

THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD'S DEATH

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“Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom. And the earth did quake and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened. And many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and came out of the graves after His resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.”
Matthew 27:50-53.

OUR Lord's death is a marvel set in a surrounding of marvels. It reminds one of a Kohinoor surrounded with a circle of gems. As the sun, in the midst of the planets which surround it, far outshines them all, so the death of Christ is more wonderful than the miracles which happened at the time. Yet, after having seen the sun, we take pleasure in studying the planets, and so, after believing in the unique death of Christ and putting our trust in Him as the Crucified One, we find it a great pleasure to examine in detail those four planetary wonders mentioned in the text, which circle round the great sun of the death of our Lord Himself.

Here they are—the veil of the temple was rent in two. The earth did quake. The rocks rent. The graves were opened.

I. To begin with the first of these wonders. I cannot, tonight, enlarge. I have not the strength. I wish merely to suggest thoughts. Consider THE RENT VEIL, or mysteries laid open. By the death of Christ the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom and the mysteries which had been concealed in the most holy place throughout many generations were laid open to the gaze of all Believers. Beginning, as it were, at the top in the Deity of Christ, down to the lowest part of Christ's manhood, the veil was rent and everything was shown to every spiritual eye.

1. This was the first miracle of Christ after *death*. The first miracle of Christ in *life* was significant and taught us much. He turned the water into wine, as if to show that He raised all common life to a higher grade and put into all Truth a power and a sweetness which could not have been there apart from Him. But this first miracle of His after death stands above the first miracle of His life, because, if you will remember, that miracle was worked in His Presence. He was there and turned the water into wine. But Jesus, as man, was not in the temple. That miracle was worked in His absence and it enhances its wonder. They are both equally miraculous but there is a touch more striking about this second miracle—that He was not there to speak and make the veil rend in two.

His soul had gone from His body and neither His body nor His soul were in that secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High. And yet, at a distance, His will sufficed to rend that thick veil of fine twined linen and cunning work.

The miracle of turning water into wine was worked in a private house, amidst the family and such disciples as were friends of the family. But this marvel was worked in the Temple of God. There is a singular sacredness about it because it was a deed of wonder done in that most awful and mysterious place which was the center of hallowed worship and the abode of God. Look! He dies and at the very door of God's high sanctuary He rends the veil in two. There is a solemnity about this miracle, as worked before Jehovah, which I can hardly convey in speech but which you will feel in your own souls.

Do not forget, also, that this was done by the Savior after His death and this sets the miracle in a very remarkable light. He rends the veil at the very instant of death. Jesus yielded up the ghost and, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two. For thirty years He seems to have prepared himself for the first miracle of His life. He works His first miracle after

death in the moment of expiring. As His soul departed from His body our blessed Lord at that same moment laid hold upon the great veil of His Father's symbolical house and rent it in two.

2. This first miracle after death stands in such a place that we cannot pass it by without grave thought. It was very significant, as standing at the head of what many call a new dispensation. The miracle of turning water into wine begins His public life and sets the key of it. This begins His work after death and marks the tone of it. What does it mean?

Does it not mean that the death of Christ is the Revelation and explanation of secrets? Vanish all the types and shadows of the ceremonial Law—vanish, because fulfilled, and explained in the death of Christ. The death of the Lord Jesus is the key of all true philosophy—God made flesh, dying for man—if that does not explain a mystery, it cannot be explained. If with this thread in your hand you cannot follow the labyrinth of human affairs and learn the great purpose of God, then you cannot follow it at all. The death of Christ is the great veil-render, the great revealer of secrets.

It is also the great opener of entrances. There was no way into the holy place till Jesus, dying, rent the veil. The way into the most holy of all was not made manifest till He died. If you desire to approach God, the death of Christ is the way to Him. If you want the nearest access and the closest communion that a creature can have with his God, behold, the sacrifice of Christ reveals the way to you. Jesus not only says, "I am the Way," but, rending the veil, He makes the way. The veil of His flesh being rent, the way to God is made most clear to every believing soul.

Moreover, the Cross is the clearing of all obstacles. Christ by death rent the veil. Then between His people and Heaven there remains no obstruction, or if there is any—if your fears invent an obstruction—the Christ who rent the veil continues still to rend it. He breaks the gates of brass and cuts the bars of iron in sunder. Behold, in His death "the breaker is come up before them, and the Lord on the head of them." He has broken up and cleared the way and all His chosen people may follow Him up to the glorious Throne of God. This is significant of the spirit of the dispensation under which we now live. Obstacles are cleared. Difficulties are solved. Heaven is opened to all Believers.

3. It was a miracle worthy of Christ. Stop a minute and adore your dying Lord. Does He with such a miracle signalize His death? Does it not prove His immortality? It is true He has bowed His head in death. Obedient to His Father's will, when He knows that the time has come for Him to die, He bows His head in willing acquiescence. But at that moment when you call Him dead, He rends the veil of the temple. Is there not immortality in Him though He died?

And see what power He possessed. His hands are nailed—His side is about to be pierced. As He hangs there He cannot protect Himself from the insults of the soldiery but in His utmost weakness He is so strong that he rends the heavy veil of the temple from the top to the bottom.

Behold His wisdom, for in this moment, viewing the deed spiritually, He opens up to us all wisdom and lays bare the secrets of God. The veil which Moses put upon his face, Christ takes away in the moment of His death. The true Wisdom in His dying preaches His grandest sermon by tearing away that which hid the most supreme Truth from the gaze of all believing eyes. Beloved, if Jesus does this for us in His death, surely, we shall be saved by His life. Jesus who died is yet alive and we trust in Him to lead us into "the holy places made without hands."

Before I pass on to the second wonder, I invite everyone here, who as yet does not know the Savior, seriously to think upon the miracles which attended His death and judge what sort of man He was who, for our sins, thus laid down His life. He was not suffered by the Father to die without a miracle to show that He had made a way for sinners to draw near to God.

II. Pass on now to the second wonder—"THE EARTH DID QUAKE." The immovable was stirred by the death of Christ. Christ did not touch the earth—He was uplifted from it on the tree. He was dying, but in the laying aside of His power, in the act of death, He made the earth beneath Him, which we call "the solid globe," itself to quake. What did it teach? Did it not mean, first, the physical universe fore-feeling the last terrible shake of its doom? The day will come when the Christ will appear upon the earth and in due time all things that are shall be rolled up, like garments worn out and put away.

Once more will He speak and then will He shake not only the earth but also Heaven. The things which cannot be shaken will remain but this earth is not one of them—it will be shaken out of its place. "The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Nothing shall stand before Him. He alone is. These other things do but seem to be—and before the terror of His face all men shall tremble and Heaven and earth shall flee away. So, when He died, earth seemed to anticipate its doom and quaked in His Presence. How will it quake when He that lives again shall come with all

the glory of God! How will you quake, my Hearer, if you should wake up in the next world without a Savior? How you will tremble in that day when He shall come to judge the world in righteousness and you shall have to face the Savior whom you have despised! Think of it, I pray you.

Did not that miracle also mean this—that the spiritual world is to be moved by the Cross of Christ? He dies upon the Cross and shakes the material world as a prediction that that death of His would shake the world that lies in the Wicked One and cause convulsions in the moral kingdom. Brothers and Sisters, think of it. We say of ourselves, “How shall we ever move the world?” The Apostles did not ask that question. They had confidence in the Gospel which they preached. Those who heard them saw that confidence. When they opened their mouths they said, “The men that have turned the world upside down have come here unto us.”

The Apostles believed in shaking the world with the simple preaching of the Gospel. I entreat you to believe the same. It is a vast city this—this London. How can we ever affect it? China, Hindustan, Africa—these are immense regions. Will the Cross of Christ tell upon them? Yes, my Brethren, for it shook the earth and it will yet shake the great masses of mankind. If we have but faith in it and perseverance to keep on with the preaching of the Word, it is but a matter of time when the name of Jesus shall be known of all men and when every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue confess that He is Christ to the glory of God the Father. The earth did quake beneath the Cross. And it shall again. The Lord God be praised for it.

That old world—how many years it had existed I cannot tell. The age of the world, from that beginning which is mentioned in the first verse of the Book of Genesis, I am not able to compute. However old it was, it had to shake when the Redeemer died. This carries us over to another of our difficulties. The system of evil we have to deal with is so long-established, hoary and reverent with antiquity, that we say to ourselves, “We cannot do much against old prejudices.” But it was the old, old earth that quivered and quaked beneath the dying Christ and it shall do so again. Magnificent systems, sustained by philosophy and poetry, will yet yield before what is called the comparatively new doctrine of the Cross.

Assuredly it is not new, but older than the earth itself. It is God's own Gospel, everlasting and eternal. It will shake down the antique and the venerable, as surely as the Lord lives. And I see the prophecy of this in the quaking of the earth beneath the Cross.

It does seem impossible, does it not, that the mere preaching of Christ can do this? And hence certain men must link to the preaching of Christ all the aids of music and architecture and I know not what beside, till the Cross of Christ is overlaid with human inventions, crushed and buried beneath the wisdom of man. But what was it that made the earth quake? Simply our Lord's death and no addition of human power or wisdom. It seemed a very inadequate means to produce so great a result. But it was sufficient, for the “weakness of God is stronger than men and the foolishness of God is wiser than men.”

And Christ, in His very death, suffices to make the earth quake beneath His Cross. Come, let us be well content in the battle in which we are engaged, to use no weapon but the Gospel, no battle-ax but the Cross. Could we but believe it, the old, old story is the only story that is needed to be told to reconcile man to God. Jesus died in the sinner's place, the Just for the unjust, a magnificent display of God's Grace and justice in one single act. Could we but keep to this only, we should see the victory coming speedily to our conquering Lord. I leave that second miracle—wherein you see the immovable stirred in the quaking of the earth.

III. Only a hint or two upon the third miracle—THE ROCKS RENT. I have been informed that, to this very day, there are at Jerusalem certain marks of rock-rending of the most unusual kind. Travelers have said that they are not such as are usually produced by earthquake, or any other cause. Upon that I will say but little. But it is a wonderful thing that, as Jesus died, as His soul was rent from His body, as the veil of the temple was rent in two, so the earth, the rocky part of it, the most solid structure of all, was rent in gulfs and chasms in a single moment.

What does this miracle show us but this—the insensible startled. What? Could rocks feel? Yet they rent at the sight of Christ's death. Men's hearts did not respond to the agonizing cries of the dying Redeemer but the rocks responded—the rocks were rent. He did not die for rocks. Yet rocks were more tender than the hearts of men, for whom He shed His blood—

“Of reason all things show some sign,

But this unfeeling heart of mine,”

said the poet. And he spoke the truth. Rocks could rend but yet some men's hearts are not rent by the sight of the Cross. However, Beloved, here is the point that I seem to see here—that obstinacy and obduracy will be conquered by the death of Christ.

You may preach to a man about death and he will not tremble at its certainty or solemnity. Yet try him with it. You may preach to a man about Hell but he will harden his heart, like Pharaoh, against the judgment of the Lord. Yet try him with it. All things that can move man should be used. But that which does affect the most obdurate and obstinate is the great love of God, so strangely seen in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. I will not stay to show you how it is but I will remind you that it is so. It was this, which, in the case of many of us, brought tears of repentance to our eyes and led us to submit to the will of God. I know that it was so with me.

I looked at a thousand things and I did not relent. But when “I saw One hanging on a tree—

“In agonies and blood,”

and dying there for me, then did I smite upon my breast and I was in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. I am sure your own hearts confess that the great Rock-render is the dying Savior.

Well, now, as it is with you, so shall you find it with other men. When you have done your best and have not succeeded, bring out this last hammer—the Cross of Christ. I have often seen on pieces of cannon, in Latin words, this inscription, “The last argument of kings.” That is to say, cannons are the last argument of kings. But the Cross is the last argument of God. If a dying Savior does not convert you, what will? If His bleeding wounds do not attract you to God, what will? If Jesus bears our sin in His own body on the tree and puts it away and if this does not bring you to God, with confession of your sin and hatred of it, then there remains nothing more for you.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” The Cross is the rock-render. Brothers and Sisters, go on teaching the love of the dying Son of God. Go on preaching Christ. You will tunnel the Alps of pride and the granite hills of prejudice with this. You shall find an entrance for Christ into the inmost hearts of men, though they are hard as adamant. And this will be by the preaching of the Cross in the power of the Spirit.

IV. But now I close with the last miracle. These wonders accumulate and they depend upon each other. The quaking earth produced, no doubt, the rending of the rocks. And the rending of the rocks aided in the fourth wonder—“THE GRAVES WERE OPENED.”

The graves opened and the dead revived. That is our fourth head. It is the great consequence of the death of Christ. The graves were opened. Man is the only animal that cares about a sepulcher. Some persons fret about how they shall be buried. That is the last concern that ever would cross my mind. I feel persuaded that people will bury me out of hatred, or out of love and especially out of love to themselves. We need not trouble about that. But man has often shown his pride by his tomb. That is a strange thing. To garland the gallows is a novelty, I think, not yet perpetrated. But to pile marble and choice statuary upon a tomb—what is it but to adorn a gallows, or to show man's great grandeur where his littleness is alone apparent.

Dust, ashes, rottenness, putridity and then a statue and all manner of fine things to make you think that the creature that goes back to dust is, after all, a great one. Now, when Jesus died, sepulchers were laid bare and the dead were exposed—what does this mean? I think we have in this last miracle “the history of a man.” There he lies dead—corrupt, dead in trespasses and sins. But what a beautiful sepulcher he lies in! He is a Church-goer. He is a Dissenter—whichever you please of the two. He is a very moral person. He is a gentleman. He is a citizen. He is master of his company. He will be Lord Mayor one day. He is so good—oh, he is so good!

Yet he has no Divine Grace in his heart, no Christ in his faith, no love to God. You see what a sepulcher he lies in—a dead soul in a gilded tomb? By His Cross our Lord splits this sepulcher and destroys it. What are our merits worth in the presence of the Cross? The death of Christ is the death of self-righteousness. Jesus' death is a superfluity if we can save ourselves. If we are so good that we do not want the Savior, why, then, did Jesus bleed His life away upon the tree? The Cross breaks up the sepulchers of hypocrisy, formalism, and self-righteousness, in which the spiritually dead are hidden away.

What next? It opens the graves. The earth springs apart. There lies the dead man—he is revealed to the light. The Cross of Christ does that! The man is not yet made alive by Divine Grace but he is shown to himself. He knows that he lies

in the grave of his sin. He has sufficient power of God upon him to make him lie, not like a corpse covered up with marble, but like a corpse from which the grave digger has flung away the sod and left it naked to the light of day. Oh, it is a grand thing when the Cross thus opens the graves! You cannot convince men of sin except by the preaching of a crucified Savior. The lance with which we reach the hearts of men is that same lance which pierced the Savior's heart. We have to use the crucifixion as the means of crucifying self-righteousness and making the man confess that he is dead in sin.

After the sepulchers had been broken up and the graves had been opened, what followed next? Life was imparted. "Many of the bodies of the saints which slept arose." They had turned to dust. But when you have a miracle you may as well have a great one. I wonder that people, when they can believe one miracle, make any difficulty of another. Once introduces Omnipotence and difficulties have ceased. So in this miracle. The bodies came together on a sudden and there they were, complete and ready for the rising. What a wonderful thing is the implantation of life! I will not speak of it in a dead man but I would speak of it in a dead heart.

O God, send Your life into some dead heart at this moment while I speak! That which brings life into dead souls is the death of Jesus. While we behold the Atonement and view our Lord bleeding in our place, the Divine Spirit works upon the man and life is breathed into him. He takes away the heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh that palpitates with a new life. This is the wondrous work of the Cross—it is by the death of our Lord that regeneration comes to men. There were no new births if it were not for that one death. If Jesus had not died, we had remained dead. If He had not bowed His head, none of us could have lifted up our heads. If He had not there, on the Cross, passed from among the living, we must have remained among the dead forever and forever.

Now pass on and you will see that those persons who received life, in due time left their graves. It is written that they came out of their graves. Of course they did. What living man would wish to stay in his grave? And you, my dear Hearers, if the Lord quickens you, will not stay in your graves. If you have been accustomed to strong drink, or to any other besetting sin, you will quit it. You will not feel any attachment to your sepulcher. If you have lived in ungodly company and found amusement in questionable places, you will not stay in your graves.

We shall not have need to come after you to lead you away from your old associations. You will be eager to get out of them. If any person here should be buried alive and if he should be discovered in his coffin before he had breathed his last, I am sure that if the sod were lifted and the lid were taken off he would not need prayerful entreaties to come out of his grave. Far from it. Life loves not the prison of death. So may God grant that the dying Savior may fetch you out of the graves in which you are still living. And, if He now quickens you, I am sure that the death of our Lord will make you reckon that if one died for all, then all died. And He died for all that they which live should not live henceforth unto themselves but unto Him that died for them and rose again.

Which way did these people go after they had come out of their graves? We are told that "they went into the holy city." Exactly so. And he that has felt the power of the Cross may well make the best of his way to holiness. He will long to join himself with God's people. He will wish to go up to God's house and to have fellowship with the thrice-holy God. I should not expect that quickened ones would go anywhere else. Every creature goes to its own company, the beast to its lair and the bird to its nest. And the restored and regenerated man makes his way to the holy city.

Does not the Cross draw us to the Church of God? I would not wish one to join the Church from any motive that is not fetched from the five wounds and bleeding side of Jesus. We give ourselves first to Christ and then to His people for His dear sake. It is the Cross that does it—

*“Jesus dead upon the tree
Achieves this wondrous victory.”*

We are told—to close this marvelous story—that they went into the holy city “and appeared unto many.” That is, some of them who had been raised from the dead, I do not doubt, appeared unto their wives. What rapture as they saw again the beloved husband! It may be that some of them appeared to father and mother. And I doubt not that many a quickened mother or father would make the first appearance to their children. What does this teach us but that if the Lord's Grace should raise us from the dead, we must take care to show it? Let us appear unto many. Let the life that God has given us be manifest. Let us not hide it but let us go to our former friends and make our epiphanies as Christ made His. For His Glory's sake let us have our manifestation and appearance unto others. Glory be to the dying Savior! All praise to the great Sacrifice!

Oh, that these poor, feeble words of mine would excite some interest in you about my dying Master! Be ready to die for Him. And you that do not know Him—think of this great mystery—that God should take your nature and become a man and die, that you might not die—and bear your sin that you should be free from it. Come and trust my Lord tonight, I pray you. While the people of God gather at the table to the breaking of bread, let your spirits hasten, not to the table and the sacrament but to Christ Himself and His sacrifice. Amen.

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