

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

27:45-56

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

In these verses we read the conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's passion. After six hours of agonizing suffering, he became obedient even unto death, and yielded up the ghost. Three points in the narrative demand a special notice: to them let us confine our attention. Let us observe in the first place the remarkable words which Jesus uttered shortly before his death: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom. No doubt they were not wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain: such an explanation is utterly unsatisfactory, and dishonorable to our blessed Saviour. They were meant to express the real pressure on his soul of the enormous burden of a world's sins; they were meant to show how truly and literally he was our substitute—was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God's righteous anger against a world's sin in his own person. At that awful moment the iniquity of us all was laid on him to the uttermost. It pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief (Isaiah 53:10). He bore our sins: he carried our transgressions. Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord's substitution for us when he, the eternal Son of God, could speak of himself as for a time forsaken. Let the expression sink down into our hearts, and not be forgotten. We can have no stronger proof of the sinfulness of sin, or of the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, than his cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is a cry that should stir us up to hate sin, and encourage us to trust in Christ. Let us observe in the second place how much is contained in the words which describe our Lord's end. We are simply told, "he yielded up the ghost." There never was a last breath drawn of such deep import as this. There never was an event on which so much depended. The Roman soldiers, and the gaping crowd around the cross, saw nothing remarkable. They only saw a person dying as others die, with all the usual agony and suffering which attend a crucifixion. But they knew nothing of the eternal interests which were involved in the whole transaction. That death discharged in full the mighty debt which sinners owe to God, and threw open the door of life to every believer; that death satisfied the righteous claims of God's holy law, and enabled God to be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly (Romans 3:26). That death was no mere example of self-sacrifice, but a complete atonement and propitiation for man's sin, affecting the condition and prospects of all mankind. That death solved the hard problem of how God could be perfectly holy, and yet perfectly merciful. It opened to the world a fountain for all sin and uncleanness; it was a complete victory over Satan, and spoiled him openly; it finished the transgressions made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24). It proved the sinfulness of sin, when it needed such a sacrifice to atone for it; it proved the love of God to

sinner, when he sent his own Son to make the atonement. Never, in fact, was there, or could there be again, such a death. No wonder that the earth quaked when Jesus died in our stead on the accursed tree. The solid frame of the world might well tremble and be amazed, when the soul of Christ was made an offering for sin. (i) » ; Isaiah 53:10) Let us observe in the last place what a remarkable miracle occurred at the hour of our Lord's death, in the very midst of the Jewish temple. We are told that "the veil of the temple was rent in twain" ; . The curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, and through which the high priest alone might pass, was suddenly split "from top to bottom." ; Of all the wonderful signs which accompanied our Lord's death, none was more significant than this. There have been a startling event; the earthquake, which rent the rocks, must have been a tremendous shock. But there was a meaning in the sudden rending of the veil from top to bottom which must have pricked the heart of any intelligent Jew. The conscience of Caiaphas, the high priest, must have been hard indeed if the tidings of that rent veil did not fill him with dismay. That rending of the veil proclaimed the termination and passing away of the ceremonial law. It was a sign that the old dispensation of sacrifices and ordinances was no longer needed: its work was done, its occupation was gone from the moment that Christ died. There was no more need of an earthly high priest, a mercy-seat, a sprinkling of blood, an offering of incense and a day of atonement. The true High Priest had at length appeared; the true Lamb of God had been slain; the true mercy-seat was at length revealed. The figures and shadows were no longer wanted. May we all remember this! To set up an altar, a sacrifice and a priesthood now is to light a candle at noon-day. That rending of the veil proclaimed the opening of the way of salvation to all mankind. The way into the presence of God was unknown to the Gentile, and only seen dimly by the Jew, until Christ died; but Christ having now offered up a perfect sacrifice, and obtained eternal redemption, the darkness and mystery were to pass away. All were to be invited now to draw near to God with boldness, and approach him with confidence, by faith in Jesus. A door was thrown open, and a way of life set before the whole world. May we all remember this! From the time that Jesus died, the way of peace was never meant to be shrouded in mystery: there was to be no reserve. The Gospel was the revelation of a mystery which had been hid from ages and generations. To clothe religion now with mystery is to mistake the grand characteristic of Christianity. Let us turn from the story of the crucifixion, every time we read it, with hearts full of praise. Let us praise God for the confidence it gives us as to the ground of our hope of pardon. Our sins may be many and great but the payment made by our great Substitute far outweighs them all. Let us praise God for the view it gives us of the love of our Father in heaven. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" will surely with him give us all things? ; (i) » ; Romans 8:32). Not least, let us praise God for the view it gives us of the sympathy of Jesus with all his believing people. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; he knows what suffering is. He is just the Saviour that an infirm body, with a weak heart, in an evil world, requires.

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