

Miracle of The Earthquake

“And the earth did quake and the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:51).

The third miracle of Calvary was an earthquake and has a significance of its own as a link in a chain of supernatural wonders. Not only was this earthquake the cause of what followed -- the opening of the graves -- but also was in itself a sign of great range and power. Equally with the darkness, the rending of the veil, and the opening of the graves, it was a supernatural notation, by which God made known the importance of the death of Jesus Christ, His son, and forever fixed the true interpretation of what was taking place here on Calvary.

In the first place, we must get the full statement before us, *“Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost (spirit). And, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent.”*

The shaking of the earth was at the very instant of Christ’s death, and followed the loud voice of victory. His death was His victory, and to the power of that truth the trembling earth gave forth its testimony.

The testimony of the earth was no slight force. The strength of the concussion is seen in that *“the rocks were rent.”* This *“rending”* was not a trivial, demonstrating it was no small violence in the earthquake. On the contrary, the *“rocks rent!”* The original word implies that the rocks were not merely cracked, but wrenched asunder into such cracks as to lay open and leave wide open the interior of the rocks that abounded on Golgotha. This trembling of the earth was no trifling magnitude. We read that when the Roman witnesses of the crucifixion saw and felt the earthquake, *“they feared greatly.”*

And, we read that this earthquake was the result of the Savior’s shout of victory. The earthquake took place *“...when He had cried with a loud voice...”* Equal to the dignity and the grandeur of Christ voice was an expressive accompaniment to the death of the One whose power the earthquake witnessed.

How far the earthquake extended, nothing is definitely said. The word *“earth,”* is also translated, *“land,”* and could mean that it was limited to the land of Judea. But, even if it was only that land, it was the immediately in the vicinity of Calvary, ground zero that was subjected to the seat of the disturbing cause. There, beneath the cross, to whose victory it was testifying, the staggering earth would vibrate the most.

We refer to this *“earthquake”* as supernatural and call it miraculous. Why? Well, *a supernatural event is one brought on by the interference of God.* Usually, God works in accordance with His established order of nature for instance God will at times cause it to rain in answer to prayer. We would call that supernatural, but probably not *“miraculous.”* This would be a specific interference of God in such an occurrence, but at the same time, God avails Himself of the forces already at work in nature.

A *“miraculous”* event, however, is one that, while being the result of an interference of God, is yet not brought about by His use of nature’s established order. It is caused solely and immediately by an act of his will -- as when He turned water into wine. The earthquake was not only supernatural, but non-natural as well -- that is miraculous! It was supernatural in that it was the result of an interference of God, and

non-natural, in that it was not the result of any of the natural causes of earthquakes, or any combination of them. God's interference was dependent of His established order, and solely by an act of His will did the earth reel to and fro.

Note the Coincidences of this Earthquake

1. This earthquake coincided with the death of Jesus Christ. It is so spoken of by Matthew, indicating that it would not have taken place except as accompanying Christ's death.
2. This earthquake coincided with the attestations of the miraculous darkness and the miraculous rending of the veil. It was one of a cluster of wonders and is to be considered in the light of the company it kept.
3. This earthquake coincided with the shout of victory from the cross, as its own immediate antecedent. It was not the internal fires of the earth, but a voice on the earth that caused the earth to tremble; the voice of redemption accomplished -- the shout of the laborer going to His rest.
4. This earthquake coincided with the rending of the rocks and the opening of the graves. And strangely, as violent as that was, it disturbed no other thing. The cross was not shaken!

The earthquake did not displace the Savior's cross, though Calvary itself was shaking. It opened graves and yet not all the graves that were there; but only selected graves -- the graves of *saints!*

It was as if the earthquake were a living thing, with divine intelligence discriminating the various dead at Golgotha. It seemed to sense the meaning of the shout of victory, and applied properly its every reeling movement. It seemed to reveal the program that was to follow, and to pre-intimate the Savior's victory for His saints, by His resurrection on the third day. Thus it was a sort of assembly of all the wonders.

As a result of these coincidences, it is plain that the earthquake at Calvary was not such as nature causes. Rather it was nature lifted out of the course of nature; lifted solely and independently by an act of God; and lifted for a special imposed service of Christ on the cross.

One cannot help but wonder and ask, "*What was the earthquake's particular testimony to the death of Jesus Christ?*"

That it had an interesting purpose and function of its own is evident. True, it had a part to perform, in the carrying on of the series of miracles, for instance, it must open the graves. But that could not have been the sole reason for the earthquake, because the victorious shout from the cross that was its cue, and also an essential predecessor of the opening of the graves. If the earthquake had not a witnessing function of its own, its occurrence was an expenditure of miracles, a waste of work, not at all in the manner of God. Matthew's Gospel produces no such impression. On the contrary, the reader is compelled to think of each of the miracles with reference to its own express coincidence with the death of Jesus Christ.

How was it that those who saw and felt the earthquake? Did they lose sight of it in the opening of the graves? No, as a matter of fact, they knew nothing, at the time, of

why the graves were opened. They regarded the violent trembling earth as a proof of Jesus being the true Messiah (Matthew 27:54). To those witnesses the earthquake exerted a *moral* effect of its own. It was a sign in itself.

What, then, was its appropriate testimony?

It was Calvary answering back to Sinai. There had been an earthquake on Sinai; there was now an earthquake on Calvary, and the wrath of Sinai was now hushed in the mercy of Calvary.

On Sinai God instituted the dispensation of the Law. Of course obligation and duty had existed before, but God on Sinai gave His verbal Law in recognition of the responsibility and duty up till now only existing in the nature of things. He did this that He might recall them to His people, and build up a defense of sacredness around them.

The Law as given at Sinai brought out the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Human sin had existed before, but the utterances from Sinai brought it forth into prominence before men. And stripping it of all disguises, made it appear as it really is -- sin exceedingly sinful, corrupt and polluted forever.

Accordingly, with what visible terrors did the Guardian of truth and righteousness, invest Himself when He came down on Sinai! *“There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the Mount, and the voice of the trumpet, exceeding loud; so that all the people in the camp trembled. And Mount Sinai was altogether a smoke, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace”* (Exodus 19:16).

By effecting the sensibilities of men, He would make vivid their understanding; and by terrors of the eye and the ear, project upon man’s thoughts the shadow of those more hideous and repellant terrors of the soul and conscience.

Thus was it indicated that so great a burden is sin, so entirely the object of God’s overwhelming destruction, that it is impossible for man to rid himself of it. He is help[less and ruined. For, *“who can stand before his indignation and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him”* (Nahum 1:6).

It was that men might understand this teaching about sin, that such a terrible scene was enacted. Moreover, those terrors from Mount Sinai were only a rehearsal; they were not the final infliction of punishment, and therefore were meant for the sinner’s instruction, and warning, and for kindling within him a longing to be saved. The terrors of Sinai were a prophecy that the great Guardian of truth and righteousness would Himself interpose to do for us what we are helpless to do for ourselves.

In this sense, Sinai was the harbinger of Calvary. And so, *“when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His son, made of a woman, made unto the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law”* (Galatians 4:4). Christ died for us. He bore for us the overwhelming weight of our sins, and endured those horrors of which the terrors at the giving of the Law were the figure.

Calvary absorbed into itself the fiery Sinai. By that darkness that drunk up the

light of day, and caused men's hearts to fail them for fear, and by the wail of sufferings through the darkened heavens, whose depth of anguish none but God had ever uttered, it became manifest even to the senses of men that this later scene was the more awful and powerful of the two.

But, at length, the darkness passed, and the sufferings were ended. Finished was the work of making it possible for God to be just, and yet the justifier of those who believe on Jesus Christ. The greater terrors of Calvary, in which had been sunk the lesser ones of Sinai, were now themselves lost in the sweet mercies of Calvary. The shout of Calvary's victory was heard instead of the trumpet sound of Sinai's wrath.

Sinai was the prophecy of Calvary; Calvary was the fulfillment of Sinai. Sinai was the sinner's wretchedness and ruin; Calvary, the sinner's recovery and blessedness. Sinai was God's relentless voice of condemnation; Calvary, God's fatherly voice of pardon and peace.

Now, therefore, because the quaking of the earth was made to bear testimony to the teachings of Sinai, so also was it made to manifest an equal reality in the teachings of Calvary. At Sinai the earth shook as if convulsed with pain, so, at Calvary the earth shook as if convulsed with joy. It thus set forth that Calvary's mercy is as powerful as Sinai's vengeance. One earthquake was the answer to the other. And meanwhile, from them both together we are taught to say, "*Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*"

Yet another attestation was given to Christ's death by the earthquake. It was the impression made by the work of redemption upon the physical creation. Jesus Christ uttered His shout at the achievement of His work, and, "*lo, the earth quaked.*" That connection was not for nothing. It was creation's expression of its share in the victory achieved. Why should not the earth have been affected by what Christ accomplished on the Cross? Did not man's sin bring a curse on the earth? Thorns and briars, inclement seasons, man's sweaty toil, the savagery of brute beasts, and all the countless hostilities of nature are the footprints of man's sin. If, then, man's redemption is as real as man's sin, should not the earth feel its effects?

Indeed, it would seem as if both man and earth were almost but one vital organism; the whole science of physical geography being but a systematic expression of the sympathy between the two -- of their action and reaction upon one another. If it is credible that so great a change in man's estate as that of his redemption could be effected, and creation not have a share in it? And if it has a share, should it not give expression to it?

When we remember what the Scripture says of the coming regeneration of the earth -- a physical regeneration that shall be the counterpart -- of the world's *moral* glory under the reign of Christ -- we cannot but see that we have in the earthquake of Calvary not only a pledge, but also a guarantee, of the fulfillment of those prophecies.

We referred to the earthquake as the earth tremulous with joy; and yet it is not a mere rhetorical conceit. There is a substantial foundation for the figure, and it means something. In Romans, Paul speaks of "*the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together unto now,*" (Romans 8:22), and says, "*The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth*

for the manifestation of the sons of God; because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:19). He even attributes to children of God the feeling of “hope.” So, then, we have the authority of Paul for representing the trembling of the earth as a foretaste of its destined millennial blessedness, when “ the trees of the filed shall clap their hands” -- when “the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.”

*“And sunshine, such as earth has never known,
Shall bill these skies with mirth, and smiles and beauty,
Erasing each said wrinkle from their brow,
Which the long curse had deeply graven there.”*

Yes, in an earthquake of joy, creation anticipated its own regeneration; through still, indeed,

*“The whole creation groans,
And waits to hear that voice,
That shall restore her comeliness,
And make her wastes rejoice.
Come, Lord, the sin, the stain,
And make this blighted world of ours
Thine own fair world again.
Come, then, Lord Jesus, come.”*

