



Three Signs of the Cross – Part 3

Christ's Cross Raises the Dead

Matthew 27:51b-53

David Sunday

April 14, 2017

Behold, our Bridegroom, loving His bride...to death. See Him draped in our ugliness, that we might be adorned in His loveliness. And come, let us adore Him.

Beneath the cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me
And from my stricken heart with tears
Two wonders I confess:
The wonders of redeeming love
And my unworthiness

[From "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" by Elizabeth Clephane]

It is a strange thing to those who know the shame, the indignity and the horror of crucifixion that this day should be called "Good" Friday. Yet Michael Reeves writes, "It is in that very moment when Jesus is made most physically appalling that He becomes most dear to us." He's echoing the Puritan Richard Sibbes, who said, "Christ was never more lovely to His church than when He was most deformed for His church, for in His willingness to die our death and take our sufferings upon Himself, Jesus reveals the utter vigor and ardor of His love."

"The utter vigor and ardor of His love." Friends, I'm here to tell you tonight that the "utter vigor and ardor" of Christ's love for you and me was not misspent. Jesus did not die in vain. Yes, He was crucified in weakness, but as His blood dropped to the ground, it was mighty enough to halt the death-spiral of creation and reverse the self-destructive course of history. Friends, there is "Power, power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb." And that power was so great it couldn't even wait until Easter morning to make its grand debut, for as our Savior took His last breaths on the cross, Matthew tells of something of seismic consequence that shook the very cosmos.

Listen to the amazing signs that accompanied our Savior's death, beginning in the second half of Matthew 27:51:

⁵¹ 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!"

Friend, this happened—not on Easter Sunday morning—but on Good Friday. Notice the three passive verbs: the rocks were split, the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. Clearly, a mighty arm was being wielded here. These rocks didn't split on their own. These tombs weren't opened from within. And the bodies of the saints who were resting in their graves clearly didn't decide on their own initiative to wake up and see what was happening in Jerusalem that day.

No, this was the hand of God. This was the same hand that brought darkness at noonday (Matthew 27:45). This was the same hand that tore the curtain of the temple in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51a). Don't you wonder what Satan was thinking as the earth began to shake? If he was planning some big celebration in hell's convention center, I can imagine him calling off the balloon drop, because it looks like his moment of triumph is already turning against him.

Death is crushed to death by Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus is death's devourer. Death thought it was devouring a Lamb, but the Lamb became a Lion, and death became its victim. And now Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades.

Death's mightiest powers have done their worst
And Jesus has His foes dispersed
Let shouts of praise and joy outburst
Alleluia! Alleluia!

[From "The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done"; author unknown]

That's what is happening in Matthew 27. A victory that is so decisive, we don't even have to wait for Sunday morning for the tombs of the saints to be opened, because a new era has dawned. This present evil age has been invaded by a Deliverer Who has the power to set us free from the bondage of sin and the penalty of death. And creation itself is trembling with the birth pangs of anticipation. On His resurrection morning, Jesus will be joined by these resurrected saints whose tombs were burst open on Good Friday, and with them He will go throughout Jerusalem proclaiming the victory of Christ's cross.

Can you hear them rejoicing? What were their testimonies like? Can you hear them singing, as they proclaimed what Christ accomplished on His cross? Did their songs sound something like this?

Up to the hill of Calvary
My Savior went courageously
And there He bled and died for me
Hallelujah for the cross

And on that day the world was changed
A final, perfect Lamb was slain
Let earth and heaven now proclaim
Hallelujah for the cross

Hallelujah for the war He fought
Love has won, death has lost
Hallelujah for the souls He bought
Hallelujah for the cross

[From "Hallelujah for the Cross" by Newsboys]

Jesus triumphed gloriously on Good Friday. What happened in those graveyards in Jerusalem on Good Friday is a foreshadowing of what's going to happen in the graveyards all around the world. When Jesus returns, every graveyard around the world is going to open up. Listen to how Jesus Himself described this in John 5:25-29:

²⁵ Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

When we see the earth shaking and the rocks splitting, and when we see the tombs opening in Jerusalem at the very moment when Jesus breathes His last breath, it is signifying to us that that hour of judgment is now upon us, that the old age characterized by sin, death and the rule of Satan is dying, and the new creation has dawned. Listen to what God's Word tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:31: *"For the present form of this world is passing away."* God's Word repeats that in 1 John 2:17: *"The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."*

When we say that someone is “passing away,” we mean they don’t have much longer to live. When the Bible says this world is passing away, it means this world system—this time period characterized by sin and death and hell—it’s on its last breaths. Jesus has triumphed and He has introduced a new creation. He has brought the dawning of a new age—a new creation that will last forever.

Do you know what that means, friends? If we’re in Christ, it means our lives are no longer controlled by the cares and concerns of this old age. “What shall I eat? What shall I drink? What shall I put on?” (Matthew 6:25-34). Wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:4-8), elections, the rise and fall of political leaders, life insurance and real estate and money and power and status and success. Oh, I know you can’t live your life in this world without thinking about those things. We can’t ignore them. But if we are in Christ, we are a new creation; the old has gone; all things have become new (1 Corinthians 15:17). We are not defined or controlled by the passing realities of this old world any more, because we know this old world is passing away and we belong to the King Who has triumphed and Who has brought in a new creation.

In fact, Paul tells us in Galatians 6:14 that we have died to being controlled by this old world: *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* The world and its system—it’s been killed. It’s been crucified to me. My love for the value system of this world died when Jesus died. I died to having this world control me. I belong to the King Who has triumphed. I belong to the King Who has made all things new. I belong to the King of the new creation, and my life is now ruled and guided and directed by His sovereign Word and by the glories and the values of His Kingdom. That’s what the Bible is telling us.

Just as those saints were raised from their graves through the power of Christ’s death on the cross, we who trust in Jesus will be raised from our graves. The Bible says, spiritually speaking, we already have been raised with Christ and we are seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6-10). This new identity and this new realm in which we live now controls our values and shapes the way we think about life in the world today. Paul says to us in Colossians 3:1-5 (NIV):

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The cross powerfully reorients our lives today so that we’re now living in the light of the future hope of the glory that will be ours. We’re not living in the gloomy shadows of our present

circumstances. We're not living under the control of this world's system any longer. The new era has dawned, the new creation has come, and that's what controls our thinking as believers.

This was driven home to me by a chapter I read in a book on the cross by Fleming Rutledge. She asks this question: "How do you usually think about your life? Usually you think from the past through to the present, and then to the future."

So here's how it goes with me. I was born on August 26, 1970, to Gene and Pat Sunday in Kenosha, Wisconsin. I grew up there, having attended Southport Elementary School, Lincoln Junior High and Tremper High School. I went to college and then married Kate. We had three children and started to grow as a family. I became a pastor. Now I'm getting a little bit older and one day I'll get even older. And some day this body is going to start shutting down. Then eventually I'm going to die. That's my story from the past to the present to the future.

What you do today is influenced by what you've done in the past. What you do today will have an effect on what you do tomorrow. But in this book, Rutledge suggests, "What if that perspective was changed? Suppose instead of looking at the future by way of the past and the present, we began to judge and evaluate the past and the present by the future—by what God will do in the future?"

What if you, Christian—who trusts in what Jesus has done for you on the cross—orient your life, not around what you have been in the past, or what you are struggling with in the present, but instead you orient your life by God's grace in the future? What if—instead of spending your days worried about your finances, fearing failure, nursing disappointments, feeling undervalued, harboring jealousy and resentment, lamenting all the things that cannot be changed, fearing growing older and losing your physical powers and watching your life slip away—what if, instead of focusing on all these signs of this old age that is "passing away along with its desires (1 John 2:17)," you focused on the future?

There's a day that's drawing near
When this darkness breaks to light
And the shadows disappear
And my faith shall be my eyes

Jesus has overcome
And the grave is overwhelmed
The victory is won
He is risen from the dead

[From "I Will Rise" by Chris Tomlin]

Friends, that was true on the day Jesus died. Resurrection Sunday is sure to happen, because of the power of the cross of Jesus. The victory was won. He is the Victor. We see that in the power of His cross to raise the dead of righteous saints in Jerusalem, just as He will raise all those who die in Christ to everlasting glory and everlasting pleasures at His right hand (Psalm 16:11).

That's why we call this Good Friday. It's Good Friday because the cross is the victory of Jesus. It's Good Friday because the cross of Jesus raised the dead and gives us new life. It's Good Friday because for those who repent and believe in Him, His death means the grave will have no power over us either. This is our future. The glorious resurrection is our future. The new creation is our future. May it shape the way we live today in the present. May it radically orient our lives in a whole new direction by Kingdom values—for the King has won the victory. He has triumphed gloriously.

Because of that...

And I will rise when He calls my name
No more sorrow, no more pain
I will rise on eagles' wings
Before my God fall on my knees
And rise
I will rise...

And I hear the voice of many angels sing,
"Worthy is the Lamb"
And I hear the cry of every longing heart,
"Worthy is the Lamb"

[From "I Will Rise" by Chris Tomlin]

Worthy is the Lamb, for He was slain, and in His death He has won the victory. Praise the Lord. Let's worship Him for the power of His cross.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net