

MIDWEEK 2

THE MIRACULOUS TEARING OF THE TEMPLE CURTAIN

Matthew 27:51a

TEXT

*“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”*

*(Matthew 27:51a)*

SERMON: THE MIRACULOUS TEARING OF THE TEMPLE CURTAIN

(MATTHEW 27:51a)

Miracles are very much a part of Lent. The death of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross was preceded by the miraculous darkness. And of what followed His death, we read:

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

*And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew 27:51–53)*

This evening, I would like to direct your attention to the *Miraculous Tearing of the Temple Curtain*.

The curtain, which was torn in two from top to bottom the moment Christ died, had hung in the temple in Jerusalem. The temple (by today’s standards) was not a huge building, but in its religious significance it was super-huge.

The curtain formed a separation between the two main rooms in the temple. The room that was by far the one with the greatest significance was the Most Holy Place, sometimes call the Holy of Holies. This room was regarded as the very dwelling place of the true and living God in all of His holiness.

The curtain was 6 inches thick; it no doubt was a double curtain. It stood 60 feet high and was the width of the interior of the temple. This curtain formed a separation that reminded the people of Isaiah 59:2, which reads: *“your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you.”*

This curtain was not the only form of separation by any means. Around the temple were walls, curtains, and courts, which separated the people in their sins from God in His purity and holiness.

On the other side of the curtain was the Holy Place. It was the room, along with the Court of the Priests, where the priests carried out their priestly functions. The priests were part of the separation, but they were also the go-between. The men who provided the animals for sacrifice could bring them into the Court of the Priests. There the priests would lay their hands on the animal to be sacrificed. This symbolically transferred their sins to the animal, which was then sacrificed. The LORD God of Israel instructed His priests to then bless the people who stood forgiven before Him (see Numbers 6:24–26).

This separation, of course, meant that the people had no access to God. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, going through the curtain, only once a year on the Day of Atonement with the blood of a bull or goat that had been sacrificed. The priests had no access to the Most Holy Place. The people had no access to the Holy Place and only on occasion were allowed to enter the Court of the Priests. The women could go as far as the Court of the Women and no further. The Gentiles could go into the Court of the Gentiles, but could go no further. If they did, they might receive a death sentence.

All of this was a part of the Old Testament Ceremonial Law. Along with the Moral and Civil Law, it had been given to Moses on Mount Sinai after the Israelites had left Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land.

We speak of various features of the priesthood that foreshadowed the role and purpose of the Messiah. The high priest going into the Most Holy Place foreshadowed the reality that was Christ in His Priestly Office. The sacrifices in the temple and the blood of the animals foreshadowed Calvary's cross and the blood that was shed for our salvation. The Day of Atonement foreshadowed the reconciliation between us in our sin with the Father in all of His holiness, which we have through faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

The moment Christ died, all separation came to an end. One artist painted a picture that portrays the Holy Place at the moment of Christ's death. It shows the Holy Place as being in shambles. The curtain was being torn. The appointed furniture was toppled over and out of place.

The priests were in the state of confusion. What the artist was trying to convey is the truth that the Ceremonial Law—with its foreshadowing sacrifices, separation, and lack of access to God—had come to an end. It had been replaced with the reality of Christ crucified through whom we now have access to the Father.

The inspired writer to the Hebrews wrote of many of these things, as well as of the access to God that we are now privileged to enjoy through Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 10:19–23 we read:

*Brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened up for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

In Romans 5:1–2 we read:

*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

And in Ephesians 2:18:

*“Through Him [Christ] we . . . have access in one Spirit to the Father.”*

And in Ephesians 3:11, 12:

*“In Christ Jesus our Lord . . . we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.”*

And, finally, in 1 Peter 3:18 we read:

*“Christ also suffered, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.”*

We are reminded of this access, of our reconciliation to God, every time we come to church. There is not a Court of the Priests to go through before we get to the church building. When we get to the door, we don't have a Levitical priest telling us that we are not allowed to enter. Nor do we have a curtain separating the chancel from the nave of the church.

The tearing of the curtain in the temple is a miraculous sign of the heavenly Father's welcome: Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, who shed His blood for us on Calvary. Through the faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit we have access to eternal life. Be glad. Rejoice.

Amen.

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

Amen.