

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Miracles of Calvary: Creation Responds!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - March 20, 2016

In the great literature of all time, the works of Homer and Geoffrey Chaucer, Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, Jane Austin, Alexander Dumas, HG Wells, Emilie and Charlotte Bronte, Robert Ludlum, Danielle Steele - it is not uncommon for great storytellers to spend a very long time setting the stage by creating a drama with great tension and mystery and suspicion and characters of spectacular evil and fearless goodness. Some psychologists believe that all of life is a study of tension and release. These authors create characters that find themselves in terrible problems or seemingly unresolvable conflict and the way out seems impossible. Then at just the right time, the tension is resolved in a great moment of superior passion and terrible crisis, tremendous risk, sacrificial bravery and breath-taking love resulting in a total surprise. This is the making for the great American novel.

Easter in a way is the climax of a very old every amazing story of just this kind of tension and resolution. It is the story of every human soul and of the God who loves it. It is the story of hopeless love, sinful passions, life and death. Just when there seems to be no way out and all was lost, up steps a hero of unmeasured courage willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday – you can write the great American novel but in a billion lifetimes you couldn't make this stuff like this up.

Let me see if I can summarize the story of the fall and now Palm Sunday and Holy week culminating in Good Friday all in about 7 minutes. I am going to be tempted to talk like those guys who do the legal stuff at the end of radio commercial, but let's just hit the high spots. I hope I don't ruin the book for you!

The Fall, Palm Sunday and Holy Week in only 7 minutes 30 seconds



Garden of Eden - Bassano Jacopo (1570-73)

Once there was a Garden perfect in every way, and God placed humanity in that garden to be in eternal fellowship with Himself. But mankind chose to betray that love listening to the voice of the serpent and choosing instead to be their own gods. Humanity fell and fell hard. Enmity was formed between us as men and women. We lost our innocence and have found ourselves constantly ashamed. Intimacy became almost impossible and we began a cycle of violence on that day upon our fellow citizens of earth that has escalated every day since then. Even the very core of creation fell that day:

Romans 8:22

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

We were lost in this desperate condition of curses and death with no hope of escape wondering how did it all get like this? Then one day there came King riding in



Fra Angelico, c.1450, Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy

Not on a horse fit for war - but humbly, riding on the colt of a donkey. The people gather in thousand cheering, singing for joy. He is worshiped as the last best hope, the promised one who can stop the hurting and save us from the death we deserve. They wave palm branches, a symbol in that culture and time of honor and peace and royalty.

But that King is betrayed by his best friends, he is arrested and mocked and falsely accused and tortured and beaten.



Pieter Lastman - The crucifixion, 1616 - Museum het Rembrandt

He is taken out of town early in the morning on a Friday before anyone of the cheering city can know and he is killed between two criminals. He is guiltless but dies for the guilty. God turns his face away and darkness falls upon the land as his Son becomes sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The place where he was killed still stands today near the garden tomb where he was hastily buried.



It still seems to have the sad and fearful face of a skull found prominently on the road to Damascus leaving Jerusalem where everyone can see his death and wondering how did it all get like this?

Then the King dies shouting "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" and just then something amazing begin to unfold. A dramatic fore-shadowing of the incredible power soon to be unleashed on this dead man some three days later. Creation itself responds. Dead of night darkness gathers at high noon. There is a renting of the temple veil from top to bottom opening up an entrance to the holy of Holies. And then the earth shook and rocks were split and even the dead were raised to life. It the physical manifestation of the cosmic vindication of the murdered Son by his Father in Heaven

The Father's Cosmic Vindication

He was indeed King do the Jews. He said he was the King of Kingdom but of another world. And for this they killed him. But even the Roman Centurion at the cross could see that creation itself was vindicating this man: Watching his death, the forgiveness in his eyes and seeing the world grieve at his death then had to exclaim, "Surely this was the Son of God." Let's turn our attention with the time we have left to the.

Earthquakes, shattered rocks and the opened graves

Let's read of the miracle of Calvary one last time from the Matthew 27 account:

Matthew 27:50-54

⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened.

And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Christ followers from the beginning of the Jesus story have been captured by this account:

“And the earth shook,” that is all flesh trembled, when the new word, the realities of the new covenant, the new song and the new heavenly things came upon them. This is what the prophet wrote concerning this very event; “All [namely the disciples of Christ] who saw these things trembled and everyone was afraid.”

Origen

What are we to take from this quaking and shaking? I think it is God telling us that this event is not over. The death of Christ on the cross looks like the end of a story. A terrible tragedy of literature like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* or *Othello* where no one wins. It seems to end with the exclamation point of finality evidenced by the shaking of the ground and the spitting of the rocks. But it is not the end. Death is not the end. Not now! You see the story’s climax is still 36 hours away. The same rock splitting power will roll away stone from the grave that could not hold him.

Now with the death of Christ, the penalty of sin had been paid, and so also the cause of death was dealt with. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:56, “the sting of death is sin and power of sin is the Law.” By sin death gains power over man. But then Paul added, “but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ by His death paid the penalty of sin, removed its dagger, and satisfied the demands of the law and the holiness of God.

There is more happening here than meets the eye. The darkness and quaking was Calvary answering back to Sinai. When God gave his law there was smoke and darkness and quaking

Exodus 19:16

¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire.

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 Law. On Calvary He satisfied it. The terrors of Sinai were a prophecy that the great Christ would 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 and in doing so he breathed life back into our dry dead bones. The dry bones and the opened crypts remind us of his ongoing work of life.

Dry Bones and Opened Crypts

Do you remember the Old Testament story? Do you think the Jews of the first century would have remembered another time when dead bones were called back to life? I think a story from the prophets would have come right to their mind. Maybe you remember too. Ezekiel has been taken by the lord to a valley and in the valley are thousands of bones, the bones of Israelites lost in war. Israel is defeated and lost but God has a plan. Ezekiel writes:

² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breathe to enter you, and you shall live.

Ezekiel 37:11-14a

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ ¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.

Here is what I believe - there is more than a 6 Calvary miracles. Why they even made a movie about one, called Ben Hur. Ben Hur's mother and sister had been cast into prison and there they caught leprosy. At the end of the movie Christ is crucified and in the darkness and rain of that cleaning death they are healed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aM6lBlaRzEQ>

Do you feel dry? Are you bone weary and is your spirit lonely and broken? There is an earthquake set aside for you. There is a Calvary miracle set aside for you. Does someone you love need a Calvary miracle? God is not done, death is not the end.

Are you in need of a Miracle?

Discussion questions

Re-read the Genesis 3 account of 'the fall.' What are some of your thoughts? Anything jump out at you in this re-reading? Who is at fault here? What actually 'fell'?

As a result of 'the fall' God cursed the ground. What was that about?

How can all the consequences of 'the fall' actually be found in God's grace?

Dave spoke on Sunday of God's vindication of Jesus. Why did he need to be vindicated? Have you ever been falsely accused? Why is that such a devastating thing?

Re-read the accounts of the aftermath of the betrayal in the garden (the trials, tortures and accusations) leading up to His murder. Which of these accounts breaks your heart the most? Which do you think hurt Christ the most?

Dave quoted Romans 8:22 and spoke of the fact of creation itself responding to the death of Christ. What do you make of that?

The life of Christ was full of miracles. It turns out the death of Christ was full of miracles too! What miracle do you need in your life or the lives of those you love? Can you as a small group commit to praying about these things together?