

## INTRODUCTION

It's been a hot, hot summer! Tyler usually averages five days a year where the temperature goes above 100 degrees. This summer we set a new record with 47 consecutive days over 100. How hot is it? Potato farmers are digging their potatoes out of the hot ground and you don't even have to bake them—just add butter and salt and they're ready to eat!

Someone sent me a picture in front of a Texas church with this on the sign: SATAN CALLED. HE WANTS HIS WEATHER BACK. He can have it! I was pumping gas the other day and a guy who obviously didn't know who I was looked across at me and said, "It's hotter than hell today." I smiled and said, "Yeah, it's hot, but my Bible tells me that hell is going to be a lot hotter than this." He didn't reply, just turned his back and kept pumping. He probably thought, "Who is this religious nut?"

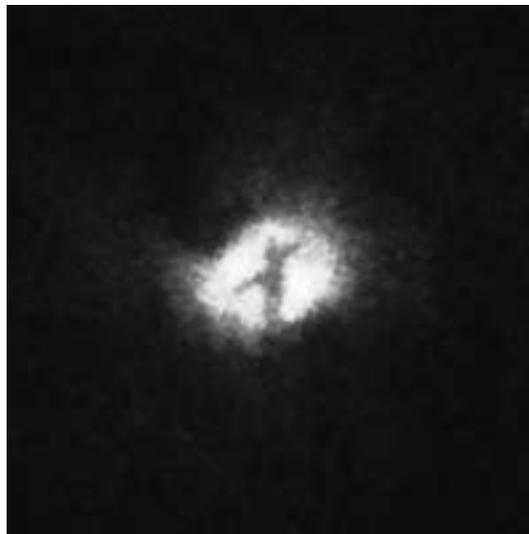
The Bible teaches there are only two eternal destinations for people: Heaven and hell. Today I want to talk about the Miracle of the Cross. If you will claim this miracle as your own, you will never spend a moment in the place called hell, where they're still setting a record for consecutive days over 1000 degrees.

How amazing is it that the cross has become a symbol of hope for millions of people? When Jesus was crucified, the cross was nothing more than an instrument of execution. It was an instrument of horrific pain and suffering. Wearing a cross around your neck would be like wearing a little miniature electric chair, or a hangman's noose. God took the most horrible experience of pain, suffering, and humiliation in history, and He turned it into something good—our redemption. So the cross symbolizes how God can take all the bad things in our lives, and transform them into something good. It stands for God's power to change whatever is tormenting and destroying us into something that is a blessing.

God has placed reminders of the cross throughout His universe. You might have heard Louie Giglio's story of being here in Tyler when a molecular biologist told him about laminin, the basic protein molecule that maintains our metabolism. When Louie went back and Googled it, he was shocked to discover the laminin molecule is shaped like a cross. God placed a microscopic reminder in our body of the power of the cross.

Three weeks from today we are hosting a special 10-year remembrance service for the 9/11 attacks on America. After the World Trade Towers crumbled, workmen immediately begin to remove the rubble looking for survivors. On September 12, one of the workmen looked up in the rubble and saw a huge cross twenty feet tall. This cross became a place of worship and wonder for the crews. It was later moved to a church and it has just been installed in a prominent place outside the new WTC museum as a reminder of how God can bring hope out of suffering.

The Hubble Telescope has been orbiting the earth since 1990 taking pictures into deep space. On June 8, 1992 it took a picture of the center of the M51 Whirlpool Galaxy which is 23 million light years from our galaxy. The picture of the core revealed a massive black hole shaped like a cross. It may look small, but width of the cross is 1,100 light years across. That means if you could travel at 186,234 miles per second, it would take you over a thousand years to get from one side of the cross to the other. Scientists believe the black hole has been there millions of years. It's as if God is saying, "I'm glad you finally got here, because this is what I wanted to show you."



*M51 Whirlpool Galaxy*  
Source: [www.hubblesite.org](http://www.hubblesite.org)

But the cross is so much more than a symbol. It's a miracle. Let's open our Bibles and read about the miracle of the cross.

Matthew 27:27-37, 45-54. "Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

(v. 45) From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'—which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.' Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.' And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who

had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'"

For the past two and a half years we've been walking through the Gospel According to Matthew to isolate every Parables and Miracle of Jesus. The Miracle of the Cross is much too broad a subject to adequately address in one message. It would be like trying to download the entire Library of Congress onto your Nook or Kindle. Thousands of books have been written on the cross.

As we approach the subject of the cross, I feel as if we're like Moses approaching the burning bush. We should take off our shoes because we are approaching Holy Ground. In this message I want to talk about some of the miracles that took place at the cross, and then I want to talk about the main miracle of the cross.

## **I. THE MIRACLES AT THE CROSS**

The day Jesus was crucified was a day of many miracles. Let me mention just four miracles that occurred during the six hours Jesus hung on the cross.

### **A. Scriptures were fulfilled**

Last Easter I spoke on "The Scarlet Thread that Runs Through the Bible." This is the prophetic thread in the Old Testament that predicted the blood atonement of Jesus on the cross. There are dozens of these prophecies, but let's look at just three that were precisely fulfilled at the cross.

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." (Isaiah 50:6) The New Testament verifies that Jesus was brutally flogged by the Roman soldiers. They mocked Him, pulling out His beard and spitting in His face. In every culture, spitting in someone's face is the most contemptible act imaginable. It is actually punishable by law in most states. Can you imagine the Son of God standing there enduring the foul, stinking, spittle of these sadistic soldiers? An old Puritan hymn by Joseph Hart said, "See how patient Jesus stands; Insulted in his lowest case! Sinners have bound the Almighty's hands, And spit in their Creator's Face." ("His Passion" by Joseph Hart) But Jesus wasn't surprised by any of this torture and shame; He knew it was the fulfillment of scripture.

"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, 18) Psalm 22 was written centuries before the cross, but it sounds as if it is written by an eyewitness to the crucifixion. You can see the agony of Jesus, dehydrated and hanging on the cross with His joints extended to their limits. This chapter predicts jagged spikes would pierce the hands and feet of the Messiah. The amazing thing about

this prophecy is it was written hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented. And what are the odds that at his death the soldiers would divide his clothes and cast lots? The soldiers weren't reading Psalms to see that they were supposed to cast lots for his clothing. They were just anxious to get the clothing of the deceased. They were unwittingly fulfilling prophecy.

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'These are the regulations for the Passover [lamb]...Do not break any of the bones.'" (Exodus 12:43, 46) Jesus died as the Passover Lamb and it is amazing none of His bones were broken. Here's the fulfillment of that prophecy in John 19:33-34, 36: "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.'" (A fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10) When a person was crucified, they couldn't breathe normally. Their diaphragm would cramp, so in order to inhale, the person had to push up, placing the painful pressure to their feet. Then to exhale, they had to lower themselves, transferring the pain to the hands. That was the only way they could breathe. So in order to hasten death, the Roman soldiers used an iron mallet to crush the victim's kneecaps. No longer able to push up, they soon suffocated. But when they came to Jesus, He was already dead, so no bones were broken as the scripture predicted.

## **B. Darkness covered the earth**

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. But at noon something amazing happened. Darkness covered the entire "land." That word "land" is the same word used for "earth." For three hours there was a supernatural darkness.

This wasn't a dust storm, or a thunderstorm, or an eclipse. 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.

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.

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. God is holy and He can't even look on sin. The Bible says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." (Habakkuk 1:13) Jesus hung there suspended between heaven and earth—and died alone. He was forsaken by God and deserted by man.

Isaac Watts was the Bill Gaither or the Chris Tomlin of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote more than 750 hymns. One of my favorites is "Alas and Did My Savior Bleed." One verse says, "Well might the sun in darkness hide; And shut its glories in; When Christ the might Maker died; For man, the creature's sin."

### **C. The Temple curtain was torn**

About 300 yards from Golgotha stood the Jewish Temple. Inside the temple there were two rooms. The outer room, the Most Holy Place, was where a few priests performed daily sacrifices. But the inner room was the Holy of Holies, and only one man could enter there once a year—the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. He would take the blood of a sacrificial lamb and enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood on the seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

The Jews believed the Shekinah glory of God dwelt there in the Holy of Holies. 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. The curtain was one solid piece, and the High Priest had to lift a corner of the curtain to enter into the presence of God.

The moment Jesus died, the curtain ripped in two. The word in the text is *schizo*, from which we get our word scissors. We're told the curtain was ripped from TOP to BOTTOM. Two groups of strong men standing at the bottom might possibly rip it from bottom to top, but only a Hand from above could rip it from top to bottom.

The symbolic meaning of this miracle is thrilling. No longer does anyone have to approach God with a sacrificial lamb or have a priest approach God on our behalf. The curtain was torn open so the only mediator we need to approach God is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is both our sacrificial lamb and our High Priest. Because of that Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence."

### **D. An earthquake raised the dead**

In the Old Testament many of the earthquakes reported were symbols of the presence of God. Now, when it says there were some holy people raised from the dead, don't get the idea of the movie "The Night of the Living Dead." These weren't dead men walking; they were probably followers of Jesus, who like Lazarus, had died recently and they were raised to provide additional testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. These people weren't resurrected, they were raised. There's a difference. When someone is resurrected, they are alive, never again to die. That's what happened to Jesus, and will happen to us when He returns. These people, like Lazarus, were temporarily restored to life, but they died again. This miracle was just another "amen" that God gave to what was happening on the cross.

## **II. THE MIRACLE OF THE CROSS**

These are just four of the miracles that took place at the cross, but none of them are the MAIN miracle of the cross. Those miracles could all be seen. They saw the soldiers casting lots. They saw the sky get dark. They saw and heard the curtain ripping. They saw and felt the earthquake. But the major miracle of the cross was taking place invisible to human eyes.

The main miracle of the cross was Jesus took the punishment for sin in my place. He was sinless,

and we are sinners. But He became our substitute. He took the punishment of our sins so we don't have to. He experienced hell in those three hours of darkness so we don't have to experience hell for eternity.

What is hell? Hell is torment, and Jesus experienced all the torment and physical pain before the cross and on the cross. Hell is a place of separation from God. And Jesus experienced that sense of separation from His Father. During his entire ministry, Jesus called God, "Abba, Father." But on the cross when He experienced a sense of alienation He said, "My God, my God WHY have you forsaken me?" The Bible also describes hell as a place of outer darkness; that's why there was darkness for three hours.

Jesus Christ suffered in six hours on the cross what you and I would have to suffer for eternity. How is that? Jesus being infinite suffered in a finite period of time what we, being finite, would have to suffer for infinity.

My friend Adrian Rogers once said, "I believe that the eternities, as well as the sin, of the world were compressed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, in that time. All of the sin of the world was distilled upon Jesus. He didn't just take my sin; He took OUR sin—the sin of the world. All of the adultery; the blaspheming; the rape; the murder; the hatred; the immorality—it was all upon the Lord Jesus. And, it was on Jesus, in a sense, for all eternity. Jesus suffered an eternity of Hell upon that cross."

Paul described the miracle of the cross with these words: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) He didn't just *take* our sin; the innocent Lamb of God *became* sin so you and I can become the righteousness of God.

I've loved asking this question through the years. And some of you have heard it enough that maybe you'll get it right this time. How many of you are going to heaven when you die? Raise your hand. Good. Next question: How many of you are righteous? Well, we've got a problem because you won't make it to heaven unless you are righteous. I didn't ask you if you were self-righteous. When you place your faith in Christ, God no longer sees the filthy rags of your self-righteousness. He views you through the filter of the righteousness of Jesus. So if you are IN CHRIST, you wear the robes of the righteousness of Jesus! That's the miracle of the cross!

Martin Luther once had a friend who couldn't accept the fact that he was forgiven. He kept trying to make atonement for his sins to be righteous. Luther wrote him these words: "Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to sing to Him and say, 'Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness. You took on You what was mine; You set on me what was Yours. You became what you were not that I might become what I was not.'"

The miracle of the cross is that Jesus took my place. He was my substitute. I really believe I'm going to be alive when Jesus returns, so I'm not really thinking about dying. I'm looking for the Uppertaker, not the undertaker. But if I do die, I've already asked Judy Drewery to sing a particular song at my funeral. The song is "I should have been crucified" written by Gordon Jensen. It says, "I was guilty with nothing to say; They were coming to take me away; But then a

voice from heaven was heard that said; Let him go; Take me instead. And I should have been crucified; I should have suffered and died; I should have hung on that cross in disgrace; But Jesus, God's Son, took my place." Now, that's a miracle!

## CONCLUSION

The Roman Centurion on duty was an eyewitness to the death of Jesus and he saw the miracle. Max Lucado has suggested this might have been what went through the Centurion's mind that day: The condemned looked like anything but a king. His face was lumpy and bruised. His back arched slightly and his eyes faced downward. "Some harmless hick," mused the centurion. "What could he have done?"

His eyes were strangely calm as they stared from behind the bloody mask. For just a moment he looked at the centurion—for a second, the Roman looked into the purest eyes he'd ever seen. As he watched the soldier grab the Nazarene and yank him to the ground, something told him this was not going to be a normal day.

As the hours wore on, he didn't know what to do with the Nazarene's silence. He didn't know what to do with his kindness. But most of all, he was perplexed by the darkness. One minute the sun, the next the darkness. One minute the heat, the next a chilly breeze. For a long while the centurion sat on a rock and stared at the three silhouetted figures. Their heads were limp, occasionally rolling from side to side.

Suddenly the center head ceased to bob. It yanked itself erect. Its eyes opened in a flash of white. A roar sliced the silence. "It is finished." It wasn't a yell. It wasn't a scream. It was a roar...a lion's roar. From what world that roar came; the centurion didn't know, but he knew it wasn't this one.

The centurion looked up into the face of this one near death. His head was heavy with pain; he could scarcely move it. But his eyes...they were unquenchable. They were the eyes of God.

He turned and watched as the eyes of Jesus lifted and looked toward home. He listened as the parched lips parted and the swollen tongue spoke for the last time. "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit."

Had the centurion not said it, the rocks would have—as would have the angels, the stars, even the demons. But he did say it. It fell to a nameless foreigner to state what they all knew. "Surely this man was the Son of God." (*The Centurion at the Foot of the Cross* by Max Lucado)

Even a hardened Roman soldier experienced the miracle of the cross. Have you experienced it?

## OUTLINE

### I. THE MIRACLES AT THE CROSS:

- A. Scriptures were fulfilled
- B. Darkness covered the earth
- C. The Temple curtain was torn
- D. An earthquake raised the dead

### II. THE MIRACLE OF THE CROSS

Jesus took the punishment for sin in my place

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." *2 Corinthians 5:21*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes