

**Theme: “The Actions of Christ’s Passion” – “Died”**

**Text: Matthew 27:50-54**

**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 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!"**

It’s something we’ve probably known and believed from little on: Jesus died on Good Friday. This statement is very simple to confess and believe. But have you ever thought about the depth of what it means to believe this **“Action of Christ’s Passion”** – Jesus **died**? First of all, Jesus was (and is!) true, eternal God. How could God die? Well, we answer this question by looking to Scripture and seeing that the Bible tells us Jesus was (and is!) also true man. But even this answer can raise more questions in our limited minds. How could someone who was born into this world at the same time be this world’s Creator? How could someone who needed food and sleep, like the rest of us, be the untiring Preserver of all things? How could this man, Jesus, who was tempted in every way, just as we are, still be without sin? God’s Word doesn’t tell us how this is all possible. Besides, our minds cannot even handle or fully understand how all this is possible. Thankfully, God has not asked us to fully understand the “how?” He has given our hearts the faith to believe it and has given us minds to realize the “what?” and the “why?” of Jesus’ death on Good Friday. The answers to these two questions are found in our text for this Good Friday.

The “what?” of Good Friday is found in the very first verse of our text: What happened? Jesus **died**. **“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit” (v. 50)**. Jesus’ death was an action on His part. It could never have happened if He hadn’t allowed it. John and Luke record Jesus’ last words from the cross just before He died, **He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30)** and **"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."** **Having said this, He breathed His last (Luke 23:46)**. From these words it is clear: Jesus didn’t “pass out;” He didn’t go into a coma. His body breathed its last breath and Jesus gave His soul into the hands of His heavenly Father. He physically **died**. The Roman soldiers made sure of it. After all, their jobs—and even their lives—depended on it! Listen to these words from **John 19:33-35**, **“But when they [the soldiers] came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.”**

The “why?” of Good Friday—why did Jesus die?—is answered by the miracles that took place at the moment of His death. Matthew draws our attention to this first miracle, **“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (v. 51)**. This may not sound like much of a miracle, and I’m sure many skeptics and rationalists try and explain away this tearing of this veil (or curtain) of the temple with natural explanations, but when we take a closer look at this first miracle and what it actually meant we will easily see that this was no mere natural “coincidence.”

First of all, this **“veil of the temple”** that Matthew refers to was the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Only the priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place, and only the high priest was allowed to go beyond this curtain into the Holy of Holies, and only on one special festival day each year: The Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies was a very important part of the temple for the Jews since it was a symbol of God’s presence with His people here on earth.

The other thing we need to keep in mind is that Jewish writings tell us that this veil for the Holy of Holies was between 60 and 80 feet wide, between 20 and 30 feet tall and was as thick as the width of a man's hand! One account said that it took three hundred priests to lift this woven curtain! This was the **"veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (v. 51)**! This was no coincidence. It was a miracle! Not only that, this miracle took place at 3:00pm, the time of Jesus' death. That was also the time for the evening sacrifices at the temple. The priests who were in the Holy Place preparing their sacrifices would have witnessed this miraculous and symbolic event.

What did it mean? By this act God was showing that Jesus' death had brought an end to His "Old Covenant" of blood sacrifices and intercession by priests and high priests. Christ's death was the ultimate sacrifice and the full payment for all sins of all people for all time. That's what Jesus meant by **"It is finished!"** Now there is no separation between us and God. There is no veil, or curtain of sin separating us from Him. That wall of our sin was torn in two when Jesus **died**.

The book of Hebrews explains this symbolism for us, **"[Jesus] entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption...Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain [veil], that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 9:12; 10:19-22 NIV)**. That is the first "why?" of Jesus' death: His shed blood—the very blood of God's Son—**"obtained eternal redemption"** for us by taking away our sins.

The second "why?" of Christ's death is answered for us by the next miracle recorded in our text, **"the earth quaked, and the rocks were split," (v. 52)**. The Old Testament contains a number of references to earthquakes as a demonstration of God's power. This earthquake was one of them. It was no coincidence that it took place as the miraculous three-hour, mid-day darkness lifted and Jesus breathed His last. God was giving the people a reminder of His power, and, was no doubt, showing His anger towards those who rejected and crucified His innocent Son. It's hard to imagine anyone coming away from this scene unaffected by what they just experienced. Like the miracles Jesus performed when He was alive, one of their purposes was to give further proof that He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God, as He said all along.

This effect was not lost on many of the people who standing near Christ's cross witnessing His death. Luke tells us, **"And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned" (Luke 23:48)**. Our text tells us that even the battle-hardened centurion and the soldiers who guarded Jesus understood what had happened: **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!" (v. 54)**. Tradition tells us that this centurion eventually became a believer in Christ. Whether his confession at the foot of Jesus' cross was a confession of saving faith, or simply the acknowledgment that Jesus must have been the Son of a powerful divine being, we don't know for sure. We do know that the second "why?" of Jesus death was so that people like the witnesses to Jesus death would see what their sins did to the Son of God and realize that His death was for them. God has recorded these incidents in His Word for all history to witness so that everyone would repent of their sins, and confess with hearts of faith, **"Truly this was the Son of God!"**

By far the most incredible miracle that took place at Jesus' death was the third one recorded in our text: **"and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (v. 52-53)**. Just in case the people didn't get the picture with the miraculous darkness during the middle of the day, the earthquake and veil tearing at the moment of Christ's death, God also raised to life some of the believers who had died and been buried in graves! Just imagine how powerful their testimony would be! This miracle gives us the third "why?" of Jesus' death: He died to conquer death. Jesus not only

proved His victory by His own resurrection, He gave His believers a very powerful reminder that His victory over death meant their victory and resurrection from the dead as well by raising these believers from their graves.

Just think of how this miracle must have affected the unbelievers living in and around Jerusalem (not to mention how encouraging it would have been for the believers to have witnessed!). Not only does the Bible record for us that there were at least 515 eye witnesses of Jesus after His resurrection, we are told that after His resurrection these resurrected saints also “**went into the holy city [Jerusalem] and appeared to many**” (v. 53). It would be awfully hard to deny Jesus’ divinity and His saving power if you saw Him dead on the cross, but just a few days later saw Him alive and well again—and at the same time you see your once-dead neighbor now alive and testifying in the street!

And yet, tragically, many did still deny Jesus. His enemies saw His empty tomb. They didn’t deny it, nor did they deny the fact that Christ rose from the dead—they couldn’t! Instead of believing they lied (**Matthew 28:11-15**). They lied to themselves and to everyone else. They wanted to deny this ever happened. They wanted Jesus to still be dead like He was when they had seen Him last. They had all the proof: Jesus’ words, His death on the cross, the miracles that occurred at His death, and the greatest miracle of His own resurrection from the dead. They even had the proof of the resurrection of other believers who had died! Yet they still did not believe. That is the horrifying power of unbelief. That is the terrible grip that Satan has on the hearts of many still today. The evidence from Scripture and from history is all there. Jesus truly **died**. Believe it!

But Jesus’ story doesn’t end there. “**The Actions of Christ’s Passion**” didn’t end on Good Friday. Jesus rose from death on Easter Sunday. Believe it! Because He rose again our story won’t end at our death either. In the end we will witness the miracle of our “**graves being opened**” and our dead bodies being raised. We too will go into the “**holy city**”—not to Jerusalem over in Israel—but to “**the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant**” (Hebrews 12:22, 24).

*In perfect love He dies;  
For me He dies, for me.  
O all-atoning Sacrifice,  
I cling by faith to Thee. Amen.*

(Hymn 452 v. 5 LSB; 170 v. 5 TLH)