

## **DEVOTIONS FOR EASTER WEEK**

### **POWER OF THE CROSS**

Monday, March 26

Reading: Matthew 27

**Matthew 27:50** *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"*

The crucifixion accounts in Matthew and Mark are nearly identical. The one major difference is that Matthew gives a more detailed description of the powerful events that occurred after the death of Christ. The power of the cross changed everything.

First, it changed humanities access to God. Both Matthew and Mark record the tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom when Jesus died. This curtain separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, the place where God's presence was believed to dwell in a special way. No one could enter the Holy of Holies except the high priest and he could only do it once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day, he would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the nation. But now Christ had become the final sacrifice and His blood opened the way for all who believe in Him to come right into the presence of God (see Hebrews 10:19-22).

Second, creation was affected. Matthew records that the earth shook and the rocks split. It is as if all of nature responded to the death of its Creator. The Apostle Paul wrote that "the whole creation has been groaning" because it has been corrupted by sin. The death of Christ began to reverse this process and "creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" and God to put everything right (Romans 8:18-25).

Third, death itself had been defeated. This was illustrated in dramatic fashion after the crucifixion. While there is some question about the order of events in verses 52-53, I believe the most logical order is to break off the events of Good Friday with the words "the tombs broke open" (perhaps as a result of the earthquake). The rest of the verses then take place on Easter Sunday when these saints are raised after Christ's own resurrection and testify in Jerusalem of His victory over death. They were probably raised with glorified bodies like we all will receive when we enter eternity. While there are still many questions about this event, it gives us a startling reminder of Christ's victory over death.

The final change is the most powerful. The cross changed the heart of a hardened Roman centurion who witnessed Jesus' death. He had seen many men die before. He more than likely had crucified many men before. But the power of Jesus' death changed his life. We can imagine him seeking out the disciples to learn more. The greatest power of the cross is its' ability to change the sinful heart and make it ready for eternity.

**THRU THE BIBLE Reading: Joshua 1-3; Luke 17**