

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Miracles of Calvary – The Curtain of the Temple Tears from Top to Bottom**  
**Pastor Scott Parr – March 13, 2016**

1. We are looking at six miracles of Calvary. Jesus was executed on a cross on a hill called Calvary. As he was dying on the cross, the land went dark in the middle of the day – and Dave talked last week about that miracle. Now, we read in Matthew 27:50-51: <sup>50</sup> *And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.* <sup>51</sup> *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*
2. I get to share with you about one simple little line in the Bible. “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” I have had so much fun studying this this week because this one little line unlocks a treasury of wonderful truth from the Bible. Almost the entire message of the Bible is summarized in this line. How? We’re going to look at...what is this curtain and the temple all about, why is it a big deal that it’s torn open, and most importantly, WHAT does it MEAN? What does the curtain of the temple have to do with Jesus dying? Buckle up – let’s find out.
  - a. The opening word “Behold” is a big deal – God is up to something! This is indeed something miraculous. “Behold” is only used by Matthew before God does something big, like angels appearing or God’s voice breaking through. You wouldn’t hear “Behold, Peter decided to add cheese to his sandwich.”
3. The Curtain of the Temple - The temple layout – Holy of Holies, etc.
  - a. **Video showing the Temple and curtain:**  
**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shwUfS4\\_VpM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shwUfS4_VpM)**
  - b. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. <sup>3</sup> Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, <sup>4</sup> which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant... (Hebrews 9:2-4)
  - c. This was done by God, not us. A miracle. A miracle of Grace, but also a miracle of the tearing of the curtain (strong). This curtain, according to Jewish rabbis in that day, was 60 feet tall by 30 feet wide and 3 or 4 inches thick. It was said that it took 300 people to move it. It was said that two horses, pulling in opposite directions, could not rip it. Clearly this was a miracle – no accident, no human could have done this, and nobody would have dared try.
4. The Power of SYMBOLS... think about how one little symbol reminds you of a wealth of knowledge you have about that subject:
  - a. Nike, for example
  - b. White House. Is this more than just a place where a person lives? It’s a symbol of power, of the president, of the government, of America. Is that the only place you can interact with the president? No, but it’s an important place of official business with the president. But the president’s influence is all over – in writing, in other people, on TV, word of mouth, in institutions, etc.
5. I’m not trying to make too many comparisons between the White House and Temple, but there are some helpful resemblances.
6. Temple – did God live in the temple? Was God living 24/7 behind the curtain of the Holy of Holies, like “What’s going on out there? ...” Of course not. And even though it was called the house of God, the ancient Hebrews knew that it in no way limited God to that place. 1 Kings 8:27 – “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!”

7. But the Temple was a sacred space, a space that was set apart for worship of God, to give offerings to God, and to do official business with God. And it was a SYMBOL that reminded the Israelites of God's presence and so many other things.
8. One of the biggest symbolic statements the temple makes is this: God is HOLY. That means God is so much higher than us, so unique, so powerful, so loving, so pure, that God deserves our utmost respect, care, honor, obedience, and worship.
9. God calls his people to be holy (we have this problem that we think we really know how to do life – like when my 4 year old argues with me that he knows everything...(Dad! I don't have to go to the bathroom today! I can wait until next week! Really! I know!).
  - a. Just like I really do know what's best for my kid and I'm trying to teach him the right way and I really want him to listen to my instruction. So also God really knows the right way for us to live and really wants us to revere him and his instruction!
10. The Old Covenant was before Christ. Before Christ, what was the Holy God's plan for offering mercy and staying in relationship with his sinful people?
11. Old Covenant, pictured in our Old Testament/the Hebrew scriptures: I will be your God, you be my people, through you I'll bless the whole earth. I'm holy, so here's how we're going to get along: you follow my laws, don't worship other gods, and be holy.
  - a. What is holiness: Be holy; don't sin.
  - b. When you do sin, offer blood sacrifices to atone, to make up for it.
  - c. Why blood sacrifices? Because life is in the blood, and you're giving your animal's life in place of your own life (Leviticus 17:11). Imagine you have 100 goats...you can eat one every now and then, you can milk them, you can get wool, etc. When you had to give a sheep's life, it was a huge reminder that sin is a big deal to God, and what a huge gift it is that God is giving you life and not requiring you to give your own life. **But it would be giving up something really precious to you too – worth a lot. And when you see that blood, you say "that should be my blood". That life should be my life. But God has allowed that the animal's life would be given in my place.** And there were lots of offerings and sacrifices, but the biggie for sin was the Day of Atonement, (Yom Kippur) when an offering was made for the sins of the people. Once a year the one High Priest would go into the holy of holies in the temple and make an offering for his own sins and the sins of all the people.
12. Hebrews 10:1-4 Explains how the Old Covenant was meant to teach us something: *The Law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup> But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. <sup>4</sup> It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*
13. So it's not that God was like "shoot! That didn't work!" God had a plan for a better covenant, but that Old Covenant served a very important purpose – it made a powerful symbolic point that Sin is dead serious to our Holy God. What if the Son of God had died right after Adam and Eve first sinned? Would we ever understand how holy God is? Would we understand how serious sin is to God? Would we comprehend what a great sacrifice that Christ made?
14. Torn Top To Bottom –
  - a) Show the rest of the video, which connects the tearing of the curtain to the crucifixion of Christ – access to God was made available to everyone through Christ.
  - b) What is God saying to us in this symbol of ripping the curtain open? You are all invited to come directly to me. You all are invited to come directly to me.
  - c) **How? Jesus Christ became both the high Priest AND the offering Sacrifice.** Hebrews 9 <sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, <sup>[e]</sup> then

through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

15. Also read Hebrew 10:5-20: <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,

but a body have you prepared for me;

<sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

<sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'

<sup>8</sup> When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

<sup>11</sup> And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

<sup>15</sup> And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

<sup>16</sup> "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

<sup>17</sup> then he adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

<sup>18</sup> Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The Full Assurance of Faith

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

16. When Jesus shed his blood on the cross (which we remember with communion), we think - **that should be my blood. That life should be my life. But Jesus Christ has offered himself in my place.**

17. And so where is the Temple now? Jesus Christ is the temple – it's through him that we worship God. And when we believe in Jesus, we receive his holy Spirit in us – and our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit.

Summary In Symbols:

The point I'm trying to make about symbols: God uses symbols powerfully to teach us things.

The symbol of the temple shows that God wishes to dwell among us, and that it's good to have holy places set aside for God in our lives. The symbol of the animal sacrifice reminds us that sin is serious to God, and that the wages of sin is death. The symbol of the miracle of the curtain tearing shows us that God is opening up access to God to anyone through faith in Jesus Christ. No priest needed, no Jewish heritage needed. The symbol of the bread and cup shows us that God's New Covenant is Christ giving himself up for us – that we can take part in his life directly – He takes our sin on himself and he gives us his life.

Old Covenant: Curtain    Change in covenant: Curtain torn    New Covenant: Bread and Cup  
So What:

- Come to God through faith in Jesus – he has done it for you. We all deserve death because of sin. But when we believe in Jesus, we’re saying “God, that blood, was supposed to be my blood. That life Jesus gave up on the cross was supposed to be my life, given up. Thank you God, I accept that gift.” It’s a great exchange! You see, this is one picture of why Jesus is such a big deal. The Bible isn’t saying “hey, just be kind of a good person or kinda religious and you’ll go to heaven.” The Bible is saying “we all have rejected the God who gave us life, and we deserve death. But Jesus, out of his great love, has offered himself as the sacrifice and died in our place.” The curtain of the temple is OPEN – the way to God is OPEN to anyone ... But it’s not just any door now leads to God – Jesus is the way. Just as the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom, so Jesus’ body was torn, and through faith in Jesus we come into the presence of God. We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.
- Striving for a holy life still actually matters...Paul writes that your body, Christian, is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So honor God with your body.
- And make sacred time and space in your life...Even though God could be anywhere, that temple was important. And even though God can still be anywhere, making sacred space for God is important. We do that here. Maybe you do that by getting up an hour early to be alone with God. Maybe that looks like a serious effort to have a weekly Sabbath where you really rest and remember God’s goodness. Maybe the way you do some of your meals could be sacred space.

**The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Jesus Christ, the ultimate high priest, offered himself, the lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. His death should have been our death. The wages of sin is death. BUT, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. He opened the way to God for us all. Let’s enter in and enjoy.**

#### **Benediction:**

Hebrews 10:19-25, NLT <sup>19</sup> And so, dear brothers and sisters,<sup>[i]</sup> we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> By his death,<sup>[ii]</sup> Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. <sup>21</sup> And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, <sup>22</sup> let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. <sup>24</sup> Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

*For Further Study: Read all of Hebrews, or at least Chapters 9 and 10.*

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Sometimes this is the only question you need: “What do you think God is saying to you, and what will you do about it?”
2. Other questions...
  - a. What does it mean to you that God is holy?
  - b. How would you explain it if someone asked, “How did the death of Jesus open up a way for humans to know God?”
  - c. Even though Jesus has offered himself for our sin, God still wants us to live a holy life. What might be a next step for you to be more honoring to God with your life?