

## **On the Cross – Final Three Hours** **Matthew 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37**

“We must keep in mind that what our Lord accomplished on the cross was an eternal transaction that involved Him and the Father. He did not die as a martyr who had failed in a lost cause. Nor was He only an example for people to follow. Isaiah 53 makes it clear that Jesus did not die for His own sins, because He had none; He died for our sins. He made His soul an offering for sin (Isa. 53:4-6; 10-12).” Warren Wiersbe

*Christ spent six hours on the cross, 9 am-3 pm. Over the centuries theologians have divided that time in half; the first and second three hours. We have looked at eight different details within the first three hours on the cross. Now, let us continue our study and see five more details found in the final three hours of Jesus on the cross.*

Except for the supernatural darkness, these details happen within the last few minutes of Jesus’ life and then after His death. No detail is really recorded in the gospels between the beginning of the fourth hour of Jesus on the cross and up to the end of hour six. We can only imagine that as the heavy, unexplainable darkness fell on the land the more causal onlookers left the scene, and even the mockers may have become uneasy and moved on.

### **1. Supernatural Darkness** Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell about the detail of supernatural darkness.

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth (“all the land” Matt. 27:45/” whole land” Mark 15:33) until the ninth hour.” Luke 23:44

This darkness cannot be explained through science. This was no eclipse of the sun. The Passover is scheduled according to the full moon; therefore, an eclipse is not possible. As God had used an unexplainable star to highlight the birth of His Son, it is here that God uses extreme darkness to draw attention to His Son’s death.

**How complete was this darkness?** We cannot know, but all three gospel records make it plain that as far as they could tell, “all” was dark. Early church writings hint that the whole world was dark. Luke 23:45 states plainly, “And the sun was darkened.” In reality, if the sun was darkened, it was dark anywhere it should have been shining! I actually think it’s funny that I read so much debate on how far reaching the darkness might have been, the fact is, turn off a lamp and the room is dark, if God turned off the sun or cloated it, the world would have been dark! It’s that simple!

**How long was this darkness?** Three hours The gospels tell us it was dark from noon until three. As one carefully looks through the accounts, it seems the crowds have thinned out probably due to the eerie darkness. The mocking has quieted down, BUT there is still a group, and they are still reacting and participating in the scene.

**Why darkness?** In Scriptures, darkness is always associated with sin and divine judgement. Isaiah 13:9-11; Joel 2:1-2, 10; Amos 5:20; Matthew 8:12, 22:13; 25:30 Here God displays physical and spiritual darkness together! This darkness was also a fulfillment of prophecy! Amos 8:9; Isaiah 5:30; 50:3

### **2. Jesus Speaks and Dies** The details of Jesus’ last words and death are woven together here from all four gospels. Jesus was **silent** the final three hours while on the cross. Only just moments before his death did he speak these last statements in rapid succession.

“And at (“about” Matt. 27:46) the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? (“Eli, Eli,” Matt. 27:46) which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias (Elijah)." Mark 15:34-35

"And at the ninth hour" – Careful reading of the passages seems to indicate that Jesus died at the ninth hour and it was then the darkness lifted! (Matt. 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46)

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (Aramaic – the tongue of Jesus)/"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" (Hebrew – the language of the Jewish religion)– This statement of Christ is found only in Matthew and Mark. This is the only words of Christ they both record in their crucifixion account. We are now at the **climax** of His sufferings! He is experiencing a double death – both physical (soul from body) and spiritual (soul from God). Here Jesus is quoting the famous Messianic passage Psalm 22:1. God's complete wrath is being **exhausted** on Christ, the Lamb of God!

"which is, being interpreted," – When Mark would give a phrase in the original languages, he would give the interpretation for his Roman readers. (5:41; 15:22)

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" – Jesus calls His Father, "My God". Jesus was experiencing the abandonment and despair that resulted from the outpouring of divine wrath on Him as the sin-bearer. (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13) This is what He was contemplating in the garden of Gethsemane the night before. (Matt. 26:39) The Life Application Bible says, "The physical agony was horrible, but the spiritual alienation from God was the ultimate torture." p. 1696 Because Christ was forsaken, when we accept His payment for our sin, we are never forsaken!

Why could God not look on Christ? Psalm 22: 3 gives us that answer. Because God is holy!

"Behold, he calleth Elias." – "Elias" – Elijah Life Application Bible says this about Matthew 27:47. "The bystanders misinterpreted Jesus' words and thought he was calling for Elijah. Because Elijah ascended into heaven without dying (2 Kings 2:11), they thought he would return again to rescue them from great trouble (Malachi 4:5). At their annual Passover feast, each family set an extra place for Elijah in expectation of his return." p. 1633

This phrase is based off Jesus' cry "Eli, Eli" meaning "My God, my God". There were several theories why the crowd would say this. Some thought perhaps Jesus was not speaking clearly due to his physical weakness and the listeners were confused. But based on Jesus' loud cries later, also, that the crowds did understand other statements this thought is unlikely. That doesn't even fit the character of God, if He had something to communicate, God would make sure it was clear and understandable to the listeners. This word, "Eli" in Hebrew means "My God". If we reconstruct the scene in our minds, we know Religious Leaders were still at the cross seeking to keep the dialog negative toward Jesus. It makes more sense to me that these "some of them" could be Religious Leaders seeking to continue to put doubt concerning Jesus in the minds of those at Calvary. They would not have wanted to admit that Jesus was calling on God. And they continued to use this thought in mockery.

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar (sour wine): ("And straightway one of them ran," Matt. 27:48) and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth." John 19:28-29 "The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to ("take him down." Mark 15:36) save him." Matt. 27:49

“all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled,” – It is said that 28 prophecies were directly fulfilled on the cross. Here John tells us that they were completed.

“I thirst” – This statement of Christ is found only in the book of John. This is the only statement of Jesus that indicates physical suffering, but He was not complaining but stating a fact. When studying all four gospel accounts of the crucifixion it seems that the response of the crowd to this statement is recorded in Matthew and Mark as well as John. The Greek language tells us the vessel of vinegar was the drink of the soldiers NOT the drugged drink given at the time of the crucifixion. It was the sour, cheap wine that the soldiers in mockery had offered to Jesus a few hours before. This drink was offered to Jesus hoisted on a stick, this tells us that Jesus’ body did not hang high above the crowd, and it does not seem that the person that offered the drink to Jesus was a soldier. The sediment surrounding the drink was one of the continued mockery by the bystanders.

This event also is a fulfillment of prophecy. Ps. 69:21 Matthew Henry said that a drop of water would have been better than sip of vinegar. Jesus took this drink to fulfill prophecy.

“let us see whether Elias will come to save him.” – Such mockery! The smaller crowd still hurled insults at Jesus. They refused to see the Lamb of God that was taking away the sins of the world.

**“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.” John 19:30 “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, (“he bowed his head, and” John 19:30) he gave (“yielded” Matt. 27:50) up the ghost.”  
Luke 23:46**

“It is finished:” – With a loud voice of triumph and relief Jesus declared “It is finished”! In the Roman culture this phrase was actually an accounting, business term. This word was written at the bottom of a bill of sale or debt. It means, transaction completely satisfied! It carries with it the idea of fulfilling one’s set out mission or obligation. John had just used that same word in verse 28 when he said, “Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished,” the word “accomplished” means the same. So, when Christ died He gathered to Himself the accumulated debt of the sinful race and offered to God a payment for sin! (Romans 3:23-28)

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:”/“he bowed his head, and he gave (yielded) up the ghost.” – Jesus continues to be in control. In every aspect of His life and death, Jesus was in complete control. He controlled the hour of His arrest, He controlled the trials, He controlled the crucifixion, and now He controls His own death! “yielded” means “handed over” this was a voluntary act of His will in giving Himself. (John 10:17-18; Hebrews 9:14)

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:” – This phrase is taken from Ps. 31:5 and was used as a Jewish child’s bedtime prayer. In the Greek, “commend” means “for safe keeping”. He gave His Father the care of His of soul. (I Peter 2:23)

“he bowed his head, and he gave up the ghost” - Jesus didn’t raise His head in a desperate act to gasp for a breath only to suffocate like crucifixion victims always died; His heart didn’t slowly quit beating; He gave His life away! His death was miraculous, He controlled it all! All four gospels indicate Jesus died by giving up His life, voluntarily. This is hinted to in Luke 9:31. During the transfiguration, Jesus and the prophets were talking about his “decease”. This word means exodus or departure; Jesus left on His own. Let’s look at the eyewitness testimony of the centurion and soldiers who had seen others die while on a cross. Let’s see their reaction to Jesus’ death in Mark 15:39!

“Christ did not die because life slowly ebbed from His veins. His life was not taken from Him. Christ died because by an act of His will He dismissed His soul from His body. Christ was sovereign over His death as He was sovereign over His resurrection.” Pentecost p. 487

### 3. **Supernatural Events at Jesus’ Death** These supernatural events are hard to explain but they seem to be set as continual evidence of Jesus’ Messianic person.

“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom (“in the midst.” Luke 23:45); and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” Matthew 27:51-53

“veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom;” – The tearing of the veil that afternoon in the temple would **not** have gone unnoticed. In fact, we can be safe to say that every single significant Religious Leader heard about it. We can only speculate, but knowing how these men worked, they would have tried very hard to keep this event from being found out by the bulk of the priests, rabbis, and all temple goers. It must have made quite a stir among those men. God was graciously desiring to get their attention!

This was a **miracle** described in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The tearing of the veil was not a freak act of nature, like a strong wind or earthquake, this was the finger of God opening the veil of access to His presence based on the final sacrifice for sin by Christ. This curtain separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. History tells us that the veil in Herod’s Temple was 2 ½ - 4 inches thick, 60 feet long by 30 feet high. The veil was made of 72 squares sewn together. It was extremely heavy and during construction, it took 300 priests to put into place. This veil was more like a fabric wall than a curtain that can blow in a breeze. Nothing could fall on it and cut it.

The veil separated the holy God from sinful mankind. The sudden tearing of the veil was not a coincidence; it happened at the moment of Christ’s death! “It is finished” the price was paid; the transaction was complete. Read carefully Hebrews 9:12, “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” All barriers between God and man were torn down by Christ; He provided the new Way! I Timothy 2:5 explains, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”

In God’s mind, the ceremonial law was done away with; sacrifices and holy days were not needed! They had been a picture of the Messiah and the work He would do for the world. At Jesus’ death, the picture had been completed. I Cor. 5:7 “...For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:”

In reality, the temple with its altar, and washing basins, and the priesthood should have ended **that day**! The temple should have become a place to teach and learn God’s wonderful plan of salvation for mankind. Instead, the use of the Temple would continue as if nothing had happened in the realm of God. It is wonderful to read in the Book of Acts of the apostles and early Christians teaching in the Temple, but in 70 AD, at the destruction of Jerusalem, God will end the sacrificial system when the temple is destroyed!

Take time today to thank God for the privilege of access to Him. Personally communicate to God through prayer and learn of Him through the study of His Words, the Bible. He loves you and seeks to have a relationship with you. The veil of partition is gone!

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness (*confidence*) to enter into the holiest 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 10:19-20”

“the earth did quake” – I set the earth quaking and the rocks renting as two details to consider. The earth can certainly quiver and not do much damage, but this is not what is described in the book of Matthew. Anyone that has experienced an earthquake certainly does not forget it. It is very disturbing to have your solid become wobbly! And God layered these miraculous events one on another. He was graciously desiring to get their attention!

“the rocks rent;” – Here is another miraculous event recorded only by Matthew. Just a few days before at Jesus’ grand entrance into Jerusalem, the Religious Leaders told Jesus to rebuke those that were praising Him. Jesus replied to them that if he quieted the people, the very stones would immediately cry! (Luke 19:39-40) Did you ever think that rocks could praise God? Jesus just said they could! Well, here, at the death of Christ, they broke apart for Him. They broke apart in obedience to God and in so doing showed the awesomeness of their Creator! Now layer that with the unsettling darkness, and an earthquake shaking of the ground. Jesus’ death did not go unnoticed! How God was graciously desiring to get their attention!

“the graves were opened;” – Matthew is the only Gospel writer that gives us this amazing event. Considering the magnitude of this miracle, there sure isn’t much information or detail! This is what we know: Graves were opened; past faithful ones of God which were dead arose and came out of the grave at the resurrection of Jesus; they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people! Wow, now after reading Matthew 27:52, we have more questions than answers! Who are the saints? When had they lived? Did they die again, or go to heaven with Jesus? How did they appear? To whom did they appear? What did they say when they appeared? It is obvious, God was graciously desiring to get man’s attention with this amazing miracle! Remember, we have as much information and detail that God wanted us to have. Pentecost tells us, “Such a miracle of God’s grace would be useful, to show the disciples that the resurrection of Jesus was not an isolated phenomenon, but that he was only the first-fruits of the victory over death.” p. 488 We can be certain, it made a huge impact on those that saw these resurrected saints!

#### 4. Final Witnesses at the Cross

- **Centurion and Soldiers** Taken from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

“Now when the centurion, (“which stood over against him,” Mark 15:39) and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, (“saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost,” Mark 15:39) and those things that were done, they feared greatly, (“he glorified God,” Luke 23:47) saying, Truly this (“man” Mark 15:39) was (“a righteous man” Luke 23:47) the Son of God.” Matthew 27:54

The events they witnessed: Jesus demeanor; His prayer of forgiveness; darkness; earthquake; controlled death

Their reaction: - “feared greatly” – Gk - absolute terror; “glorified God,” – verbalized the work of God – Jesus’ innocence (Gk concentrating on Jesus’ unjust death; Pilate had the same conclusion while trying Jesus) ; His identity as the Son of God!

When weaving the gospel texts together, the witness of the centurion (the man in charge of all the soldiers at Calvary) along with the soldiers is quite amazing! These men were Gentiles who did not know of the God of Israel. Yet **that day** they saw the power of God on display!

Several of the authors I studied were not convinced that this was genuine faith but instead a pagan appreciation of the awesomeness of the circumstances. This thought is based on the use of the phrase “Son of God” **which** was much like Pilate’s reaction, wondering if Jesus was a god-man (John 19:7-8).

This starts to get technical but paired with the centurion's other comments most theologians do feel that at least the centurion did come to faith in Christ! I would like to think that what the centurion said is what he believed, for these statements certainly could have gotten him into trouble with both the Romans and the Jews! I hope all of them left the crucifixion sight confident that Jesus was the righteous Son of God and desired to know more about Him!

- **Golgotha Crowd** These witnesses are only described by Luke.

“And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.” Luke 23:48

We are told this group of people came to the execution sight and saw the “things which were done”. We can feel confident that they saw of the darkness, mocking, Jesus' demeanor, earthquake, and Jesus' controlled death. Some might have been at the cross for the whole six hours but that would not have been necessary to be impressed by Jesus.

Two actions of these people are recorded in this verse. Let's consider them:

“smote their breasts” – this is very Jewish; we find a clue to its meaning in Luke 18:13 where the Religious Leader and publican are praying in the Temple, it tells that the publican “would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” I looked this phrase up in other English versions, here are some of the words used – they felt mournful, repentant, brokenhearted, very sorry, sorrowful, remorseful, cried, very sad, deeply distressed, deep sorrow, overcome with grief, devastated, profound grief Wow, another power witness to the impact of the Calvary scene.

“returned” – These witnesses returned to their homes. The Gk is very strong, it suggests as they returned back to their homes but they **also** returned back to life as normal. This great sorrow and regret in seeing Jesus die, didn't change them! I hope this is not true! I hope they sought out the truth about Jesus and committed themselves to the One who affected them that day at Calvary!

But this happens so often in the heart of man! We are convicted of sin, our need to trust God, yet we return back to our normalcy soon after leaving the place of conviction. James 1:23-24 says, “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”

Oh, may we be ones who will obey the call of God and be faithful doers of His word! Then we will know His greatest blessings! “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” James 1:25

- **Acquaintances and Women** This privileged group of men and women were eyewitnesses to the death of Christ. Some of these women will be used of God at the tomb to witness Jesus' burial and resurrection also!

“And all his acquaintance, and the woman that followed him from Galilee, (“ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children (Gk – literary “sons”) (“Salome;” Mark 15:40).” Matt. 27:55-56 (“and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem” Mark 15:41) stood afar off, beholding these things.” Luke 23:49

Several writers connected this detail with Ps. 38:11, “My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.”

It is apparent these men and women stayed near Calvary to the end. Don't miss the short phrase from Mark 15:41, after Mark gives the names of the three women at the sight, he adds, "and many other women". This indicates that these three women were not the only ones standing "afar off" watching the sight but there were others who loved and served Jesus! Some of these might be alluded to in Luke 8:1-3 as serving during the ministry of Jesus. I love the fact that God recorded their faithfulness in His Word!

"beholding these things." – Gk - has the emotion of not being sure what to think When compared to the dismay and despair of the two men on their way to Emmas, this thought seems correct. (Luke 24:17-21)

## 5. Haste to Remove the Bodies

- **The Problem** - The bodies on Golgotha needed to be removed before Sabbath

"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." John 19:31

We again see the Jewish leadership coming to Pilate with a request concerning Jesus. They are continuing their hypocritical ways by asking Pilate to make sure the bodies are not left on the cross on their special sabbath day yet, it was with their own hands they put Jesus, a just and innocent man on that cross!

Pilate was needed to give these special orders. This was not normal crucifixion procedure. Most crucifixions would last for days, this crucifixion had only lasted 6 hours.

- **The Solution** - Speed up the dying process and break the legs of the condemned

"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 (immediately) came there out blood and water." John 19:32-34

These soldiers were "professional executioners". They knew what "dead" looked like! The fact that blood and water came from Jesus proved **He was dead**. They will later report to Pilate **Jesus was dead**, Mark 15:44-45. God used these men to record to the world that **Jesus had died!**

Why pierce Jesus' side? Some say it was a miracle the soldiers didn't break the legs of Jesus whether **He was dead** or not. But piercing His side seems like a useless act because they knew **Jesus was dead**, yet whatever the reason, it did prove to all that observed that **Jesus was dead**. The settling and separation of blood and body fluids proved it. It also was another fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy!

The piercing was not a poke with the end of a knife but a deep wound. It was a spear driven into His side. Remember what Jesus will say to Thomas after His resurrection, "reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."

- **The Result** - Fulfilment of Scripture

"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." John 19:35-37

John is telling the reader that he was a witness to the fact that Jesus had died and is giving a true witness of the events for the purpose of the readers to understand and believe.

I Cor. 15:3-4 tells us that Jesus died “according to the scriptures”. All throughout the process of His trials and crucifixion, Jesus died “according to the scriptures”, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies.

Ps. 34:20 “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”

Ps. 22:16 “For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.”

Zech. 12:10 “...and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.”

### **Believer’s Application:**

When Jesus called out, “It is finished:”, what was completed? Let’s look a little deeper at this sacred transaction and apply it to our lives.

- 1. Work of Redemption** – The payment of sin for fallen man was complete. (I John 2:2) The suffering and separation from His heavenly Father was over. Jesus can again approach God as His Father! He had obeyed His Father in the work of the redemption of man. (John 4:34; 17:4)
- 2. Old Testament Pictures of Redemption** – Hebrews 9:24-28 Quote - Life Application Bible p. 1851 “Until this time, a complicated system of sacrifices atoned for sins. Sin separates people from God, and only through the sacrifice of an animal, a substitute, could people be forgiven of sin and become clean before God. But people sin continually, so frequent sacrifices were required. Jesus, however, became the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. Jesus came to finish God’s work of salvation, to pay the full penalty for our sins. With his death, the complex sacrificial system ended because Jesus took all sin upon himself. Now we can freely approach God because of what Jesus did for us. Those who believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection can live eternally with God and escape the penalty that comes from sin.”
- 3. Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled** – All the prophecies concerning the Messiah, from His miraculous conception, His virgin birth, earthly ministry, miracles, and message, all the prophecies concerning his sufferings and death was now completed! Christ shouted, “It is finished!”