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The Death of Christ – *Luke 23:44-56*

Introduction – While there is more historic evidence of the death, burial, and even the resurrection of Jesus Christ than any other historic act of its day, evidence alone never saved anyone. Only the death of Jesus Christ, and only our identification with the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf, saves men. Luke stated to Theophilus that he had carefully made a record of the things to which men gave witness (Luke 1:1ff) – the death of Christ brought the entire world to its knees in judgment and in salvation, in His wrath and in His mercy, in loss and in life. Why did Jesus have to die? *“Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.”* – 1 Cor 15:36.

Two Signs (vv44-45) – Darkness and the torn veil are first of all signs of judgment upon Jerusalem. At the very height of the time of the sun, darkness is over the land for three hours. Study darkness throughout the scriptures. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5) but the Father had withdrawn Himself from the Son (Mark 15:34). Darkness covered Egypt in the plagues for three days. A darkened sun pointed to the end of a kingdom (Joel 2:10, Amos 8:9, Zeph 1:15). The “garment” of the temple was torn proclaiming judgment and defilement upon this holy place. The destruction of the temple had begun.

Two Signs – United to Jesus in His death, we were once in darkness, but now we are called into His glorious Light (Eph 5:8, 1 Pet 2:9). He is united to us, taking our sin upon Himself so that God would be just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). And the veil, being torn in two, was also a sign that the times of sacrifices for sins had come to an end; a new High Priest had come and mediated for us a place in the true holy place (Heb 8-10, esp 9:11-15).

Two Exclamations (vv46-47) – Psalm 31 was an evening prayer, sung around the time of the evening sacrifice. Jesus cried out with a loud voice, shouted verse 5, and then “breathed His last.” But His cry and His death were not signs of defeat. The song is a song of confidence and victory (Psalm 31:3-8, also vv19-24). As He died, Jesus declared that the Romans didn’t take His life, nor the Jews. His enemies had no control over His life; God determined His life and death. In His death, Christ put death to death (Rom 6:9-10, 1 Cor 15:54-57).

Gentile Declarations – The second exclamation and the first witness recorded by Luke is by a Gentile, a centurion. The Jewish leaders do not respond in praise of Jesus – and so the Gentiles do. The rejection of Jesus by the Jews was God’s plan to bring the gospel to the world (Rom 11:11, 25). His declaration that Jesus is righteous, or innocent, was a declaration that Jesus was a victim, not a villain, and that His death was therefore for someone else. These are prophetic words from a man who represents the New Israel.

Two Groups of Witnesses (vv48-49) – The crowd, having seen the spectacle of the death of Jesus, go home repentant. They are beating their breasts like the tax collector in Jesus’ parable (Luke 18:13). These are the ones who will later be baptized at Pentecost so that many in Israel are saved by the Messiah.

Women who have followed Jesus from Galilee have witnessed His ministry, His prophetic words, and now His death, see with their own eyes what His words had proclaimed – the death of their Lord and Savior. They are witnesses of all that has happened both by and to the Jews and the Gentiles. These women cared for His body, observed where He was buried, and will return to the tomb on the day of His resurrection.

A Secret Disciple (vv50-54) – Joseph was a rich member of the Sanhedrin and a secret follower of Jesus (according to John’s account), “also waiting for the kingdom of God.” In offering this place for Jesus’ burial he fulfills Isaiah 53:9. Even among the Sanhedrin that had put Jesus to death there were followers, even if only in secret. And while that may not be a good role model for us, remember that Joseph comes forward publicly, denouncing the work of the Jews and the Romans, by asking to care for the body of His Savior – this would have been a very dangerous thing to do, which is why the other disciples are nowhere to be found.

Who are we? – On that day, the world was being saved and so we should see ourselves in these characters around the cross.

We are the Women – We bear witness to the real sufferings of death of Jesus, His real burial, and later His real resurrection. We, the church, the bride, follow our second Adam in the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth, the new humanity, those who bear witness of the Light to all the world. We bear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of

Jesus Christ; for if this is not true, we are the most to be pitied.

We are Joseph of Arimathea – Do we struggle at times to stand against the powers that be when openly standing for Jesus Christ places us in danger? And yet God, in His providence, continues to cause His church to join with Him in His humiliation before joining with Him in His exaltation.

We are the Crowd – We are those who have come to see Jesus, and when we see with eyes of faith, we are brought to repentance, humility, and dependence upon Him, amazed at the sheer work of grace before us.

We are the Centurion – We declare the righteousness of another, the lack of our own, and are united with Him in His death so that we might be united with Him in His life as well. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

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