

Good Friday

Billy Graham gave a TED talk in 1998 called "On Technology and Faith". This talk was given during a summit on the future of technology in which he was asked to bring some religious insight. In turn, he asked the technology leaders and experts there to consider using their knowledge, resources and expertise to help solve 3 of the world's greatest problems: the problem of Evil, the problem of Suffering, and the problem of Death. After taking some time to examine the scope of these 3 fundamental problems, he concluded that no amount of technology could solve them. But there is a solution, as he then noted. The Creator and Designer of this world has already provided the solution, the Person of Jesus Christ. In fact, the solution was present before the problems arose. In John chapter 1 we read that Jesus was with God in the beginning. The truth is that Jesus had to suffer for the sins of us all and give His life on the cross so that we could be reconciled to the Father. This is what we are talking about tonight and to begin, let's turn to Luke chapter 23 starting in verse 44-49.

Luke 23:44-49 ESV

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour,^[a] and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,^[b] 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. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

Listening to the account of our Lord's last breath is sobering. He took our punishment and the afflictions of us all were upon Him.

Why can we call what happened on this night, almost 2000 years ago, good?

Well, we know that Sunday is coming and that the stone was rolled away. The empty tomb declares Jesus' victory over death, and He is the first fruits of all who will rise again. Amen!

But before we celebrate His resurrection, let's take the time to remember what He accomplished on the cross.

To get a better picture of these precious moments, let's read the other gospel accounts, next is Matthew chapter 27 starting in verse 50-54.

Matthew 27: 50-54 ESV

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^[i] of God!"

Here we witness some other events that occurred on that day. Let's finish with Mark chapter 15 starting in verse 37-39.

Mark 15:37-39 ESV

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he^[b] breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son^[i] of God!"

Some of the significant events that occurred in these 3 accounts were the curtain of the temple being torn in 2, the sun failing from noon until 3 in the afternoon, an earthquake, some of the dead had rose from the grave, and the centurion after noticing how these things were connected to the way Jesus breathed His last, recognized that He was the Son of God. We do not have the time to consider all these events and their significance, but I do want to consider one in detail- the tearing of the curtain.

This has taken on a deeper meaning for me this year and I want to share what the Holy Spirit has revealed to me.

This event was included in all 3 of the gospel accounts that we read and therefore must have significance. I am sure that its significance is beyond what we can fully understand. However, we will endeavor to examine the use and purpose of the curtain or Veil from scripture and gain some insight into why it was recorded in these passages.

To do this we will have to pull from both the Old and New Testament scripture. Let's start with a passage that will help us open some of the hidden meaning, Hebrews chapter 10 verses 19-22.

Hebrews 10: 19-22 ESV

Therefore, brothers,^[c] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Wow, the depth of this passage is incredible.

The author of Hebrews, guided by the Holy Spirit, has really helped us here. As we focus on the tearing of the curtain, we read that the curtain is actually Jesus' body or flesh. That is Amazing! We also see that a new and living way has been opened through the curtain and we have a great high priest which, in all, allows us to draw near to God. Very amazing indeed!

As I have studied for this message, 3 fundamental issues, like the 3 that Billy Graham mentioned, have stood out me as pertinent to our understanding. These issues are Sin, Sacrifice, and Separation.

In order to better grasp what this verse is saying and gain insight into the tearing of the curtain, we will need to examine scripture in light of these 3 issues.

If you all are ready, let's go back to Genesis 3 starting in verse 6.

Genesis 3:6-7 ESV

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,^[b] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Well, there is Sin- as soon as their eyes were opened from sin, they realized that they were missing something, clothes. On to verse 20

Genesis 3:20-21 ESV

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.^[g]²¹ And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

There is Sacrifice- an animal had to be killed and sacrificed by God to make those garments of skin. God clothed them. On to verse 22.

Genesis 3:22-24 ESV

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" ²³ therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

And there is Separation- Man was sent out from the garden. Pastor Colin pointed out to me that the Hebrew word used for sent in verse 23 is the same Greek word used in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he sent His one and only Son that who ever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

In 1 Corinthians 15:22 Paul states that "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

The effects of sin are real, something had to be sacrificed because of it, and it also resulted in separation from God. God is Holy and is completely separate from sin.

So, there was both physical death, as Adam and Eve's days became numbered, and spiritual death, as they were separated from God. All their descendants are likewise born spiritually dead- that means you and I- were born separated from God.

But God, who is great and mighty, had the solution before there was ever a problem. The gospel of John opens like this: Verse 1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

Alright, so what does this have to do with the curtain tearing. Let's go to Exodus chapter 26 where we read about the construction blueprints for the tabernacle given by God to Moses. Starting in verse 31

Exodus 26: 31-33 ESV

And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.³² And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver.³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.

Here we get a description about the design of the curtain or veil. The fabric that was used for its construction was elegant and it was the work of a master craftsman. The colors used in making the curtain represent God's creation and the firmament between God and man, and the cherubim represent the place of God's residence amongst man. The curtain was beautiful in design and construction, just as God had designed the universe and everything in it beautiful from creation.

The curtain also served the purpose of separating the holy place from the Most Holy place, where the Ark of the Covenant was set. The Lord God dwelt in the Most Holy place of the tabernacle and this required that a curtain be placed at its entrance so that no one could see in. We see that the curtain separates God from man and is necessary because of the sinful state of man.

We read more about the role of the curtain in Leviticus 4 where the Lord gave Moses instructions on what to do if anyone sinned unintentionally.

Leviticus 4: 5-6 ESV

And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting,⁶ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the Lord in front of the veil of the sanctuary.

Here we are again with sin and sacrifice. Sin requires a sacrifice. But here we read that the sacrifice is made by a priest. We didn't read anything about a priest in Genesis though. I'll let you all ponder that.

The blood from the sacrifice was sprinkled before the Lord in front of the curtain. Surely some of the blood splatter would have stained the curtain.

This is the image that the Lord used to provoke me to write this message. The curtain, a beautifully crafted work of art, that represented all that the Lord had made, that was used to separate God from man, was stained by the blood of the sacrifice.

Do you all see it?

Close your eyes and picture the curtain. This masterfully woven tapestry approximately 30ft wide X 30ft high made from purple, blue, and scarlet thread depicting God's creation- stained by blood.

Do you see the sin that stained God's creation? Pause- you can open your eyes now.

We may think in our modern context that blood is dirty, but the blood sprinkled by the priest was actually used to cleanse Israel from their sin. We read more about this in Leviticus 16 where the Lord gave Moses instructions about the Day of Atonement. This is the one day out of the year that Aaron, the high priest, was permitted enter through the curtain. Starting in verse 15 we read that

Leviticus 16: 15-16 ESV

“Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

Only the high priest is allowed to enter through the curtain to make atonement for the sins of Israel by presenting the blood of the sin offering. The curtain separated that which is clean from that which is unclean.

Everyone, at this point, should begin to see the relationship between sin, sacrifice, and separation and how the curtain is involved in it.

Let's take a minute and look at the role of the priest. The priest made the sacrifice, took the blood into the Most Holy Place and made atonement for the sins of Israel. I read in a commentary that the changing of the covenantal relationship with God required a changing of the priestly line. This happened when Moses was given the ten commandments. The Lord established a relationship with Israel by making a dwelling place among them in the tabernacle. Aaron and his descendants, the Levites, were established by the Lord as the priestly line.

This brings us back to Hebrews. Let's read in Chapter 6

Hebrews 6: 19-20 ESV

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus has become a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, of the tribe of Judah, on our behalf. This is some deep stuff here and I don't have time to unpack it fully. But if the high priestly line has changed, then the covenantal relationship with God has changed as well.

We read that the priest was the one to make the sacrifice, take the blood, and enter through the curtain that separates us from God and to make atonement for the sins of His people.

How does this apply to Jesus?

Let's read further in Hebrews chapter 9 starting in verse 11.

Hebrews 9: 11-15 ESV

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,^[a] then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify^[b] for the purification of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our^[a] conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.^[b]

As we read at the beginning of our time together, in the 3 gospel accounts, when Jesus breathed His last the physical curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. This means that God is no longer hidden away in a Jewish temple. He is available to all who would believe in Him, regardless of race, gender, social status, ethnicity, physical impairment...

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus offered Himself in our place as the perfect sacrifice, the unblemished lamb, and He entered once for all into the Most Holy Place as the High Priest, atoned for the sins of everyone, and mediated a new covenant.

In this new covenant, where is the curtain that separates man from God?

The apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, starting in verse 3.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ESV

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants ^[c]for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is veiled to those who are perishing because of unbelief. They are blinded by Satan, who keeps them from seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

In this new covenant, there is only one way to the Father, who resides in the Most Holy Place, and that is through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said of Himself, in John 14, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus' body or flesh has become the curtain. To go through the curtain to the Father is to believe in Jesus Christ and what He did on the Cross.

A couple weeks ago Rob told us that, being fully God and fully man, Jesus' deity, that is His omniscience, His omnipotence, and so on was veiled by His body. God took on flesh and walked among us.

With all this in mind, let's read Hebrews 10 again.

Hebrews 10: 19-22 ESV

Therefore, brothers,^[c] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Do you have confidence this evening to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus?

The new and living way is opened for you through His flesh.

You have Jesus as your Great High Priest.

So, draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

I want you to know that Jesus gave His life for you, as He breathed His last breath on the cross.

Just as the curtain of the temple was sprinkled by the blood of the sacrifice to cleanse the sins of the Israelites, our hearts have been sprinkled clean by the blood that stained the old rugged cross.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our bodies have been washed.

At the beginning of our time together I asked you to take a moment to remember, and we'll end with this.

How do remember what Jesus has accomplished for you on the Cross?

God's love is deep and wide, but the only way to the Father is through His Son.

Those who trust in Jesus as Savior are also united through Him as God's children. Be Blessed, Sunday is coming!