



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 27:45-66

Topic

Matthew tells us that when Jesus was crucified graves were opened and afterward many bodies of the saints were raised

Title

"Come Out, Come Out, Resurrected You Are"

Introduction

I say, "Grim Reaper," and you immediately see a skeletal figure carrying a large scythe and clothed in a black cloak with a hood, hourglass in hand, waiting for the last drop of sand to fall.

That image has been the personification of death in the Western world since at least the 15th century.

In literature, or on film, he sometimes disguises himself, so as to sneak-up on those whose souls he has come to reap.

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Matthew 27:45-66

"Come Out, Come Out, Resurrected You Are"

In the Twilight Zone episode, *Nothing in the Dark*, an old woman has been avoiding the Grim Reaper by living as a recluse, refusing to open her door. The Reaper, played by a handsome aspiring actor by the name of Robert Redford, tricks her into letting him in by pretending to be a wounded policeman.

The Bible personifies death. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, death is described as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse:

Rev 6:8 So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

The apostle Paul personifies death at least two times in his inspired writing:

- In First Corinthians 15:26, he writes, "the last enemy that will be destroyed is death."
- A little later in that same chapter, he quotes the Old Testament, and personally addresses our "last enemy," saying, "O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" (v55).

Death is not directly personified in our text in Matthew; but he describes some incredible events that occurred at the moment the Lord died, showing death's defeat.

The religious leaders, fearing Jesus might somehow be shown to be alive, put themselves in the awkward position of defending death. They placed a seal, and a guard, on the tomb, hoping Jesus would stay put.

I want to live knowing death has been defeated, not defending it by living in fear. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Enemy, Death, Was Defeated At The Cross Of Jesus Christ, and #2 Your Enemy, Death, Could Not Be Defended At The Tomb Of Jesus Christ.

#1 Your Enemy, Death,
Was Defeated At The Cross Of Jesus Christ

(v45-53)

We're so anxious to get to the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can overlook the effects of His death on the Cross.

We're told that it was at the Cross He "disarmed principalities and powers, [and] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

Sure, the Cross was necessary to get to the resurrection. But it was more than just a means to that end. The Cross itself was a victory in God's long spiritual warfare with Satan.

Mat 27:45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

There is some evidence in secular history of this darkness. "[Early church leaders] Origen and Eusebius quoted words from Phlegon (a Roman historian) in which he made mention of an extraordinary solar eclipse as well as of an earthquake about the time of the crucifixion."

Since it was Passover, and Passover always occurs on the calendar when the moon is full, it's not possible that this was a natural event, like a solar eclipse. It was supernatural.

Mat 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

Jesus was put on the Cross about 9AM. The darkness began at high noon. Then, after a total of six hours on the Cross, at the ninth hour of the day as the Jews reckoned time - at 3PM - He cried out, and dismissed His own Spirit.

You might recognize these words as the opening line of Psalm 22. There is a tradition that Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?," and then recited the whole psalm, and perhaps **all** the subsequent psalms until Psalm 31:5, which reads, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit..."

Did the Father really forsake Jesus? Is that why there were three hours of darkness?

A little later in Psalm 22, in verse twenty-four, you read,

Psalm 22:24 For He has **not** despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; **Nor** has He hidden His face from Him; **But when He cried to Him, He heard.**

In His humanity, Jesus certainly felt forsaken. But the psalm itself indicates that He was unforsaken by His Father.

I don't pretend to know what was occurring, in the dark, for those three hours. But I've come to question the emotional, over-preaching of the forsakenness of Jesus.

It's more on point to realize that Psalm 22 - written about a thousand years prior to the crucifixion - describes what was happening to Jesus, on the Cross, in detail - even quoting some of the words the people in the crowd would shout.

Jesus was letting the people know that the Cross was no accident or afterthought. It was an integral part of the plan of redemption.

Mat 27:47 Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!"

Mat 27:48 Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink.

Mat 27:49 The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him."

They misheard His words and thought He was calling upon the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, to come save Him.

Jesus' illustrated sermon from Psalm 22 was wasted on at least some of the crowd. They weren't really listening. They had already made up their minds, and filled-in the blanks with their own ideas.

Don't you wonder, sometimes, how people can hear the Word and not get saved? Or how believers can listen to a Bible study, but go away unaffected?

Well, if people in that crowd, at the Cross, could hear Psalm 22, and see Jesus living it, and read in it words they themselves were predicted to say over one thousand years earlier - it shouldn't surprise us people today harden their hearts.

God's Word is powerful; it can divide between the soul and the spirit. What we need is ears to hear it; what we need is to develop a greater humility in listening.

John, in his Gospel, tells us that Jesus said, "I thirst," and that this soaked sponge was offered to alleviate Him from being so parched.

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

After being beaten by the Jews, scourged by the Romans, and been on the Cross for six hours, you would not expect Jesus to be able to "cry out... with a **loud** voice." It was to show us His complete command of the situation. No one took His life; He laid it down voluntarily.

Why end it at precisely 3PM? The timing was perfect. Jesus dismissed His spirit, and died, *just as the Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple.*

In a few hours, on the third day, Jesus would rise from the dead. But His death had already defeated death. Matthew makes that clear by relating a few things that happened right as Jesus died.

Mat 27:51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom...

Properly understood, the "temple" is the two rooms called the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Book of Hebrews describes those two rooms, saying, "for a [temple] was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the [temple] which is called the Holiest of All" (9:2-3).

The Holiest of All, also called the Holy of Holies, was where the presence of God was supposed to dwell. It was only entered once each year, on the Day of Atonement, by the high priest who went in offering blood as a sacrifice.

I said it was where the presence of God was "supposed to dwell" because, after the destruction of Solomon's Temple, the ark of the covenant with its lid, called the mercy seat, were lost to the Jews. The prophet Ezekiel describes the glory of God departing from the temple at that time.

To access the Holy of Holies, you passed through the veil that kept it hidden from view. It was quite the curtain. It was sixty-feet by thirty-feet and at least four inches thick. Josephus remarked that two teams of horses, if tied to either end, could not tear it apart.

Yet the precise moment Jesus dismissed His spirit, and that He offered Himself as the final lamb, it was torn, from top to bottom.

God supernaturally reached down from Heaven, tearing the veil, signifying that the way to Him was open to all believers.

The Book of Hebrews puts it like this:

Hebrews 10:18 ... there is no longer an offering for sin.
Hebrews 10: 19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter
the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,
Hebrews 10: 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated
for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

When Jesus died, the need for all further sacrifice ended.

Think of it this way: Just as the priests were about to sacrifice the
Passover lambs, the darkness over all the land suddenly ended,
and when they looked behind them, they could see into the Holy
of Holies through the torn veil.

The curtain, as it were, was opened, and the spotlight was on the
new and glorious way of relating to God, by the once-for-all
sacrifice of Jesus' death on the Cross.

Why was there ever a need for a sacrifice in the first place?

In the Holy of Holies used to be the ark of the covenant with its
mercy seat lid. Inside the ark were the two tablets of the law. The
law of God condemns us as sinners; and the wages of sin is
death. Only by the blood sacrifice of a substitute could sin be
dealt with.

The apostle Paul explained it this way, saying, "the sting of death
is sin, and the strength of sin is the law" (First Corinthians 15:56).

Because of what Jesus did, dying as the Lamb of God Who takes
away the sin of the world, Paul also said, "Death is swallowed up
in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your
victory?" (v55).

The torn veil, among other things, tells us that death is defeated.

Matthew provides more evidence that death is defeated:

Mat 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,

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

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

"Rocks were split, and the graves were opened." In other words the earth quaked in order that graves would be opened as a show of victory over death.

If there was any question about the meaning of the quake-opened graves, there was a resurrection of certain saints from the dead.

The question is always asked, "Did these rise from the dead only to die again?" No; certainly not. That would ruin the typology.

Jesus is called "the firstfruits of them that slept" (First Corinthians 5:20). He was the first to rise from the dead in a glorified body *never to die again*.

If these token saints rose only to again die, that wouldn't show anything at all about firstfruits.

No, these rose, in glorified bodies, never to die again.

But, notice carefully, Matthew says they came out of their graves "after [Jesus'] resurrection." They did not precede Him. They could not precede Him Who must be first among many.

O, and by-the-way: According to the Jewish calendar, Passover is on the 14th of the month Nisan. It is followed by a sabbath on 15 Nisan. Then, on Sunday, 16 Nisan, is Firstfruits.

Jesus rose from the dead on Firstfruits - and many saints rose with Him as firstfruits of the resurrection!

O, and by-the-way: Some Messianic Jews point out that Jesus, in His first coming, fulfilled all the spring feasts on the Jewish calendar - Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost. They make a strong case that, in His Second Coming, He will fulfill the fall feasts of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles.

What became of the resurrected sants? We're not told, but obviously they went to Heaven at some point after they had been seen in Jerusalem.

- Torn veil - Death is defeated since I no longer have to pay the wages of sin, which is death.
- Quake-opened graves - Death is defeated since the graves are opened.
- Raised saints - Death is defeated because I will one day be raised in a glorified body fit for eternity.

Thus we say that death was defeated at the Cross. Not yet destroyed; and we'll come to that as we close. But certainly defeated.

Death is an incredible foe. Knowing 'he' is defeated strengthens and encourages me - even as people still die, and even as I may die.

Paul applied it, this victory over death, by saying,

First Cor 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

First Cor 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Have you heard the saying, "when you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose"?

If you are a believer, you've got **everything** spiritually speaking - eternal life, rewards storing-up for you in Heaven where nothing can steal or corrupt them, the promise that you might never die if you're raptured, but that you'll be resurrected if you do die.

The fact that death is defeated leads us to say, "when you've got **everything**, you've got nothing to lose."

Don't fear the Reaper!

#2 Your Enemy, Death,
Could Not Be Defended At The Tomb Of Jesus Christ

(v54-66)

Matthew highlights a few things to show Jesus was dead, and not just mostly dead.

Mat 27:54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Did the centurion get saved? Maybe; hopefully. But commentators note that he is quoted as saying "this was the Son of God," past tense, which sort of minimizes Jesus' deity.

I think it's more a declaration to tell us Jesus was dead.

If you die in Kings County, the Sheriff is the Coroner who will examine your death and provide the death certificate.

The centurion in charge of Jesus' crucifixion was the Coroner. He knew death, and death by crucifixion. When he said, "this was," he was declaring that Jesus was dead beyond doubt.

Mat 27:55 And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar,
Mat 27:56 among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Also at the Cross were the apostle John, Jesus' mother, Mary, and her sister.

They were "looking on from afar," not because of fear; they weren't hiding. The soldiers would establish a reasonable perimeter, and there was quite a crowd of haters.

Mat 27:57 Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.

Mat 27:58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him.

Mat 27:59 When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

Mat 27:60 and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed.

Mat 27:61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.

The bodies of crucified criminals were usually left on the Cross to be torn by scavenger birds.

Jews were under obligation from the law of God to not let a dead body remain out; but, being crucified as a criminal, they probably would have thrown Jesus into the dump.

It was a miraculous fulfillment of Bible prophecy, of Isaiah 53:9 to be exact, that Joseph came forward.

Isaiah 53:9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah accurately predicted that the Messiah would be put to death with the wicked, but buried in a rich man's tomb, 700 years before it occurred.

It was just another of the nearly 30 Bible prophecies fulfilled at the Cross.

The Sabbath was fast approaching, when Jews could do no work, so they hastily prepared Jesus' body for entombment. Even though time was limited, there was enough time, and contact with the body, for them to know He was really dead.

Mat 27:62 On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate,

The day after, Saturday, was a Sabbath. These guys were violating the Sabbath by meeting together, and by meeting with Pilate. Hypocrites - as all legalists ultimately must be.

Mat 27:63 saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.'

Mat 27:64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."

They'd been listening to Jesus' sermon tapes! They understood His claim to rise from the dead - perhaps more clearly than His disciples.

Nonbelievers sometimes - maybe even mostly - have a warped understanding of what it means to be a Christian. But if they've had some exposure to the Bible, there are some things they will expect of you and me, if we call ourselves Christians.

One thing, a general principle, is that we, as Christians, claim to have transformed lives. We say we live in the power of the resurrection.

So, as we live and move among nonbelievers, they have a reasonable expectation that we will manifest that transformation.

Bottom line: If we are just like nonbelievers, where is the power?

Mat 27:65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."

Mat 27:66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

These guys didn't realize it at the time, but they were helping to prove that Jesus was really dead! One of the theories to explain the resurrection, and say it was a myth propagated by the disciples, was that they stole His body.

Well, this guard, and this seal, were especially set to thwart just that possibility!

Another theory was that Jesus was only mostly dead, and recovered in the tomb. He somehow unwrapped Himself, then rolled away the stone and escaped.

Nope. These religious leaders killed that possibility, too.

These guys were in the unenviable position of trying to defend death. Instead of being excited by the possibility that, if Jesus rose, they, too, might one day rise - they wanted Him to stay dead.

Death was their champion. They were betting on him in this fight for the bodies and souls of men. They were fans cheering for the Reaper.

Alas, death had already been defeated. It was only a matter of hours when, on the third day - on Firstfruits - Jesus would rise, and with Him the token saints that declare our future rapture o resurrection.

I want to return to the very important fact that, although defeated, death has not been destroyed, in that we still die.

We live in the time between the two comings of Jesus. I've explained it many times before by comparing it to World War Two and D-Day.

D-Day was a resounding victory for the Allied forces; it effectively ended the war. But the Axis troops fought on until one day short of one year later.

Satan and his malevolent forces fight on - and the casualties are real and severe. Death takes people; but not in the same way.

We are confident, convinced, that, for believers, to be absent from the body is to be immediately present with the Lord.

If I live, great; if I die, greater!

One day, soon, death will be destroyed:

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

First Corinthians 15:24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

First Corinthians 15:25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

First Corinthians 15:26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

The death of death is described this way:

Rev 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

One commentator wrote,

So is death now our friend? Or is it still our foe? For believers, death is a friend insofar as it ushers us into the immediate presence of Christ.

But insofar as it is still coupled with much suffering, it remains the last enemy that must be totally vanquished.

However, our problem with death is not with death itself but with the process that leads up to it. It is dying that is still feared by Christians. What Christian would be afraid of death if we could just shut our eyes and wake up in Heaven? We know that the other side of death is glory and that death is but the portal or threshold to that glory.

You've got everything, and, therefore, nothing to lose, but everything to gain.