

THE MIRACLES OF EASTER

April 08, 2012

By Pastor Stan

Matthew 27:45

PASTOR STAN WEESE

SERMON SERIES: EASTER SERMON

TOPIC: EASTER

SERMON TITLE: "THE MIRACLES OF EASTER"

SCRIPTURE TEXTS: MATTHEW 27:45-28:6 / P. 705

DATE: APRIL 8, 2012

copyright 2012 by Stan Weese

INTRO.

-- The miracle of Jesus' Resurrection is, of course, the primary event that we associate with Easter; but there are actually six miracles that are part of the Easter story. The first five of those miracles are described in the last two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, and they lay the foundation for the sixth miracle, which is still happening today.

So turn in your Bibles to Matthew 27:45ff. (p. 705).

-- The succession of miracles that we are about to look at started on Good Friday, as Jesus was dying on the Cross. Each of the miracles gives us an important insight into the purpose and meaning of Jesus' death.

I. THE FIRST MIRACLE: MIRACULOUS DARKNESS (27:45-49)

-- The first miracle is a miraculous darkness that occurred during the time that Jesus was on the cross and is described in verses 45-49.

A. THE MIRACLE

1. Its Duration

-- Matthew tells us that this darkness occurred "from the sixth hour until the ninth hour," or from noon until three o'clock. Jesus was crucified at the third hour or nine o'clock in the morning; so He had been on the cross for three hours when the darkness began.

Notice that the darkness began at noon, when the sun would have been at its highest point in the sky and its light would have been most intense.

2. Its Nature: Supernatural, Not an Eclipse

-- It's clear that this darkness was supernatural and not a solar eclipse for at least two reasons:

a. For one thing it was too long. While a solar eclipse can last about two hours from beginning to end, the period of total darkness (which is what happened for three hours during the crucifixion) lasts only a few minutes in an eclipse.

b. But more importantly, this wasn't a solar eclipse (when the moon passes between the earth and the sun) because Jesus was crucified during the Jewish feast of Passover, which occurs at the time of the full moon, a time when a solar eclipse is impossible because the moon is on the opposite side of the earth, away from the sun.

3. Its Extent

-- When Matthew says that the darkness "came over all the land," he could mean the entire earth or a limited area, like the land of Judah or the area surrounding Jerusalem, which would have actually been even more amazing. Whatever is meant, one thing is certain: this darkness that lasted while Jesus was hanging on the cross and that ended when He died was no natural event but a supernatural act of God.

B. THE MEANING

1. God's Judgment

-- The purpose of the darkness was to demonstrate what was happening on the cross - not just the fact that Jesus was dying but that in His death Jesus was taking upon Himself the judgment of God. Throughout the OT darkness is associated with the outpouring of God's judgment against sin.

Joel 2:1-2 …for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand - 2 a day of darkness and

gloom, a day of clouds and blackness…

Amos 5:20 Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light…

2. For Our Sins

-- In His death on the cross Jesus was taking the judgment of God for the sins of all those who would come to Him for salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us…

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree…

3. The Culmination

-- The darkness of the judgment endured by Jesus reached its culmination with Jesus' words in Matthew 27:46.

v. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?" - which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus was not exaggerating or speaking inaccurately here. Sin separates us from God. God in His infinite holiness cannot embrace that which is sinful. So when Jesus bore our sin, He of necessity experienced separation from the Father. Indeed, this is the only time in the Gospels when Jesus does not address God as "Father." When Jesus took our judgment, the intimate fellowship between Him and the Father that exists for eternity was somehow broken. Jesus did not cease to be God, but He did cease to experience the nearness, presence, and intimate fellowship of the Father. How that could be is a deep, shrouded mystery understood only by God but demonstrated in the darkness that came over the land as Jesus died on the cross.

II. THE SECOND MIRACLE: THE TORN CURTAIN (VV. 50-51A)

A. THE MIRACLE

1. Set into Motion (v. 50)

-- The second miracle, the tearing of the Temple curtain, is set into motion by what happens in verse 50. Matthew says that Jesus cried out in a loud voice. John tells us that what Jesus cried with this loud voice were the words, "It is finished." The judgment was endured, the work of atonement was complete, the sacrifice for sins has been made. Jesus is now ready to give up His spirit, and Luke tells us that He dies with this final prayer, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." Notice that with God's judgment finished Jesus once again speaks to God as "Father."

2. The Temple

-- Matthew tells us that Jesus shout "It is finished" sets into motion the second, third and fourth miracles. The second miracle is the tearing of the curtain in the Temple. The Temple had two main areas: the Holy Place, which was the larger area and could be entered only by the priests who were on duty, and the Holiest Place, which was the smaller area and was obscured by a large heavy curtain that extended from the top of the Temple to the floor. Behind that curtain was the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the throne of God. The only person who could enter the Holiest Place was the High Priest, and the only time he could enter it was on the Day of Atonement and only with the blood of an atoning sacrifice.

3. The Tear

-- Matthew is careful to note that the curtain was torn completely in two, starting at the top, indicating again that this tearing of the curtain was a supernatural act of God. Furthermore, all of this happened at the ninth hour (three o'clock in the afternoon), the time of the evening sacrifice and a time when priests would have been ministering in the Temple standing right in front of the curtain.

B. THE MEANING

-- The tearing of the curtain indicated that the way to God's presence had now been opened, and the fact that this occurred when Jesus cried "It is finished" indicated that it was Jesus' death on the cross that was the atoning sacrifice that removed the barrier between us and God and opened the way into His presence.

Hebrews 10:19-20 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God…

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

-- In tearing the curtain and opening the Holiest Place, God was saying, "Draw near and enter in. Come

to the throne of grace. The death of My Son has now opened the way."

III. THE THIRD MIRACLE: THE EARTHQUAKE (V. 51B)

A. THE MIRACLE

-- The third miracle, which occurred immediately following the tearing of the curtain, was an earthquake. But this was an earthquake like no other. It was prompted by Jesus' cry "It is finished." Although it shook the ground violently enough to split boulders and terrify Roman soldiers, it apparently didn't damage any buildings. In fact, its damage was extremely selective. As we will soon see, the only thing it broke were the large stones that sealed the graves of certain godly people buried in tombs around Jerusalem.

B. THE MEANING

-- Throughout the OT earthquakes are associated with the presence and judgment of God.

Exodus 19:18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently.

Nahum 1:5 The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it.

IV. THE FOURTH MIRACLE: THE DEAD REVIVED (VV. 52-53)

-- I want to read these verses from the NASV because I think it clarifies best what happened:

vv. 52-53 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

A. THE MIRACLE

-- This certainly has to be one of the most perplexing miracles in the Bible. Matthew is the only one who records this miracle, and this is all he says about it. Here's what appears to have happened. The tombs containing the bodies of godly people were broken open by the earthquake that occurred when Jesus cried "It is finished." Then after Jesus resurrection on Sunday these godly people were revived (brought back to life, much as Lazarus had been) and they left their tombs and went to Jerusalem and appeared to many people there. This is most likely a miracle of reviving rather than resurrecting. In other words, these people probably came back to life but then died again (as did Lazarus).

B. THE MEANING

-- The significance of this miracle appears to be twofold:

1. It demonstrated that Jesus had broken the power of death. It's likely that when these revived saints appeared to people in Jerusalem they did so to proclaim the glories of what God had done through Jesus' death and resurrection.

2. It points to the day when God's people will be gloriously resurrected, never to die again.

V. THE FIFTH MIRACLE: JESUS' RESURRECTION (27:65-28:6)

-- This is, of course, the great miracle that Easter celebrates - the Resurrection of Jesus.

A. THE MIRACLE

-- An interesting feature of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' Resurrection is that the actual resurrection itself is never described. When the women arrived at the tomb, Jesus was already risen. His body was not in the tomb. Oh yes, an angel rolled away the stone from the entrance to the tomb. But why did he do that? Not to let Jesus get out; remember how the risen Jesus suddenly appeared to the disciples who were together in a locked room. The angel rolled away the stone so that the women could go in to see that the tomb was empty.

B. THE MEANING

-- This passage gives us insight into the significance of Jesus' Resurrection.

28:6 "He is not here; he has risen, just as He said."

-- The Resurrection is the validation of Jesus' life and ministry - that He was, indeed, the Son of God and that His death on the Cross had indeed paid the penalty for our sin.

Romans 1:4 [Jesus] was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

VI. THE SIXTH MIRACLE: OUR SALVATION (EPHESIANS 1:18-20)

-- But the Resurrection of Jesus isn't the last of the Easter miracles. In fact Jesus' Resurrection along with all the other miracles we've seen this morning lays the foundation for this final miracle, a miracle that is still happening today: the salvation of those who turn to and trust in Christ.

Ephesians 1:18-20 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead…

-- The same power of God that produced all the miracles we've seen this morning, the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, that same power works in those who believe in Jesus to make us alive spiritually and to give us new natures that love God and desire to follow after Jesus. And it's that same power that gives us hope, the assured hope that the work God has begun in us He will continue, that He will not let go of us, that no one can take us out of His hand, and that He will one day take us to be with Him and we will inherit the glories of eternal life.