

1 Corinthians 15:3-4, *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died** for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."*

I want to draw our attention to Christ's death, because, if the fact that Christ did die is not clearly established, it is vain to try and prove his resurrection from the dead. Jesus might have died in some obscure place, laying down his life as a ransom for mankind, yet there would be no legal evidence of it. But God allowed the wrath of man to become a powerful instrument of establishing the fact that Jesus Christ did, indeed, die! God, the Father, allowed Jesus to be taken under what was then the legal process -- arrested first by the great council of the Jews, and then by the authority of the roman governor, so that the matter became a matter of public record -- a legal transaction. The highest powers of that day -- both of the Jewish and Roman governments -- united in the fact of his arrest, his trial, and his being condemned to death.

We cannot help but note how God had so wisely arranged the time of his death. It took place during the feast of Passover, when Jews from throughout all the countries they where they had been scattered. Every male Jew was commanded by God to return to Jerusalem every year to observe the Passover. Jerusalem could not hold the people that came together; they pitched their tents all around he city, on the hills and in the valleys. It was the time of full moon, when there was brightness all night. The multitude was there to witness the scene, so that people would attest it to from all parts of Judea and from all countries around about Judea, as far away as Egypt.

Nothing was overlooked in God's planning. The manner of his death was such as to be not a sudden one, but one of torture, passing through several hours. Had the execution been a sudden one, as it very well could have been -- Christ's death would have been equally efficacious --but it would not have been witnessed by so many. Jesus hung those dreadful hours, from nine until three, the sun being darkened, what an opportunity was given to the people passing by to be impressed with this scene. The crucifixion was near the city; the crowd was there; the Temple worship was in process; the strangers were there; the great stream of humanity passes by on this festive day, a thoroughfare of men, women, and children walked by in view of the cross on which our Savior hung. Scripture tells us the multitude, *"passed by and reviled, and said: 'He saved others, himself he cannot save.' "* Oh, you can be assured that the multitude saw Jesus as he hung suffering on the cross.

Also, you will note, that the circumstances attending Christ's death were such as to invite universal attention. Crucifixion was not designed for death to be a private one -- not merely a legal transaction, that was a matter soon over -- but death by this means was a long-drawn-out and agonizing spectacle -- to be witnessed by the multitudes. And, in order that man's attention would be drawn to that scene, God called upon the heavens and the earth, the air and the graves, and the Temple itself to give their testimony of this episode taking place.

Before the coronation of a prince in olden time -- and in some kingdoms the custom is still observed -- there is sent forth a herald, usually three days in advance, to

issue a challenge to any one who dares to claim the kingdom to come and prove his right, and to announce that the coronation of his prince is to take place.

It was such a challenge God gave to all the powers of humanity and to all the powers of darkness. There hung suffering on the cross God's Prince, His Son, dying for the sins of humanity. God was about to crown him King of kings and Lord of lords when the morning of the third day would arrive. God sends forth His voice of challenge, and as He speaks the earth rocks to its core; the ground, shaking and convulsing, calls man attention to what was about to occur.

Not only the voice of earth, but yonder the sin clothed itself in sackcloth for three hours -- as much to say "*There will be gloom for three days, as the great Light of the world has veiled Himself, in a mantle of night, for three days. But, as out of this three hours of darkness light will shine forth, so at the end of three days will the Sun of Righteousness shine once more!*" It was the herald's voice passing through the heavens, saying, "*Give attention, ye created beings to what is happening here.*"

Earth and the heavens were not alone in calling attention to this occasion, over in the valley, are the tombs where the prophets were buried. The hillside is full of the resting places of the dead, generation-after-generation have been buried there. Visitors visit these tombs and say, "*There is a mighty judge in Israel; over there is a tomb of a prophet.*" No doubt there those who were visiting these tombs when the earthquake took place -- and, Scripture says, "*Behold, the tombs were opened and the graves displayed the dead within,*" (Matthew 27:51). A herald's voice was calling from the depths of the grave, "*Hear, O sons of men, what is taking place today!*"

Is it possible to comprehend the feelings of those who stood by those tombs, bending over the graves, when the tombs and the graves were thrown wide open? Suddenly the doors of tombs burst open and the rocks gave way, and they saw the forms of those dead came forth. What was accruing? What could it all mean?

Something else has always interested me. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Jesus Christ "*gave up the ghost,*" that is, when His spirit left His physical body. At that very hour the great sacrifice was being offered in the Temple. Multitudes of devout people were gathered at the Temple. The outer court was full of worshippers. The doors and gates, leading into the Sanctuary were crowded. The lamb was before the altar, as the priest, in his vestments, takes the sacrificial knife. The blood was to be shed at exactly the hour of three. The multitude was looking on.

The veil of the Temple was a huge, beautiful embroidered with cherubims, curtain - 30 feet wide, 60 feet high and 4 inches thick. Josephus writes that this veil was so heavy, that, it needed 300 priests to manipulate it. History records that "*horses tied to each side could not pull the veil apart.*" The rending of this veil must have been a shocking, frightening and awesome event, at least to the priests who were ministering in the Temple. No wonder Matthew's account is ushered in with "*Behold, the veil of the Temple was rent to twain from the top to the bottom.*" The noise from the tearing of such a large, thick curtain would have been exceedingly loud and startling. The priest within the holy place would have witnessed this tearing of the veil, occurring at the very moment of the offering of the Passover lamb.

As the veil was rent into, the Holy of Holies, not to be seen by anyone was now opened. The curtain being rent right down the middle would have exposed the whole room to those officiating near the veil. The multitudes of people that were gathered outside of the Temple would have heard the sound of a loud tear. They would have seen the shocked look upon the faces of the priests that ministered at the Temple. Word would have spread rapidly through Jerusalem that the veil to the Holy of Holies had been torn from top to bottom right down the middle; what a sobering and mysterious sign from God. The very instant Jesus yields up His spirit the ears of the priests are pierced by this great veil being separated.

Did the High Priest drop the sacrificial knife, as he was about to slaughter the Passover lamb? Did the lamb go free as the Lamb of God from the foundation of the word was slain for mankind? The Passover lamb was to be slain at three o'clock in the afternoon – and that is the very moment that Jesus, *“yielded up His spirit,”* and died. And the instant the *“veil was rent in two, from top to bottom.”*

The herald's voice seemed to say, *“An end to all blood sacrifices – to all the suffering victims, for One has come to do the will of God on whom the burden of man has been laid.”*

God tore asunder the veil, His herald, declaring in dramatic, unmistakable language that the way was opened whereby humanity, oppressed and downtrodden, from all parts of the world could now find their way to the *“mercy-seat”* of Almighty God. Every impediment and obstacle that stood in the path, that made access to God's loving presence impossible, was removed by the redemptive work of the Mediator. The author of Hebrews says, *“We now enter the Holiest with boldness by the blood of Jesus.”*

Christ's death demanded public investigation -- and it received it!

To all these happenings on earth, the heavens, the tombs opening, and the veil in the Temple being rent, is added absolute proof of the fact of Christ's death.

John 19:32-33, “Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.”

This passage in John's Gospel records a little incident that seems to be mentioned without much elaboration, yet is one of the strongest possible proof, not only the fact of Christ's death, but the nature of His death. When this Scripture was written the human body was not understood -- for instance, the circulation of the blood had not been studied and understood -- Physicians had not discovered, as they have today, the study of the human system. The science of pathology had not been considered, yet, in this passage has a world of meaning.

It is now known that a person who dies from violent emotions, by what is termed *“a broken heart,”* or, *“a crushed spirit,”* a watery secretion is formed around the heart.

Those who witnessed the piercing of Jesus' side did not understand water secretion issuing forth from the heart, unstained by blood, showed a great heart being crushed by agony from within.

I shall not at this time tell of the horrible physical agony Jesus endured that day. We all have heard it before - or, perhaps see the movie, "*The Passion*" -- But consider with me the emotional and spiritual trauma Jesus bore that day at Calvary, when the darkness and dreadful load of all of humanity's sin was "*laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.*" His spirit so crushed that He cries out, "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?*"

But it is now over. Jesus Christ died on the cross. He paid the total price for our sin - so that we might have forgiveness from all of our sins, and eternal life within.

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Romans 6:23).