

March 20, 2016

## THE DEATH AND THE EARTHQUAKE

Matthew 27:50-54

Earthquakes happen when there is a shift in tectonic plates deep beneath the surface of the Earth. At the moment of Christ's Death, deep beneath the surface of all existence, there was a shift so significant that there was a seismic experience that could be felt. Like the darkness that surrounded Jerusalem and perhaps the whole land, a darkness that could be felt, likewise, this seismic shift was precisely *that* substantial. It could be felt. In the spiritual and moral realm, a shift in the effect of sin happened. Sin was buried so deep and righteousness was elevated so high that all of Life became different. The innocence of Christ was that pure, and His sacrifice for sin was that perfect! The Curtain of the Temple, the barrier between the Holy Place with the altar, and, the Holy of Holies, the Holiest Place, where the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, ...that barrier was eliminated. The notion that anything stood between God and His likeness in humanity was altered. Sin may have made that barrier necessary for the protection of humankind from the fire of God's total holiness, but now, sin was dealt with in such a final way that, in a manner of speaking, you could say, the human spirit became inflammable. The effect of Sin was so completely diminished for the faithful that they were set free from it!

The power of sin is not gone, guilt and the prospect of Hell may still exist for the unfaithful. But Christ dealt with Sin in that single moment in such a perfect way that even Death was overcome briefly for the saints who had died. Tombs broke open and those who had lived holy lives were raised, later, after the Resurrection, to appear to many people in Jerusalem!

God, in Christ, summoned up one last outcry, and Jesus gave up the Spirit. His Body was dead. The heart of God-incarnate stopped beating. He breathed His last breath. It was over. It was finished. But... It was just beginning! Simultaneous with that Cry of Christ the earthquake came, the Curtain ripped, the rocks split, the tombs opened, and the saints awakened!

Already, existence was different. There would be another earthquake at the moment of the Resurrection, when another seismic shift in the spiritual realm occurred, but this divine act, the completion of Christ's Sacrifice – His Death – has changed things so considerably in the moral reality of life, that our acceptance of that Sacrifice for our souls washes us clean. Oh, we can still get dirty, but the grace and power of God's reconciliation and our repentance returns us to a state of cleanliness. We are forgiven!!! Hallelujah!

And we experience this seismic shift in our lives when we acknowledge our brokenness – the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit! "A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise!" (Psalm 51:17) And then seek God's grace, and discover forgiveness.

Faith helps us identify with what Christ has done in such a way that we can say, with Paul, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!*" (Galatians 2:20) But we need to look at Christ on the Cross and see our sin and our guilt being taken to the grave. "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful nature!*" (Galatians 5:24)

Becoming faithful is like changing our clothes! Galatians 3:27 – *As many of you as were Baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ!* Ephesians 4:22-24 – *You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* Romans 6:5-6, 10-11 – *If we have been united with Jesus in a death like His, we will certainly be united with Him in a Resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ...The*

*Death He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the Life He lives, He lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus!*

Our nature is different! 2 Corinthians 5:17 – *If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has died! Behold, the new has come!*

We will now walk in the light as Christ is in the light! (1 John 1:7) We can claim what Christ has claimed: *“In the world, you will have tribulation; but take heart! I have overcome the world!”* (John 16:33)

And the Centurion, at the foot of the Cross, heard Christ’s final cry, felt the earthquake, saw the rocks split, and knew....and announced it: *“Truly this Man was the Son of God!”* The first Gentile believer!

Faith is not just about hope and heaven. Heaven begins now. Faith is about change – changed hearts, changed minds, saved souls!

It happened at the Cross!

**Galatians 6:14 – *May I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world!***