

Seventh Wednesday in Lent, April 1<sup>st</sup>

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Luke 23:46**

Luke 23:44-46

**44** It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, **45** while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. **46** Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

Matthew 27:51-54

**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!"

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The final words of Jesus before He died on the Cross<sup>1</sup> are accompanied by miraculous signs. St. Luke records the darkness and the Temple veil, while St. Matthew (who was in Jerusalem at the time) adds that he recalls an earthquake (amid other phenomena). But if someone did not want to put significance to all these signs and wonders, they could have done so with ease. These are the sorts of things that the nonbelieving jews in Jerusalem would have shrugged off, though they shouldn't have. Sure, it can get dark out in any number of circumstances. Sometimes cloth gets old and rips all on its own. Earthquakes just happen, historians record them all the time. Even when St. Matthew brings up old prophets rising from their graves and speaking to people, it would not be surprising if the skeptics of the day claimed ignorance - "well how do you *know* that was Jeremiah rising from the dead? Crazy people make crazy claims all the time." No one would be convinced unless they were open minded.

Of course, someone would be *gravely* mistaken to ignore all of these things happening at once, but the pharisees and sadducees and almost everyone else were just that – gravely mistaken. They were supposedly experts in the Mosaic Law, but they did not bother to remember what Moses wrote concerning the heavens and the earth:

**25** "When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, and you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, **26** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. **27** And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you."<sup>2</sup>

And:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.<sup>3</sup>

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1 St. John records Him saying "It is finished" before He "gave up His spirit" in John 19:30. He spoke "Father into Your hands I commend my spirit" in the moment He "gave up His spirit."

2 Deuteronomy 4:25-27

3 Deuteronomy 30:19

And:

28 Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears and call heaven and earth to witness against them. 29 For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands.”<sup>4</sup>

What happens during the Crucifixion is no coincidence. Moses called upon the heavens and the earth to witness the Covenant between God and the Israelites. Close to 1,500 years later, having seen rebellion after rebellion from these people, finally both heavens and earth get a front-row seat to the worst betrayal yet. The children of Israel and Judah had slain the prophets, ran after other gods, murdered and oppressed their countrymen, disobeyed every commandment in the Law, and even after the Babylonian Exile they worshiped in a halfhearted way. But now, after God sent His only Son, this same people decide not to listen... but to slay Him.

St. Matthew records that the rocks were split during the earthquake. Consider my friends that when Jesus entered into Jerusalem during the Triumphal Entry, as people were rejoicing and crying out “Hosanna,” the pharisees asked Jesus to silence the crowd: His reply was “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”<sup>5</sup> Not only are the heavens shrouding Jerusalem with contemptuous blackness for the foul deed being carried out; not only is the earth buckling under the weight of Judah's wickedest sin; but even the stones witness and rend themselves as though they are trying to speak. They break open while Judah silently refuses to praise the Messiah being murdered right in front of them.<sup>6</sup>

All of this is to say that the murder of Jesus Christ is the final nail in the coffin of the Old Covenant. Just as Moses broke the tablets of the Law when he saw the ancient Israelites cavorting with the golden calf, the earth breaks and the rocks of Judea split as the Godman dies. The curtain in the Temple is torn asunder, demonstrating that God's special presence departed the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant once stood; from now on out, the *only* way they could ever be deemed acceptable to our Lord again is by repentance and faith in the Christ that they had crucified. They could never hope to trust in a Covenant that had been so utterly broken that the sky itself was closed off.

Yet at the same time, two things can be true. First, it is true that our Lord Jesus died on account of His own kin perpetrating of the worst crime in history; they crucified God, who had taken human form to witness to them.<sup>7</sup> The very One who gave them that Old Covenant that they loved so much, they killed. Yet at the same time it is true that Jesus went to the Cross willingly. Remember my friends, His last words before breathing His last – “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” The ones who had Him killed did not *force* His spirit out of His body. Oh no. Jesus only dies when He says it is time for that death to happen. He could have decided, out of His miraculous power, to stay up there indefinitely. But *He* gives up *His* spirit when *He* decides to permit the wounds to kill Him.

Two things can be true at the same time without contradictions here. The witness of the heavens and the earth and the stones which broke is that the children of Judah broke the Old Covenant finally and irreversibly. Yet at the same time, God was establishing a *New Covenant* based on simple faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, they killed Him; but at the same time He voluntarily submitted to death *in order to save you my friend*.

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4 Deuteronomy 31:28-29

5 Luke 19:40

6 St. Matthew uses the term *Lithos*, which are the larger rocks and cliffs. St. Luke records Christ using the term *Petros* in Lk.19:40, which denotes smaller rocks. Yet the connection between these two events is undeniable, and in our perspective the greater crime and silence denote greater rocks attempting the sound.

7 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

Jesus determined when it was time to let the crucifixion kill Him. And when He had suffered, when the witness was presented, when the final act of sacrifice was to be accomplished, He gave up the ghost and then our sins were forgiven. This is the greater part, the veritable miracle that happened here. What the pharisees intended for evil, God intended for good, taking their wickedness and turning it around on their own heads. Ironically, with the murder of an innocent Man these men who loved the Old Covenant so so much ended up making room for its replacement. Now we are free from the burdens that no man is able to carry, and Christ sealed the deal with “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.