

“The Victorious Death”—Luke 23:44-49

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Victorious Death”, is Luke 23:44-49 → *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 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. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all His acquaintances and the women who had followed Him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

The celebration in the wake of a victory can be an amazing sight to behold. Maybe you’ve seen a sports field overrun with fans cheering and yelling because their team won some championship such as the Super

Bowl or the World Series, Stanley Cup and so forth. But it doesn't stop there. They share it with as many people as possible, maybe even continuing the celebration back home with parades and parties with the desire for all the world to know they are number one.

Victory is not what you may think of when viewing the scene of Jesus' death on the cross. It seems to fit more with Easter, the celebration of His resurrection from the dead. Yet, the very strange affects recorded in John's Gospel which Jesus' death had upon those present, along with other strange occurrences, reveals much more than defeat. Our text refers to the crucifixion as a *spectacle*, unfortunately implying what was taking place for many of those present was mere entertainment. Oh the depth of sinfulness which desires to see others suffer in gruesome agony to death . . . and enjoy the sight. Lord, have mercy.

The *spectacle* was even accompanied by "special effects." Since *darkness covered the whole land* at the strange time of noon until 3 pm *while the sun's light failed*, you'd think that people would have wondered what was going on, even those not present at the foot of the cross. When *the curtain of the temple* which separated God's holiness from the priests was miraculously *torn in two from top to bottom*, Matthew tells us that *the earth also shook, and the rocks were split* (cf. Matthew 27:51). Since all this followed their "entertainment" of mocking Jesus while He was hanging on that cross, would these cataclysmic events have brought

them to their knees wondering what was going on?

The people who confessed faith in Yahweh may have immediately wondered what He was doing in their lives in the midst of such an experience. Was it the end of the world? Was God angry with them and bringing His judgment upon their sin? Even the Romans with their paganism could have possibly wondered if their gods were angry with them for some reason. People do the same today whenever they experience strange and adverse situations in their lives. Many times their thoughts will immediately gravitate to God or some higher power, wondering if He's messing with their lives for some reason. The real question is: Would they have associated these events **with their treatment of Jesus and their lack of faith in Him as their Savior?**

Together with these strange occurrences, the words of Jesus before taking *His last* breath are recorded in verse 46 of our text: *Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!* The time of physical death had come when *the spirit returns to God Who gave it* and the body *returns to the earth* from which it was created (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7; Genesis 2:7). Apparently Jesus didn't pull through for them like they demanded and save Himself. He died. It's all over. They can go home now. However, we don't find them returning home rejoicing and proclaiming, "We're number one!"

But wait! Apparently the Holy Spirit must have produced something more than the agony of defeat in it all. Verse 48 of our text says that *all*

*the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, **when they saw what had taken place**, returned home **beating their breasts**.* The practice of beating upon one's chest was usually done as a sign of mourning in the midst of repentance. Jesus once spoke about a man who stood in worship, refusing to *even lift up his eyes to heaven*. Instead, he *beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (cf. Luke 18:13) Did the Holy Spirit convict these people of their sin in it all so that they might have *returned home beating their breasts* in repentance?

Then verse 47 of our text tells us that *when the centurion saw what had taken place, **he praised God**, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"* The centurion was the Roman soldier responsible to make sure the crucifixion was carried out properly. He was a pagan who believed the Roman false gods. Matthew's account says *when the centurion **and those who were with him**, keeping watch over Jesus* (i.e. his fellow soldiers), *saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"* (cf. Matthew 27:54) Instead of being the time of defeat, Jesus' death actually was the victorious death.

It was victorious because Jesus had fulfilled all that was necessary for you to receive the benefits of the devil's power over your life being crushed once and for all (cf. Genesis 3:15; Colossians 2:13-15). It was victorious because Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice which God's

justice demands for your sin. Thus, through faith in Him as your Savior, you can come into the presence of God forgiven and righteous in His sight. His death on the cross open up your way to God as your **loving** Father. Thus, the symbolism of *the curtain of the temple which was torn in two*, thus opening the way into the Holy of holies.

It was victorious in that it accomplished what Jesus said would happen in John 12:31-32 → *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world (i.e. the devil) be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.* That afternoon Jesus drew many people to faith in Him. One of the thieves next to him defended Him and asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. Jesus' promise to him? *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.* (cf. Luke 23:39-43) He drew the centurion to praise God and, along with his fellow soldiers, confess Jesus as the Son of God. Our text gives us the impression as well that He drew these "spectators" to see their sins in it all and *returned home beating their breasts*, possibly in repentance.

Notice what verse 49 of our text says about those who did follow Jesus and probably believed in Him: *And all His acquaintances and the women who had followed Him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things. These things* included His death **and** the affect it had on all these people. Did they see defeat or victory?

What do you see as you view the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Does it show you your sins, the ways in which you are not living in accord with God's written Word which Jesus obeyed perfectly and fulfilled **for you**? Does looking upon this cross make you feel guilty in the midst of those sins? Then repent of your sins and trust in Jesus' carrying your sins on the cross so you don't have to walk away beating your chest in despair rather than in faith. View it as the victorious death based upon 1 Peter 3:18 → *Christ . . . suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.* Jesus takes the spectator and turns him into the victor who can praise God saying, *Thanks be to God, Who gives me the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:57).
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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