soldiers) to keep watch over the tomb to make sure no one tampers w/it until after the 3rd day. Pilate says, “Fine, take the guard & make it as secure as you know how...” We love it. Again, all these security measures did was give greater weight to the miracle of the resurrection.

They go to the tomb, seal the stone & set the guard. Basically they took a rope or some kind of cord, stretched it across the stone, fastened it to the side of the outer wall & set a smashed a signet into the clay (or wax) which if it were messed with it would break the seal & whoever breaks that seal signs their own death warrant.

So there was a material obstacle (the stone itself), the obstacle of human/Roman authority (represented in the seal). There was military might (represented in the guard). Being Roman they couldn’t care less about Jesus or Jewish laws/rituals. The only thing sacred to them was that seal, they were guarding it w/their lives.

So how will it end? Spoiler alert, there’s no power on earth that can stand against the power of the resurrected Christ.

These religious leaders were in the unenviable position of seeking to defend death. Death was their champion. But Jesus is the Prince of Life, death was defeated at the cross... You wait, you watch--- & you'll see.

Prayer Points:

Lord Jesus we are once again in awe of You. We give thanks & honor & blessing to You. You have opened the door, granted us access into the holy presence of God, through Your blood. Help us to lead lives that honor You, openly in love with & obedient to You. Be glorified in us.

It's an open invitation, the blood of J.C. has made access available to you into the presence of God. You are loved by Him, & accepted completely by Him; in Christ. Grace & mercy come to you in Him. Whoever believes in Jesus will never perish but have eternal life. Believe on Him today.