

# THE MIGHTIEST MIRACLE OF CALVARY

## MATTHEW 27

Jesus rose triumphant over sin, death, and Hell after being captured and killed during the greatest crime the world has ever witnessed.

On a cross of wood, with carpenter's tools, and "on a skull shaped hill, on a sunny day outside of Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago when MANKIND MURDERED THEIR MAKER<sup>1</sup>". There on a hill called Calvary in full view of thousands of witnesses, was the day the Creator was crucified.

His name was Jesus, a peasant carpenter, who had carried on an itinerant relief work across all of Israel. Thousands, tens of thousands followed, heard and witnessed some of the mightiest acts ever seen on the planet in history. But now He hangs there:

### Seemingly Helpless

Shouldn't Christ have done something on the cross if He were really God the Son? Yes, and He did. As we open to Matthew 27 we are looking at the scene, which highlights the mightiest of all Christ's miracles. Matthew picks up with the drama from Noon (the 6<sup>th</sup> hour) to 3 PM (the 9<sup>th</sup> hour).

Please stand, and follow along in your Bibles as we read Matthew 27:45-54:

*Matthew 27:45-54 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" 47 Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" 48 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. 49 The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 So when the centurion and*

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<sup>1</sup> Many ideas in this message were derived from an audio tape of a message preached by John Phillips 2/95 at 1st Baptist Jacksonville.

*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!" (NKJV)*

## **Pray**

Matthew 27 records that despite Christ being scourged, nailed, and dying, nothing could stop Jesus Christ. Crucifixion, betrayal, and mockery didn't stop Him. Not even the hatred of the Jewish leaders, and the cruelty of the Roman executioners. Nothing stopped Jesus then, and nothing stops Him today.

There are five final miracles from the Cross of Christ's Crucifixion that were recorded to always remind us that Jesus can reach out to us from anywhere, at anytime, and in any way that we need His touch. To show us His mighty power Matthew first tells us that when Christ hung on that cross of wood for you and for me:

## **He Touched The Sun**

*Matthew 27:45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour **there was darkness** over all the land. (NKJV)*

Have you ever thought about why that amazing detail is recorded in God's Word? On the 4th day of Creation week the Sun was born from the hand of God the Son, Jesus Christ its Creator. The thermonuclear furnace at its core was lit as He flung it off into space to warm and light the planet upon which He was going to create man in His own image.

For all the 33 years (or 12,235 days) of Christ's earthly life, that Sun had shined down upon its Maker. It has seen Him turn water into wine, raise a dead little girl to life, feed thousands on grassy hillsides. It has seen Him heal and restore ruined lives deformed bodies and sightless eyes. But now that vast solar furnace that flamed to life from Jesus Christ's Hand looks down to see those other created things, called humans, murdering their Maker.

The Sun is 864,000 miles in diameter, it contains 835 QUADRILLION cubic miles of intensely hot gasses; weighing 2 OCTILLION tons; at its core hydrogen is fused into helium and thermonuclear energy at 25 MILLION degrees Fahrenheit. How hot is that?

Well, if a piece of the Sun<sup>2</sup> the size of a Cheerio, was taken from it's core and placed in Grand Rapids this moment: even at that distance it would kill each of us here in our seats this morning with just the energy radiating from it! That is an amazingly intense amount of thermonuclear radiation. And yet the Creator just reached up and [snap] snuffed it out like a birthday candle.

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<sup>2</sup> Our Amazing World of Nature, Readers Digest Books, 1969, pp.261-63.

Now wasn't that a mighty miracle for Christ from the weakness and pain of the Cross He reaches up and just flicked it off? How did He do that? We don't know.

It wasn't an eclipse they only last 7 minutes at most and the moon at Passover is nowhere near eclipsing areas. No other explanation than He touched the Sun, what an incredibly mighty miracle of Calvary, but not the mightiest.

The darkness was overwhelming and unexpected for those at the cross, just like it will be in the coming seven-year judgment, there will be a darkness that can be felt in Revelation 16:10:

*Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. (NKJV)*

But this darkness was part of the plan.

In Genesis the First thing Jesus did at Creation was to "Let there be Light". The Work of Creation was done in the LIGHT. But from the Cross He reached up and snuffed out the Light, because the work of Redemption was so horribly costly it had to be done in the Dark. God would let no one see Him turning of His back upon His Son! As Christ cried in Matthew 27:46:

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (NKJV)*

The crowds had heard the Sadducees and Pharisees when they called for a sign; but Jesus told His critics in John 8:12:

*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (NKJV)*

But how true it was now. The darkness that comes when the Light of the world is gone! The songwriter said it so well when he wrote:

*Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
and shut her glories in;  
When Christ the mighty Maker died,  
for man the creatures sin.*

At His birth our Creator placed a new star in the sky; at His death He snuffed out of the sky our brightest star. What a mighty miracle, what a sign to mankind that they were murdering their Maker.

So Jesus as the Light of the World first reached up and touched the Sun, and then look at v. 51:

# He Touched The Temple

*Matthew 27:51 Then, behold, **the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom**; (NKJV)*

Old Testament worship was centered at the Tabernacle and then the Temple. A Divinely designed liturgy was carried on for 1,500 nearly unbroken years in the way Moses was told by God to do it on Mt. Sinai.

The epicenter of that worship was the Holy Place in Jerusalem's Herodian Temple: in the front half of it stood the Altar of Incense, the Golden Lamp stand, and Table of Showbread; and the room was divided by a curtain. This curtain was actually a finely woven rug: 4 inches thick, 60 feet high and 40 feet wide.

Massive and towering, this curtain barrier expressed one clear message: STAY OUT. No natural light ever penetrated its dark depths. Even the light of the ever-burning lamp stand never reached behind the veil.

In better times the Shekinah Glory of the Presence of God made the Holiest of Holies behind the veil brighter than noonday. In all of Israel's history probably no more than 50 men had ever gone into the holy of holies: only the High Priest; and then only once a year.

When that day came for the High Priest to pass behind that veil. He was wearing bells on the hem of his garment to let the other priests know he was still alive as he was inside; garbed carefully in the God directed robes and priestly garments. With trembling hands cradling a basin of blood, veiled by a cloud of smoking incense burning in a pot he carried - the High Priest would enter.

Sprinkling the blood on that mercy seat on behalf of all the people of God and hastening out. Why? The only purpose of the Veil was to keep people out of the Holy Presence of God. God was saying I AM HOLY. YOU ARE NOT. STAY OUT!

On the day Christ died can you imagine the scene those officiating priests must have beheld? They came in to trim the lamps, pour a handful of incense over the fire on the altar and change the bread on the Table. Then perhaps at that very moment Christ touched the Veil.

With an unearthly sound that massive curtain was violently torn from top to bottom. Aghast, as for the first time in nearly 1,500 years, common priests looked upon the ark and the mercy seat and God's throne of grace and mercy.

God was now declaring: ***anyone who wishes may come in now, you are welcome anytime***. As He tells us in Hebrews 4:16:

*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NKJV)*

Aren't you glad we live on this side of Calvary?

So Jesus on the Cross as the "Light of the World" first reached up and touched the Sun, and then as the "Greatest High Priest" reached over and touched the Temple, and then as the "Creator of the Universe" at the end of v. 51:

## **He Touched The Earth**

*Matthew 27:51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; **and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,** (NKJV)*

At the Palm Sunday Triumphal entry Jesus had responded to those criticizing the shouts of Hosanna in Luke 19:40:

*But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." (NKJV)*

Here at Calvary, the greatest moment in history is unfolding and now no one is crying out His glory. Only days before thousands and thousands thronged Him shouting HOSANNA, and treated Him as a King. But now no one raised a voice in protest of this crime, except one dying thief. Where were they?

1. **Bartimaeus:** He made you see when you shouted after Him on the road to Jericho, why are you so silent now?
2. **Lazarus:** He raised you from the dead not more than a week ago. Where are you, can't you say anything?
3. **Nicodemus:** you came one night seeking and found eternal life, stand up and say something.
4. **Disciples:** He took you everywhere to witness His deity for three years. He calmed the sea, raised the dead, put shining eyes into dark and empty sockets, cast out demons and loved you to the end. Where are you now? Hiding in back alleys and scared to death. Come and say something. Can't you speak up for Him?

So since no one else will speak up God picked:

1. A dying thief: to seek Him as Jesus the Savior, and cry out REMEMBER ME.
2. A pagan Roman Governor: to place over His head the declaration He was the Messiah, Christ.
3. And the Earth, which quaked as the rocks cried out their worship of their Maker.

So Jesus on the Cross as the "Light of the World," first reached up and touched the Sun, and then as the "Greatest High Priest" reached over and touched the Temple, and then

as the "Creator of the Universe" reached down and touched the Earth. Then in v. 52-53, as the "Final Judge" He reached out and:

## He Touched The Graves

*Matthew 27:52-53 and the **graves were opened**; and **many bodies of the saints** who had fallen asleep **were raised**; 53 and **coming out of the graves** after His resurrection, they **went into the holy city** and **appeared to many**. (NKJV)*

Note in your Bibles these unbelievable, incredible, and true words from God Himself: opens and closes with the same word that modifies all the others and that word is: MANY.

Many saints, some maybe dead only hours or buried centuries ago, all in graves, and all part of MANY, all around Israel were touched from the Cross, by Jesus. Jesus is the only one in the Universe whose voice can be heard by every dead person in every grave of all time!

Like after every great earthquake, people began to go out to survey the damage; but unlike any other quake they noticed something eerily strange. All over Israel from Dan to Beersheba, north to south, top to bottom: graves were popped open.

Perhaps as curious onlookers peered into those dark recesses they could see eyes from embalmed bodies staring at them, or maybe just bones turning to dust. But Jesus had touched the graves, and something strange was happening all over the country.

But then, suddenly, right in step with God's plan, it began to happen. On Sunday morning, right after Jesus stepped out from The Grave, they started to come out of their graves in resurrection bodies; and started to march towards Jerusalem.

Can you imagine the uncanny meetings that took place? Out in a field by Hebron near the cave of Machpelah, a farmer was working his field on Sunday morning when he met a man walking out of the cave.

"Hello" said the stranger. "Hello" said the farmer, "do I know you?"

"I am Father Abraham, formerly of Ur, and most recently from the happy side of Hades."

And just like that all over Israel, God's Word says MANY graves opened, MANY saints raised, MANY saints set their faces toward Jerusalem. We don't know which saints were raised, we just know that they WERE raised, and we know it was MANY!

Can you imagine what it could have been like? People may have ran into Elisha, Joseph, and Isaac. Can you imagine what amazing conversations as people may have spoken with Jacob, David and Samuel?

What a commotion it must have been as the first-fruits of the resurrection of Christ gathered in the Holy City. Why do you think that almost the entire city turned out to hear Peter on Pentecost for an explanation<sup>i</sup>?

So MANY were raised and many came to be witnesses of the miracle of Calvary.

So He reached up and touched the Sun, He reached over and touched the Temple, He reached down and touched the Earth, He reached under and touched the Graves, and finally, as the "Savior of the World", from the cross in v. 54:

## **He Touched The Centurion**

*Matthew 27:54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (NKJV)*

A centurion was trained never to fear. As the most trusted of the soldiers of Caesar's Legions, these were the men who looked death in the face unflinchingly. They would lock their mighty shields in battle and march against countless foes and never fear. Have you ever paused to think about this scene? What amazing events these must have been to make a tough, calloused and hardened centurion to FEAR GREATLY.

This soldier had been born somewhere in the Empire. Perhaps his father was a legionnaire. He listened to the stories as he grew up about the wonders of Ancient Rome: it's nobles, temples, virtues, and fearless legionnaires. As he grew perhaps his father took him to the holidays and at an arena he saw gladiators fighting to the death and mighty horse and chariot races.

Then he chose to become one of Caesar's finest and the barracks became his home. He was taught to discipline his body, to obey orders and to fight without fear. He learned to kill, to drink and to curse by the gods. He was calloused and hard. A SOLDIER OF ROME. As he distinguished himself in his duties he rose to become a leader of a hundred, a Centurion.

One day on the bulletin board of his barracks and notice was posted dispatching him to the most despised corner of the Empire - Palestine. But not the lovely coastal port of Roman Caesarea, no of all places on earth he was being sent to Jerusalem. A city seething with religious fanaticism and zealots; and ready to explode at any moment. A place where Rome was not respected, nor obeyed. He served Caesar in Jerusalem.

One morning the Roman Governor Pilate summoned him to his palace. "Take these three and crucify them and report back when they are dead." Who were they? It didn't matter. 30,000 had already been crucified. It was just a job. One of them thought he was some kind of a King. Well we will show Him what Rome thinks of rival kings.

But now its 3 PM and as Matthew 27:54 tells us: Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying,

Truly this was the Son of God.

That is the greatest miracle of all, because that is the one He is still doing!

I have often wondered what it was like when he went home after this tour of duty. People came up to him and said you are different. What happened? I can hear him say:

I met a man at a place called Calvary. He was dying on a cross of wood. That man was GOD; and that God changed my life!

Did you know on this Resurrection Sunday: THAT was the greatest of all the miracles, because that is the most repeated of all Christ's mighty works. Because:

## **Jesus Still Touches Hearts Today**

When Christ hung on that cross of wood for you and for me He confirmed His deity as He performed powerful touches from Calvary:

This Resurrection Sunday we worship:

- The Light of the World (John 8:12) who lit the Sun, and darkened it.
- The Way to God (John 14:6), who tore open the dividing wall in the Temple.
- The Maker of all things (John 1:3) who alone can make the Earth to quake.
- The Resurrection and Life (John 5:28-29), the Only One who can raise the dead.
- The Savior of the World (John 4:42; I John 4:14) who alone can touch a heart!

Have you met Jesus? Has He changed your life?

He promised that whoever comes to Him, He will never push away.

If you never have, you can call out for Jesus to save you today!

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<sup>1</sup> When Paul was preaching to Agrippa he said in Acts 26:26 For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. (NKJV)