

INTRODUCTION

It's been my joy to lead hundreds of Holy Land visitors to a cliff outside Jerusalem that looks like the face of a skull. You can see indentions in the rock that look like the eye sockets of a skull. Even after twenty centuries of erosion, the cliff still resembles a skull. And many believe it is the very place where Jesus was crucified. Years ago, the great pastor from Memphis, Dr. R. G. Lee was visiting Jerusalem for the first time and his group entered the grounds of the Garden Tomb where skull hill can be seen. Suddenly, Dr. Lee broke away from his group and ran ahead to the place where you can see face of a skull in the rock face. When the guide and the rest of the group caught up to Dr. Lee, he was on his knees in prayer. The guide said, "Dr. Lee, have you been here before?" Dr. Lee looked up with tears in his eyes and said, "Yes, I was here 2,000 years ago because I was on the heart and in the mind of Jesus when He died for me."

So, even if you've never visited this place outside Jerusalem, I believe Dr. Lee was right. There was a time when you were there. There's a great gospel song recorded by the Gaither's I've chosen as the title of this message. Ronald Michael Payne wrote the words which say: "A look of love was on his face; The thorns upon on his head. The blood was on that scarlet robe; Stained it crimson red. Though his eyes were on the crowd that day, He looked ahead in time. And when he was on the cross, You and I were on his mind."

In Revelation 13:8 the Bible says Jesus is the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. And it says in Ephesians 1:4 that God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world, so I really think Jesus was thinking of me and you when He died that day.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four gospel accounts, but over one quarter of the book is devoted to the last week of the earthly life of Jesus. The crucifixion is the climax of the story.

Mark 15:21-39. "A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

It was the third hour [nine in the morning] when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!' In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

At the sixth hour [noon], darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour [three in the afternoon]. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*"—which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When

some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.' One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down,' he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'"

More books have been written on Jesus Christ than on any other person in the history of mankind. And there are more books written on His death than on any other aspect of His life. There are enemies of our faith who laugh and scoff at the idea that God's Son would end up dying the death of a common criminal. However, it is the cross that makes the story of Jesus so real in world where there is real pain and suffering.

The brilliant New Testament scholar Dr. John Stott wrote this about the cross: "I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. In the real world of pain how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I turn to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged into God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me. He set aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death." (*The Cross of Christ*)

I've preached on the cross many times. And like the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2 NASB). If I knew I had only one message to preach before Jesus returns, it would be on the cross.

But rather than just talking about the actual brutality of the crucifixion itself, I'm going to circle around in several directions and answer the question. "What REALLY happened on the cross?" There are thousands of answers to that question, but let me suggest that four important things happened when Jesus was crucified.

I. WHEN THE SOLDIERS CRUCIFIED JESUS, THEY WERE FULFILLING PROPHECY

To me, the fulfillment of prophecy is one of the strongest arguments for the supernatural nature of the Bible. Let me illustrate Bible prophecy. What if some archeologists were digging in Arizona, and uncovered the writings of a Native American tribe dating all the way back to the 1300s. When they translate the 700-year-old writing, they discover it predicts that in 1953 a boy will be born in Ruston, Louisiana. His father and grandfather would both be named Orlo. He would marry a girl named Cindy and they would have two daughters. And one day this man would be a pastor in Tyler, Texas. Now, there are over seven billion people on this planet, but I'm the only person alive who precisely could fulfill those seven detailed predictions.

There are over 70 Old Testament predictions about the Jewish Messiah, and Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled every single one of them. And there are twenty-five predictions about His suffering and

death. For instance the Bible predicted what the Roman soldiers would be doing. Listen to the prophecy from Psalm 22. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint...a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced by hands and my feet...They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." (Psalm 22:14, 16, 18)

These soldiers weren't reading a copy of the 22nd Psalm saying, "Okay, it says we need to pierce his hands and feet, and then gamble for his clothes." No, they were just doing their job, but they were unwittingly fulfilling scripture.

Jesus died as the Passover Lamb, and the instructions in Exodus made it clear that not a bone of the Passover Lamb was to be broken. Toward sunset, the soldiers took an iron mallet and crushed the kneecaps of the two thieves on either side of Jesus. Since they could no longer push up with their legs to breathe, they would soon die. But the Bible says, "But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water...These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'" (John 19:33-34; 36)

The amazing thing about these Old Testament prophecies is that they were penned two hundred years before the Romans started using crucifixion as a method of execution.

II. WHEN GOD TURNED HIS FACE AWAY, DARKNESS COVERED THE LAND

Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 am. For the first three hours there was a lot of activity. People passed by shouting blasphemies at Him. Jesus made several statements from the cross. He cried, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." He asked John to take care of Mary, His mother. But at noon something amazing happened. I'm sure those who were taunting and jeering grew quiet and started to be afraid. Imagine standing outdoors at noon, and suddenly there is darkness. And the Bible says darkness covered the entire "land." That word "land" is the same word used for "earth." For three hours a supernatural darkness enveloped the land.

This wasn't a dust storm, or a thunderstorm, as Hollywood often portrays. Neither was it a solar eclipse, which only occurs for a few minutes. It was a supernatural darkness. Just as there was a supernatural light in the sky at the birth of Jesus to guide the Magi, there was a supernatural darkness at the death of Jesus.

The same God who spoke, "Let there be light," could have easily thought, "Let there be darkness." And there would be darkness. We don't have to wonder WHY there was darkness. Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, WHY have you forsaken me?" The cry was the reason for the darkness and the darkness was the reason for the cry.

Notice these three scriptures that describe God. 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." Habakkuk 1:13 says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." God spoke through Isaiah and said, "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a

moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the Lord your Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7-8)

From the beginning of the beginning, God the Son and God the Father had been co-equal and co-eternal. But in that moment in time in which the humanity of Jesus took on our sins, God had to look away. When God looks there is light, and when He looks away, the light disappears. When God looked away from His sin-stained son, darkness descended.

Isaac Watts was a prolific hymn writer of the 17th Century. One of his most famous hymns is about the cross. He wrote: "Alas! And did my Savior bleed and did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" (That was taken from the 22nd Psalm where David was convicted of his sinfulness and called himself a worm.) "Well might the sun in darkness hide; And shut his glories in, When Christ, the mighty Maker died, For man the creature's sin."

III. WHEN JESUS DIED, HE TOOK THE PUNISHMENT I DESERVED

When He was on the cross, you and I were on His mind, because He was taking our punishment. We believe in a powerful doctrine called substitutionary atonement. That means Jesus was our substitute. Calvary was on the slope of Mt. Moriah, where centuries before Abraham prepared to kill his only son Isaac. Instead, God provided a ram as a substitute.

I can remember playing basketball in high school. I was usually on the starting five. But sometimes in the game, the coach would tell one of the players on the bench to go into the game and take my place. The sub would run to the scorer's table and say, "Number 22 going into the game." The next time there was a stop in play, the sub would run on the court and point and me and say, "I've got it, you can take a rest." I never liked being taken out the game, so I never liked it when a sub took my place.

But there was a time and place where I was running loose on the court of life, and I was in trouble. I had missed every shot and committed many errors and flagrant fouls. The consequences of my mistakes were horrible. I was going to have to die and experience hell for all eternity. But when I was lost in my trespasses and sins, there was a hero who told the heavenly score keeper, "I'm Jesus. I'm going in to take the place of David Dykes." He pointed at me and said, "I've got this. You can rest on the sidelines." And I am forever grateful that Jesus became my substitute on the cross.

Isaiah predicted the Messiah would take our punishment. He wrote, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

There is a church in Norway where the figure of a lamb can be seen carved high up on the tower of the church. There's a fascinating story behind that carving. When the church was under construction many years ago, workmen were on the scaffolding working on the uncompleted tower. One of the workmen lost his balance and fell screaming toward the pavement many feet below. His fellow workers climbed down expecting to find him dead, but to their amazement and joy, he was alive and walking with only slight injuries. At the moment of his fall, a flock of

sheep was passing through the narrow street underneath the tower. When the workman fell, he landed on top of a lamb. The lamb was crushed to death, but broke the workman's fall and he survived. In memory of his miraculous deliverance, the workman carved a lamb on the tower at the exact height from which he fell.

That's a powerful image, and it applies to us. We are all fallen men and women, and Jesus is the Lamb of God. In His death, He broke our fall and now we can walk away forgiven and whole.

IV. WHEN THE CURTAIN TORE, IT OPENED A NEW WAY TO GOD

About 300 yards from Golgotha stood the Jewish Temple. Inside the temple there were two rooms. The first room, the Most Holy Place, was where a few priests performed daily sacrifices. But the inner room was the Holy of Holies where God's glory dwelt. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter behind this room. Separating these two rooms and effectively separating God's glory from the rest of the world was a thick curtain. It was sixty feet tall and thirty feet wide, woven as thick as a man's hand. At the moment Jesus died, that curtain was ripped in half from top to bottom. The word in the Bible is *schizo*, from which we get our word "scissors." Two groups of strong men pulling on both bottom corners might possibly tear an old curtain from bottom to top. But the fact that it was torn from top to bottom means that only a Hand from above could rip it.

The symbolic meaning of the torn curtain is exciting. That curtain basically separated God from the world, and God's presence could only be accessed through the mediation of the High Priest. But when Jesus died, a new way to God was opened.

The writer of Hebrews makes this clear, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart." (Hebrews 10:19-22)

The torn curtain has three amazing consequences for us:

A. It means no more barriers!

The Jewish Temple was a series of barriers or walls. If you weren't a Jew, you could only go into the court of the Gentiles, if you were a Jewish woman you had to stop before you came to the court of the men. If you weren't a priest, you couldn't enter into the court of the priests. Only a few priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place, which was the room outside the Holy of Holies. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the Jewish High Priest would lift the corner of this massive blue curtain and slip into the holy of holies with fear and trembling. Once inside, he would take the blood of a lamb and sprinkle it on the seat of the Ark of the Covenant. He was there as a representative of the Jewish people to seek forgiveness on their behalf.

But when Jesus died on the cross, this curtain was torn! God was saying, "There will no longer be any barriers between you and Me!" Now, you and I can approach God freely through the blood of Jesus Christ.

B. It means no more sacrifices!

The Jewish priests had slain thousands of bulls and lambs in the Temple area. On this very mountain, a virtual river of blood had flown down the slopes to seek forgiveness of sins. Jesus died as the Lamb of God, and there is no need for any more animal sacrifices. Aren't you glad we didn't have to bring a lamb or a goat to be slain today? The Lamb of God has already made the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

C. No more mediators!

The average Jewish person could never enter the Holy of Holies. They needed a priest to enter in for them. But when the curtain was torn God was telling us we don't need anyone as a mediator between us except for the Lord Jesus Christ. The curtain was torn open so we can approach God on our own. You don't need to confess your sins to anyone except Jesus. He is our high priest, and through Him we have access to the Creator of the Universe. The Bible says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5)

Can you imagine being one of the priests on duty when the curtain ripped apart on its own? When they learned it was exact moment Jesus died, it had to have a huge impact on some of them. Perhaps that's why the Bible says in Acts 6 that a large number of the priests placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

But for others, they considered it an accident. The Temple and the sacrificial system remained for another forty years until the Romans destroyed it. So I imagined some of the priests stitched back up the curtain and went back to their old religion that could never forgive sins.

CONCLUSION

You and I were on His mind the day He died. We were there. The Dutch artist Rembrandt was a deeply committed Christian. He didn't preach the Bible; he painted it. In the main art museum in Munich, Germany you can see one of his masterpieces called The Raising of the Cross. Once again, Rembrandt has painted himself into the scene. He's the man with the beret helping to raise the cross. It was his way of saying he was there at the cross—and so were you. The old song asked the question, "We're you there when they crucified my Lord? Sometimes it causes me to tremble. Tremble. Tremble." Yes, you and I were there. When He was on the cross, you were on His mind.

OUTLINE

I. WHEN THE SOLDIERS CRUCIFIED JESUS, THEY WERE FULFILLING PROPHECY

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint...a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced by hands and my feet...They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."
Psalm 22:14, 16, 18

II. WHEN GOD TURNED HIS FACE AWAY, DARKNESS COVERED THE LAND

"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." *Habakkuk 1:13*

"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the Lord your Redeemer" *Isaiah 54:7-8*

III. WHEN JESUS DIED, HE TOOK THE PUNISHMENT I DESERVED

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." *Isaiah 53:5*

IV. WHEN THE CURTAIN TORE, IT OPENED A NEW WAY TO GOD

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart." *Hebrews 10:19-22*

- A. No more barriers!
- B. No more sacrifices!
- C. No more mediators!

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
