

2014

"The Grateful Dead"

Matthew 27:50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

Matthew 27:51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,

Matthew 27:52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;

Matthew 27:53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Here's something you don't think about regarding hurricanes.

While rare, it's not unknown for flooding to disturb graves. Hundreds were pulled out of the ground by hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Mississippi, Louisiana and other parts of the South.

In 2011 hurricane Irene killed four people in Vermont, but the storm scattered dozens of sets of human remains - bodies pried from eternal rest in a mountain cemetery and swept down a raging river, where some may never be identified or even found.

I think the word I'd use is "grisly."

Just as Jesus died on the Cross, an undisclosed number of believers who were dead and buried in local tombs were raised from the dead. Then, after Jesus rose from the grave, they came out of their graves and appeared to folks in Jerusalem.

It is the least known, and least discussed, of the six miracles at Calvary:

1. There was a miraculous darkness that lasted three hours.
2. It was a miracle that the veil in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
3. The quaking earth and split rocks were a miracle.
4. The undisturbed graveclothes of Jesus was a miracle.
5. The opening of the many graves was a miracle.
6. And the resurrections of many deceased saints was miraculous.

I think the resurrection of the deceased saints is pretty big. One reason we don't talk about it much because scholars scare us away:

1. First they can't wait to tell you that Matthew is the only Gospel writer who records this miracle – as if it is somehow less significant because the other three guys overlook it.
2. Then they suggest several supposed difficulties with the wording... And the timing.
3. Then they argue that those who rose did so in regular human bodies and would therefore die again.

Let's take a simple look at it. Four major things happened:

1. The veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
2. The graves were opened.
3. Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.
4. They came out of their opened graves *after* Jesus rose from the dead and they appeared to folks in Jerusalem.

I want to use those four things as our Easter Sunrise devotional.

The thick and gorgeously wrought veil which was hung between the "holy place" and the "holiest of all" shut out all access to the presence of God. Into this holiest of all none might enter, not even the high priest, save once a year, on the great day of atonement, and then only with the blood of atonement in his hands, which he sprinkled "upon and before the mercy seat seven times" (Leviticus 16:14) to signify that access for sinners to a holy God is only through atoning blood.

But as they had only the blood of bulls and of goats, which could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), during all the long ages that preceded the death of Christ the thick veil remained; the blood of bulls and of goats continued to be shed and sprinkled.

But now, the one atoning Sacrifice being provided in the precious blood of Christ, access to this holy God could no longer be denied.

How emphatic the statement, from top to bottom; as if to say, Come boldly now to the Throne of Grace; the veil is clean gone; the mercy seat stands open to the gaze of sinners.

It prompted one commentator to say, "Before, it was death to go in, now it is death to stay out."

Next, the graves were opened. Was it from the earthquake? It is not likely that those tremors were what broke open the graves. Earthquakes are not so specific, are they?

This was a separate miracle.

Open graves are never very much fun! They have a pretty high yucchh factor; and, at night, they creep us out.

There was nothing anyone could immediately do to repair the open graves. When Jesus died, it was Passover and the Sabbath was approaching. A Jew could not come into contact with a dead person or a grave without becoming ritually defiled. Anyone who went to repair a grave would not be able to celebrate Passover. Also, no work was to be done on the Sabbath. So they were doubly hindered from doing anything about the open graves.

Think of it: All through that Sabbath evening and night, all around them, graves were lying open. It had to have been eerie, to say the least.

The symbolism isn't too difficult to determine. The moment Jesus died on the Cross, graves broke open to declare His dying on the Cross conquered death once and for all.

How is it possible to defeat death? Death came into the human experience because Adam and Eve sinned:

1. Adam and Eve immediately died spiritually.
2. They began to die physically.
3. They were going to die eternally; and by that we mean separated from God for eternity in a place that would punish them for their sin.
4. Worse yet – They represented the entire human race in their decision to disobey God. Every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve is born with sin already imputed to them; is born with a sin nature; and commits individual acts of sin.

God promised Adam and Eve He would defeat death by dying Himself in their place. When Jesus died on the Cross, and immediately the graves were opened, it was a divine declaration that God had kept His promise.

Next, many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. Inside of their tombs, the deceased were now alive. We're not told who was raised, but we are told there were many. And that it was only saints.

Interestingly, they remained in their graves and tombs until after Jesus rose. They waited so that Jesus would be the first to show Himself.

Jesus is called the firstfruits of the resurrection. He would be the first to rise from the dead in a glorified physical body to never die again. It just would not have been proper for any of these resurrection saints to be seen before the Lord was revealed.

How did they know to wait? Well, we know that the spirits of deceased believers were in a place called Paradise, or Abraham's Bosom. Maybe Abraham had a town hall meeting; told them who was going to be getting raised; and gave them instructions. (Obviously I am speculating).

Their graves and tombs were not the six-foot by 3-foot holes in the ground we are used to. They were chambers cut into hillsides, where many individuals, even whole families, could be entombed. There was room to walk about in their chambers.

Let's say you were one of them. What would you do while you were waiting for Jesus to rise from the dead? I think I'd shout out; or sing; or otherwise make my presence known.

As for the symbolism... Jesus died, and immediately saints who had died were alive. It was an illustration of something Paul would say in his famous chapter on the resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:21 For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

All die; in Christ all shall be made alive. That is the principle being illustrated in this resurrection as Jesus Christ died.

It's comforting, really, that a bunch of saints rose with Jesus. It enhances the promise that all who die in Jesus will be raised. For example: If only Jesus rose, as time went on waiting for His return, people might think that deceased believers had somehow missed out on something.

In fact, the believers in Thessalonica thought just that. Because many saints rose with Jesus, we can be even more confident all will be raised with Him.

In the mean time, in a spiritual sense, Christ died, and when you who were dead in your sins received Him, you were made alive. You passed from spiritual death to eternal life as your spirit was regenerated and God the Holy Spirit came to live within you.

The third thing about this miracle was that they appeared to folks in Jerusalem.

Some scholars suggest that those who rose did so in Lazarus fashion. In other words, they rose in their physical bodies, only to die again.

Besides being lame... I think that cannot be true, for at least two reasons:

1. For one thing, what kind of a testimony about Jesus would it be that dead people rose to die again? He'd already done that many times in life.
2. More biblically, there is symbolism in the Old Testament of offering firstfruits to the Lord. You'd offer *several* stalks from the harvest as a symbol of the greater harvest to come. You wouldn't just grab one stalk of grain. So you would expect *several* resurrections to

accompany Jesus as a firstfruits offering. And they would need to be the same kind of resurrection as His – into eternal life, in glorified bodies.

It was for a witness and a testimony that they appeared to many. Scoffers spin their theories to try to disprove the resurrection of Jesus:

1. They say He didn't really die, but was only mostly dead; and that He revived in the Tomb.
2. They say the disciples stole away with His body and lied about the resurrection.
3. They say that everyone forget which Tomb Jesus was buried in; so that, when they went to a wrong Tomb, it was empty, and everyone only supposed He had risen.

They never factor-in these other believers who also rose from the dead and appeared to many. They dismiss them as a fantasy of the Gospel writer.

They were no phantoms or fantasy. They were additional witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord.

So there it is:

1. Jesus conquered death.
2. He makes you alive – now, on earth – as you are regenerated and filled with His Spirit.
3. You will be raised from the dead in a glorified body – unless you are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord and are Raptured.

Until Jesus returns, **we are**, in a spiritual sense, the many saints who have been raised from the dead. We appear to many every day as we go about our business.

Scoffers may scoff, but we are alive, and offer resurrection life to any who will receive the Lord.