

Miracle of The Rending of the Veil

“And behold the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51)

The next miracle mentioned after the darkness, is the rending in twain of the Veil of the Temple. Some have supposed that it was the earthquake that caused the rending of the veil, however it is unreasonable to ascribe to an earthquake the splitting in two of a loose hanging curtain, but did not shake to pieces anything else in the Temple where the curtain hung.

Matthew 27:50-51 declares, *“Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; **and** – [refers to a separate independent act of God] – the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.”* According to God’s divine record, the order given was that the rending of the veil was independent of the quaking of the earth. When Scripture records the cause and effect, the rending of the veil was the outcome of Christ’s second of the two cries from the cross, that is, His last, loud, expiring cry. This cry seems to be also the cause of the earthquake.

These two – the rending of the veil and the earthquake – were twin consequences of one and the same loud, heart-rendering, cry from Christ’s dying lips. That is, it was the earsplitting, piercing cry of the expiring Savior, that split in two the veil of the Temple; shock the earth, and brake the rocks.

Matthew’s account is strengthened by Mark’s Gospel, mentioning the occurrence of the veil being rent at the same time of Christ’s last cry, but makes no mention of the earthquake. Also, while Matthew, in accounting for the impressions of the Roman centurion in witnessing the crucifixion, says that he was affected by witnessing the earthquake, while Mark says nothing of the earthquake, but records the centurion was affected by his seeing and hearing that Jesus “so” cried out.

Comparing the two evangelists it seems that the force of Christ’s cry to be the cause of the quaking of the earth, and, at the same time, the rending of the veil. Seeking to find the exact sequence of these two events in reference to each other, we discover a relation of cause and effect that is solemn and, at the same time, inspiring, *“Jesus cried with a loud voice, and, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain **from the top to the bottom.**”*

The Temple in Jerusalem took the place of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. There were many differences between the wilderness Tabernacle and the Temple, but as for the veil, the later was just a reproduction of the earlier Tabernacle veil in material and ornamentation, regarding to their purposes they were precisely identical. Even though the veil rent was Temple veil, to understand this renting of the veil and the reasons why it was torn in such fashion, we need to study the Old Testament Tabernacle veil. This veil was a curtain, hanging between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

There were three divisions of the Tabernacle -- the outer court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In the outer Court the congregation of Israel assembled. Into the Holy Place the priests daily entered to minister according to their office. Into the Holy of

Holies no one was ever to enter except the High Priest, and he could enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement with the blood of a sacrifice and smoke of incense.

In the Outer Court, in the sight of the people, stood the Brazen Altar and the Brazen Laver -- symbols of what is needed in order to draw near to God. There can be no approach to God without passing the place of bloody sacrifice, and in that blood being cleansed as in a laver. In the Holy Place, in the sight of the priests who had just come from the bloody Alter and the cleansing Laver, were the Table of Shew-bread, the Golden Candlestick, and the Golden Alter of Incense – symbols of union and fellowship with God. In the Holy of Holies, for only he eye of the High Priest, were the Ark of Covenant, its golden cover -- the Mercy Seat, the cherubim and the Shechinah cloud of glory -- symbols of the throne of God’s presence, and power, and grace.

So, in the structure of the Tabernacle, we have God’s own symbolism of these truths involved in a sinner’s acceptable worship of God.

The veils symbolized obstructions to worship. As long as the Tabernacle dispensation stood, the approach to God was very imperfect; illustrated by these veils. The people in the Outer Court were shut off from the Holy Place by means of the first veil; priests in the Holy Place were closed off from the Holy Place by means of the second veil. The office of each veil was the same -- that of concealing what lay behind it, and barring any further approach.

By way of the Brazen Altar and the Laver, the people of the Court might advance so far; but only those who were priests could pass the first veil, and go nearer, to the symbols of fellowship with God. However, only the High Priest could pass the second veil, and go the nearest, even to what were significant symbols of the nearness to God.

Of these veils, symbols of obstruction in the worship of God, the second veil was the most expressive. The Holy of Holies was the pinnacle of the reality of blessedness of communion with God. It was the ultimate reference to it that all the ritual of the Tabernacle was conducted, from the coming in at the gates of the Court, up to the High Priest’s appearance within this foreshadowing the very presence of Almighty God. This second veil -- the more expressive symbol of an obstruction, concealing, covering the glory of God’s presence -- that is the one spoken of in our text.

This second veil was a curiously wrought fabric -- *“of fine-twined linen”* -- were displayed the colors of blue, purple, and scarlet. The intervening of these three colors, in harmony, were interwoven cherubims. The veil was as a huge screen carrying the image of life and power, and at the same time exhibiting beauty and glory. It hung by hooks of gold from four pillars overlaid with gold. The Scripture calls it a *“cunning work;”* the cunning of God, for it was copied from, *“the pattern showed to Moses on the mount.”*

How impressive it must have been, in the seven-fold light of the Golden Candlestick. With what awe it would fill the mind, since it hung there to hind from view the greater glory that was behind it. And by the pictured expression of guardian watchfulness and power in the inwrought cherubims, it was ever saying quietly but solemnly, *“Thus far, but no farther.”* You can imagine the whispered reverence among the priests of the Holy Place.

However, when Jesus Christ was crucified this veil ceased to exist. It was rent!

Suddenly its purpose was at an end. There it hung, but man's eye could now see through it and beyond it! As a veil it was gone. All at once, in such a strange manner, the concealment had ceased. It was not as if the Temple, in which it occupied had any other damage, or as if some hand of some enemy had done violence to it, but it was as if by it self became internally exhausted and fell in its place before the Holy of Holies, as if resigning its reason for being. It was not any man that interfered! And, also, not anything else, through all that magnificent Temple was displaced, or even marred,

Nor was the "rending" due to any natural process of decay or decompose that would cause the threads of the veil to pull apart. It was rent "in two;" that is, it did not tatter. It did not have a rent here and there. Scripture clearer states, "it rent in twain" – just two pieces! One translation states, "in the middle;" making it two equal pieces with the opening of the veil in the very middle --revealing what had served to concealed. And, it was "rent from top to bottom" – in a straight line downwards, and completely through. It was not jerked apart by some intruder from below, but cleanly cut by an invisible hand from above. The statement in Scripture implies the supernatural, and indicates that the matter is regarded, by any one who might have witnessed it, that the veil was slashed into by supernatural, invisible, hands.

Even more remarkable was the coincidence of the rending of the veil. It happened precisely the instant that Jesus Christ expired on the cross. This was the very moment the veil of concealment had been waiting for; the split second for which through all the ages it had continued to exist in defiance of time, or violence of men. It waited for this very instant! It was as though an inherent intelligence had kept watch over it, and now had heard the stroke from heaven for its conclusion.

The veil was rent in immediate succession to the loud expiring cry of the Crucified. There were two loud cries from the cross. The first just before the darkness had ended; now the second after the darkness had passed. The first was an agonizing wail of abandonment; the second a voice of joy. The first was crushed out of Him by insufferable agony, of which the dread darkness was the sign; the second was the bounding forth of His feelings of achievement and deliverance in the restored light of the Father's communion. The first pronounced the word, "My God My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The second was a shout, pronouncing the completion of His mission on earth, "It is finished."

His work was done. He had borne the sins of man. The burden was over. So, then, this second loud voice from the cross was a Conqueror's outcry of victory. As when a weary man, the day's task over, is pleased at thinking of the success his achievement, sinks to rest in sweet visions of tomorrow, so it was with an intensely human joy, that before committing His spirit to His heavenly Father, in triumph of His purpose accomplished, the suffering Savior gives this final shout.

How real the victory was made evident in the supernatural loudness of a dying man's voice. The Roman centurion was overcome with amazement at it, and the solid earth rocked.

That shout of victory coincided with the rending of the veil. As the Savior finished His work, as the note of triumph rose high and clear from His dying lips, then,

just then, as if the craftsman's blade passes swiftly down the veil, the concealment of the Holy of Holies was ended forever. It was a sign of *what* the victory was.

There is something else noticeably divine for us to ponder. The rending of the veil was meant that we should think of it and be taught by it. Not only does the Word of God record it – but also the terms in which it is written required that the eye of the observer should be there. It suggests the presence of witnesses, and as a matter of fact, there were witnesses. The timing of the rending of the veil is one of the most wonderful features. Jesus Christ expired at three o'clock in the afternoon. This is the exact time of the beginning of the evening sacrifice on this Passover day, so that the priests were in the Holy Place, in front of the veil, actually engaged in their duties. Oh yes, God meant it to be seen, and meant it to be something to be remembered.

One cannot help but notice how the strong proof of the Gospel writers is this statement of the rending of the veil. The evangelists were bold to publish their accounts in the midst of the Jews, and under the very eyes of the priests. And they were never contradicted. You can imagine how it would have seized upon and used to proof the falsehood of Christianity by those acute and watchful infidels, Celsius Porphyry and Julian, if it had not been absolute true! But no; the enemies of Jesus were silenced. They could not say that they had never heard of it before. The simple statement of the Gospel writers proves that it is the true story of the veil's destruction.

Surely, God meant it for instruction. With what power it might make itself felt may be inferred from the sacredness of the veil; that so controlled the conduct of the priests. As great as the sins of God's chosen people had been for fifteen hundred years, violation into entrance, or even viewing, what was behind that veil, was not one of them. Can you even begin to imagine how, bizarre and dreadful it must have been and the effect it would have had upon the witnesses, as that veil fell asunder? As the sight of it affected the priests, so must their report of it have struck with wonder the excited community? And the celebrated coincidence of the hour, how could it have failed to turn every honest thinker both Christ-ward and Cross-ward? What a practical outcome it was of the true and meaning of the occurrence, when, so soon as the Gospel began to be proclaimed, "*A great company of the priests became obedient to the faith.*"

And not to us the Gospel record is evermore saying "*Behold -- look at this great sight -- this message of God to the eye -- the Gospel in symbolism.*"

The way in which the dying Savior's victory was set forth and illustrated by the rending of the veil, reveals a great deal from the consequences to the Temple of worship where the veil had hung. The changes it produced, illustrates the victory of the Crucified Lord.

The unbroken secrecy of the Holy of Holies was not at an end, and all its mysteries opened to view.

The priests who ministered in front of the veil might now safely enter into that typical presence of God most freely.

The people in the Outer Court might now advance into the Holy Place of the priests, and thence into the Holy of Holies. When the very presence-chamber of God had cease to be screened off, the spirit and meaning of the first veil would also have been

exhausted.

The rending of the veil brought about the destruction of the Tabernacle dispensation. It took the meaning out of the entire structure. It disjointed the ritual ceremonies and decapitated the divine economy of the ages. And since it carried with it the demolition of the dispensation, so also it pulled down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and threw open that presence-chamber of God to all mankind.

All this shows the Biblical truths given in types, but, to face the real changes that the rending of the veil brought about, one cannot help but ask, *“Why was such an obstructive form of worship ever instituted by God?”* Why did He screen off the chamber of His presence from men and ordain that none should approach Him save under the shelter of sacrificial blood? Sin, sin-- that was the obstruction! All the Tabernacle arrangement was God’s solemn announcement that He will not commune with a man whose sin is upon him with its deep and damning curse.

When the veil, type of obstruction, was swept away, signified that sin, the real obstruction, was taken out of the way. What was typically done in the veil was really done in Christ Jesus. This was the victory of His death. He, the sinless, battled for us with our sin, and He overcame it. He, the sufferer, exhausted in His own person the required suffering for all man’s sin.

So it was that the High Priest of the veil was hindered from fulfilling his function by that shout of triumph from the cross rending the veil. For now the Crucified Himself, the real High Priest, was to carry His own blood once for all, not into the typical presence, but into the real presence, into the heaven of heavens. There He was to appear, in the power of an endless life, as Himself God’s righteousness for sinners through faith in His blood.

Jesus Christ has settled forever, for every one who will draw nigh to God through faith in Him, the entire question of sin, and He has removed every possible obstruction to an intimate fellowship of God.

Now the way is opened for man’s approach. By faith and in spiritual worship we *“have boldness to enter into the Holy of Holy by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh”* (Hebrews 10:18-23).

In a word, the rent veil was the rent humanity of the Son of God. In its fine linen we see the righteousness of His human nature. In its suspension by hooks of gold -- gold in the Tabernacle being a type of the divine nature -- we see the dependence of His humanity upon His deity. In its heavenly blue and its earthly scarlet, and in the gradual shading off of the former into the latter by the intervening purple, we see heaven and earth blending together in His human life, in rich and beautiful harmony. And in the mass of cherubim into which it was entirely woven, we see the supernatural functions of the human life.

Yes, indeed, it was the “cunning work” of God -- the humanity of Jesus! Its excellency is what made it a veil. That display of the Perfect Man on earth was the demonstration of the only kind of man whom God could ever permit to approach Him. His excellencies, if that had been all, would have been the destruction of our hopes. Incarnation in other words, would have been of no use without the *sacrificial* death.

The veil must be rent!

His glorious humanity was most thoroughly rent. Rent “*from the top,*” for it was God who smote Him -- rent “*to the bottom.*” He was exceeding sorrowful even unto death He was so rent that now, through those excellencies we sinners pass at once to the presence of God. We look by faith into the heaven of heavens. We look with faces unveiled, for, though strong and clear, yet mild and lovely, is the glory that thence comes down upon us.

There is neither obscurity nor reserve, nor the blistering blaze of deserved wrath. “*Abba, Father,*” was never heard from the lips of men till Jesus taught it to us. But now the child finds his way at once to the Father’s bosom, and puts his arms about the Father’s neck.

