

The Power of the Cross

Matthew 27:45-61 - NCBC, October 31, 2021

Main Point: **Jesus' death comes with powerful signs that God is able to save you from sin.**

- Behold God's signs of judgment at the cross (45-50)
 - Divine Darkness
 - Divine Disconnection
 - Divine Death
- Behold God's signs of life after the cross (51-56)
 - Reconciliation with God
 - Resurrection from dead
 - Reception by outsiders
- Behold God's signs of fulfillment in the burial (57-61)
 - Unnatural timing
 - Unnatural honor
 - Unnatural love

Application: **Will you believe that Jesus' death is for you?**

Opening Announcements:

- Start signing up today for the new Adult Discipleship Electives that will **begin Sunday November 28th**. These are great classes designed to equip you for ministry and strengthen your faith in Christ!

<<How Deep the Father's Love for Us>>



This is such good news to celebrate on this Lord's Day together. Jesus' death has paid our ransom.

Well, good morning! Please open your Bible now to **Matthew 27 verses 45-61.**



If you need a Bible, simply raise your hand so we can give you one. These Bibles are our gift to you to use every day, or you can also return them to the back at the conclusion of our service.

And while you're opening to **Matthew 27**, I want to quickly highlight our plans for our November Sundays:



Next Sunday, **November 7**, I will be preaching a special message from **Hebrews 13** as we take communion together and observe the *International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church*.

Then, **November 14**, Pastor Scott will be preaching a special message for *Orphan Sunday* and Compassion International child sponsorships will be available. Then during the 9:30a hour on November 14, we're looking forward to hearing updates from our elders about all that God is doing in and through our church family in this season. Some exciting announcements will be part of this congregational meeting, so please plan to join our 9:30a hour on November 14th.

The following Sunday, **November 21**, we'll return to Matthew and I'll preach a message on the resurrection of Jesus after we witness a number of believer's baptisms! Wow... I can't wait for our joyful worship together on November 21! Then during the 9:30a hour, we are planning a very special anniversary celebration as we recognize God's faithfulness to New Castle Bible Church over the last 80 years!

I'm so tempted to spill the beans and tell you all the special plans for November 21st ...but I'm not going to yield to temptation! Let me just say, you do not want to miss this very special time of worship and thanksgiving!

Then, to cap off this special month, Sunday **November 28th** we will enjoy a very special guest preacher and begin our new cycle of Adult Discipleship Electives.

So suffice it to say, November 2021 is looking like a very special month of worship together! Please make sure you're coming prayed up in the power of God's Spirit with eager expectancy to worship Jesus as Lord together.



Now today, on the very anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, we turn our attention to the power of Jesus' death and burial. Please stand in honor of the reading of Scripture, as I read from **Matthew 27, verse 45** in the English Standard Version:

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it,

said, “This man is calling Elijah.” ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” ⁵⁵ There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. ⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

This is the reading of God’s Word. Please be seated.

Let’s pray.

¹ Galatians 6:14

² Matthew 1:21; John 1:29

³ John 3:16

If you are new to Christianity, it may seem ironic or even nonsensical that Christians put so much emphasis on the cross. After all, the cross is an instrument of execution and death. Why would Christians boast in the cross,¹ make jewelry out of the cross, or even use the image of the cross to decorate our church buildings or homes?

Why do Christians joyfully emphasize the death of Jesus? And why do Christians label the day of Jesus’ death as “Good Friday”?

These are great questions, and I pray today’s sermon will give you a clear and convincing understanding of the death of Jesus. Because listen carefully – Jesus’ death was not a failure. Jesus was not a victim, and his death was not a failure.

The crucifixion of Jesus was God’s rescue plan for sinners from the very beginning.² God so loved sinners like you and me, that He sent His only Son – Jesus, to come into the world,³ add humanness to his very nature,⁴ and die the death that we sinners deserved in our place⁵ so that whoever believes in Jesus could receive the everlasting life with God that only Jesus Himself deserves.⁶

In other words, when you study the death and burial of Jesus, you can’t help but notice that God is absolutely in control through all of it. Yes, wicked men and Satan seem to be winning at first glance. But Matthew’s gospel

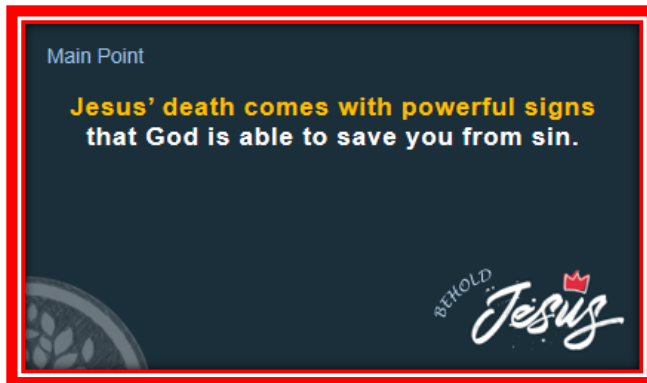
⁴ Philippians 2:6-8

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁶ John 11:25-26

makes it obvious that even through accountable souls' sin,⁷ God was making His rescue of sinners a reality.

And that's our main point today:

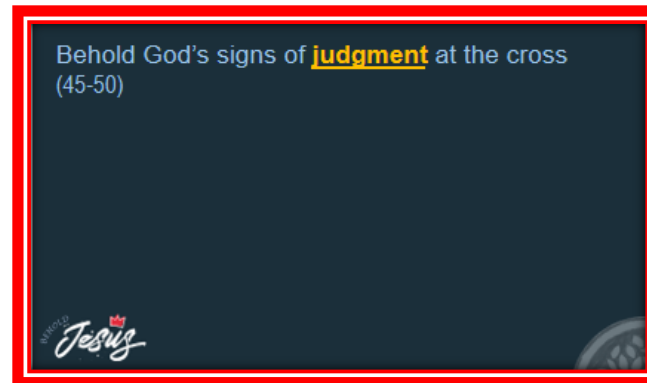


Jesus' death comes with powerful signs that God is able to save you from sin. At the cross, all signs point to the reality that Jesus is accomplishing God's plan of salvation for undeserving sinners. Even in Jesus' death and burial, we see clear signs that Jesus is the Son of God. And these signs of God's power give believers much hope and confidence that God is able to deliver us from sin's penalty, power, and polluting presence in our lives.

So as we study the death and burial of Jesus today, we will notice 3 groups of supernatural signs of God's power that were displayed in His death. All so that we might have greater faith and confidence that Jesus' death is able to save us from our sins.

First in **verses 45-50** we need to,

⁷ Acts 2:23; 3:13-19; 4:28; c.f. Matthew 26:24
Page **4a** of 14



Behold God's signs of judgment at the cross. This first paragraph contains several signs of supernatural power associated with God's judgment that we must understand if we are going to rightly understand Jesus' death.

First, in **verse 45** we see the supernatural sign of,



Divine Darkness.

Verse 45 reads, *Now from the sixth hour [which was 12'oclock noon] there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour [which was 3pm]. Remember Jesus was hung on the cross around 9am in the morning.*⁸ We know

⁸ Mark 15:25

the first three hours of his agony were filled with the jeering taunts of the soldiers, crowd, and thieves.

But then, at noon, the entire land gets unexplainably⁹ plunged into darkness for three hours.

Now think like a first century Jew for a moment. It's Friday of Passover...the feast where you remember how God judged Egypt with 10 plagues before delivering your people in the exodus.

And do you remember what the ninth plague was, before the final plague of death where God passed over the homes that had applied the blood covering?

Exodus chapter 10¹⁰ describes the ninth plague of Egypt as a pitch-black darkness that lasted supernaturally for 3 solid days. All light was removed from the land of Egypt so only darkness was felt.

So now, as Jesus hangs on the cross as God's eternal Passover Lamb,¹¹ a plague of suffocating darkness silences everyone and gives the terrifying sense of judgment for 3 solid hours.

The Old Testament often associated unnatural darkness with judgment.¹² And so while Jesus takes on the sin of the entire world, this Divine Darkness provides a graphic sign of God's judgment against sin.

⁹ This cannot be explained through a natural phenomenon like a solar eclipse, since Passover always occurred at the full moon, and normal solar eclipses only occur during a new moon. Further, this darkness lasts exactly 3 hours – from noon to 3pm when Jesus dies.

¹⁰ Exodus 10:21-23

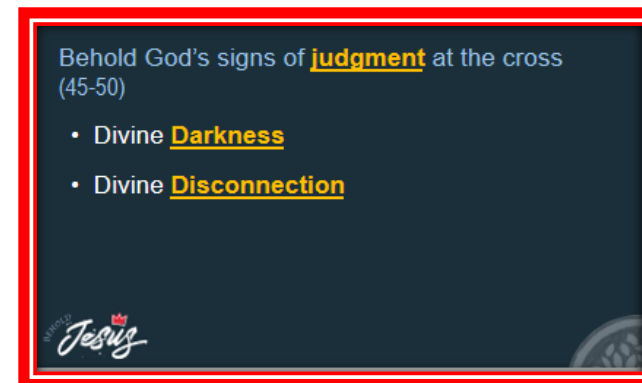
¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5:7; c.f. John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19

Then a little before 3pm, Jesus shatters the darkness with the surprising strength of a loud voice that would not be natural for any dying man – saying in **verse 46**,

Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? Which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”¹³

Now do not misunderstand this cry. Jesus is not expressing confusion or unbelief. He's not asking God, “Why are you doing this to me?” After all, Jesus had foretold this very moment¹⁴ and was willingly submitting Himself to it.¹⁵

This cry was a sign of,



The agonizing **Disconnection**, or relational alienation that Jesus was experiencing as He became sin in our place.

¹² Amos 5:20, 8:9; Isaiah 5:30, 13:10-11, 59:9-10; Jeremiah 13:16, 15:9; Joel 2:2, 10, 31; Zephaniah 1:14-15; c.f. 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6

¹³ Mark 15:34 uses Aramaic words, Matthew uses the Hebrew words for God

¹⁴ Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19

¹⁵ John 10:17-18; c.f. Matthew 26:39-42

Jesus' cry quotes **Psalm 22 verse 1** and expresses the pain of experiencing relational disconnection from intimacy with God for the first time ever. This is the only recorded time that Jesus does not reference God as His Father.

Jesus' cry was a powerful sign of God's judgment, for while God was still very present at the cross,¹⁶ His presence was now only a presence of judgment and wrath against Jesus as the sin-bearer of the world.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says that at the cross Jesus became sin on our behalf. **Galatians 3:13** says that Jesus became our curse, for He was bearing our sins in His body on the cross.¹⁷

Jesus' cry is a powerful sign that God must judge all sin – because the pain of sin's separation from God's favor pressed out an agonizing cry of anguish from our Lord as He drank the cup of God's wrath that our sins deserved.

In the darkness of that moment one bystander tried to show mercy, while most of the others took the opportunity to mock and tease Him yet more.¹⁸

But then, the final sign of God's judgment is seen in **verse 50** as,

¹⁶ In the same way, we understand that God is even present in hell (Psalm 139:8). Technically speaking, hell is not the absence of God, but the absence of God's favor. There is nowhere that our omnipresent God is not present. But at the cross, (like in hell), the presence of God can only be experienced through wrath and judgment, for God cannot look on sin with favor (Habakkuk 1:13).

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:24



Divine Death.

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.

His final loud cry was one of victory! God's purpose accomplished! Plan fulfilled! *It is finished!*¹⁹ *Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit*²⁰

Notice, the strength of the loud voice. Jesus did not have His life taken from Him.²¹ Jesus did not gradually succumb to the cross' suffocation or physical torture. Jesus willingly gave His life as a sacrificial ransom for my sins and your sins.²²

Jesus knew the wages of sin is death,²³ and without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin.²⁴ Therefore, God's judgment is pictured when Jesus died

¹⁸ Matthew 27:47-49

¹⁹ John 19:30

²⁰ Luke 23:46

²¹ John 10:18

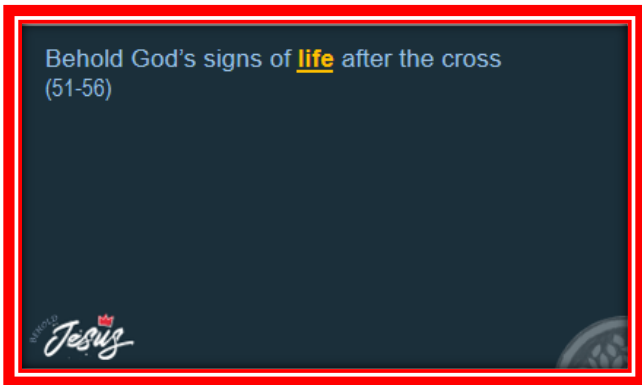
²² Matthew 20:28

²³ Romans 6:23

²⁴ Hebrews 9:22; c.f. Leviticus 17:11

sacrificially and voluntarily as God's Passover lamb for us.

Behold God's signs of judgment against sin at the cross! Jesus died the death our sins deserved, to bring us to God. So let's move on now to **verses 51-56** where we,

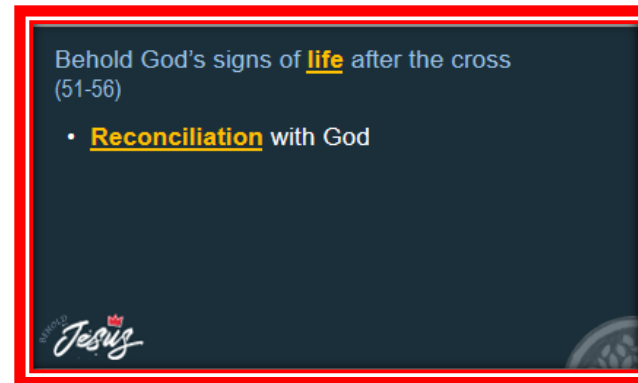


Behold God's signs of life after the cross.

As soon as Jesus sacrificed Himself to pay for our sin, **verse 51** says,

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

Now this is a powerful sign of,



Reconciliation with God that Jesus' death accomplished.

After all, remember how God created people to live joyfully with Him in the Garden of Eden. But once Adam and Eve sinned, they could no longer live with God in Eden. Sin cannot dwell together with our Holy God. So God put our first parents out of His presence and guarded the entrance to His presence with a powerful angel so that every person would know that we can no longer go in because of our sin.²⁵

But God still desired to live with His people. So beginning with Moses and then with David and Solomon God taught His people how they could build a tabernacle, and then eventually a temple, where they could again meet with God. And the way God designed His dwelling place among people outside of Eden was through a series of rooms, separated by thick curtains or veils, and the innermost room was called the Holy of Holies, where God Himself lived.

Only the high priest of God's people could go behind this veil into the Holy of Holies and experience God's

²⁵ Genesis 3:23-24

presence...and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement after the lamb's blood was slain.²⁶

The rest of the year, the veil separated God and His people... and angels were embroidered onto this thick veil as a reminder that because of our sin, we can't go in.²⁷ Sin separates people from God and makes us unable to live in His holy presence.

Now in Jesus' day, Herod the Great had rebuilt the Jewish temple and turned it into an architectural wonder. The veil that separated the holy place from the Holiest of Holies was now 60 feet tall, and some 4 inches thick.²⁸ It was a beautiful tapestry by any standard, but its purpose was still to separate God's people from God's presence. The veil reminded everyone that our sin means we can't go in.

So don't miss this powerful sign of life after the cross. As soon as Jesus dies to pay for the sins of the world,



God Himself tears the veil, again giving all people everywhere access to living together with Him!

Church – let's glory in this wonderful sign of life!! Jesus is the final sacrifice which covers the sins of all who believe on Him forever! The death of Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant of the Law and inaugurated the New Covenant of God dwelling together with His people again.

You no longer need to go to a particular temple to worship God, and you no longer need a human priest or a ceremonial sacrifice. Jesus died in our place so that now we can be reconciled with God!

Think of it this way. Before Jesus died, the only way to enter into God's presence was through the veil. But after Jesus' death, God removes the veil. Jesus is now the only way to enter into God's presence.²⁹ After Jesus' death, the only thing separating you from living forever with God is whether you will believe in Jesus' death and resurrection for your reconciliation with God.³⁰

²⁶ Leviticus 16

²⁷ Exodus 26:31; 2 Chronicles 3:14

²⁸ According to Josephus

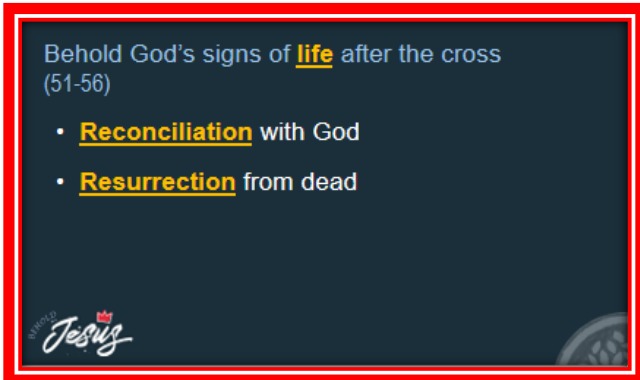
²⁹ Hebrews 10:20; c.f. John 14:6; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:9-10, 7:22, 7:25-28, 8:1-2, 8:6, 9:24-28

³⁰ Hebrews 9:12, 14; 10:10, 10:12-14

No wonder Christians boast in the death of Jesus! For when Jesus died, He defeated sin and opened the way for sinners to reenter Eden!

Now **verse 51** goes on to describe a powerful earthquake where rocks were torn and the tombs were opened. Because Matthew wanted his readers to make the obvious connection between the death of Christ and the death of death. When Jesus died, sin was defeated. So death lost its power. And just as sin corrupted all of creation,³¹ the defeat of sin through Jesus' death causes the whole creation to shake and tremble in eager anticipation of being set free from its bondage to corruption!³²

Then the second powerful sign of life after the cross was,



Resurrection from dead

Verses 52 and 53 record how the tombs were supernaturally opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the

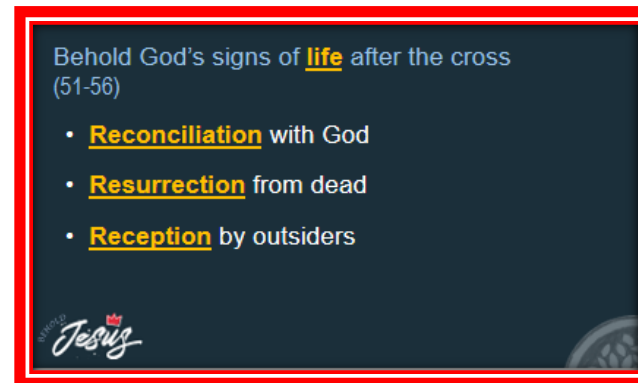
tombs after his resurrection they went into the city and appeared to many.

Now if you write in your Bible, underline that little phrase, *after his resurrection* in **verse 53**. Notice that the tombs were split open during the earthquake that happened at 3pm on Friday afternoon after Jesus died...but the dead were not resurrected until Sunday after Jesus Himself became the "first-fruits" of the resurrection.³³

Matthew simply joins the death of Jesus with the resurrection of Jesus, because in his thinking, you can't have one without the other.

The result of the cross is freedom from sin's death, so the physical resurrection of Old Testament saints after Jesus' resurrection provide powerful signs of life after the cross.³⁴

Finally, don't miss,



³¹ Genesis 3:17-18

³² Romans 8:20-22

³³ 1 Corinthians 15:20

³⁴ C.f. Ezekiel 37:12-13

The supernatural Reception by outsiders. Verses 54-56
graphically picture how Jesus' death invites religious outcasts to receive Jesus.

Both Gentile soldiers and women would have been considered religious outcasts to the Jewish people. Women were not allowed to be disciples of any Jewish rabbi in the first century.

But **verse 54** says that when the Roman soldiers saw the earthquake and the opening of the tombs, and how light returned as soon as Jesus died... *they were filled with awe... literally terror*³⁵... *and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

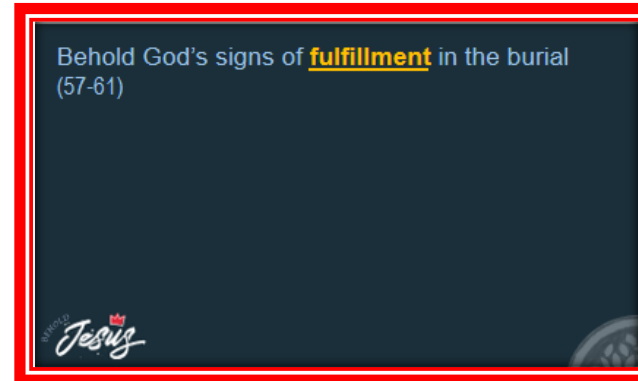
Here we see a Gentile confessing his belief that the Jews refused to see. Jesus is truly the Son of God. He is worthy of our worship. He alone is the God of resurrection. No one is too sinful or too broken or too lost for Him. Anyone – no matter who you are or what you have done, can enter into the presence of God forever if you will simply turn from your sins, and believe that Jesus is God!

The marginalized women point to the same truth. Even after all the others had fled, these women are a powerful sign of how the death of Christ produces surprising loyalty and love for Him in the hearts of those whom the world most quickly despises.

Loved ones... don't miss the supernatural signs of life after the cross! The death of Jesus comes with powerful signs that God is able to save you from your sins and give you eternal life with Him forever!

³⁵ Note this is the same emotion described in the Transfiguration when the
Page **10a** of 14

Finally let's,



Behold God's signs of fulfillment in the burial of Jesus.
Because a close study of Jesus' burial proves that God was powerfully controlling every detail to bring sinners to Himself in Jesus' death.

First, **verse 57** says that *when it was evening...* which referred to the hours between 3 and 6pm, a rich man named Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.

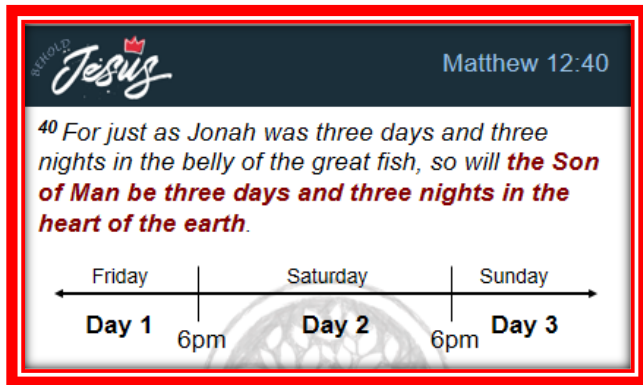
Now this reflects,



disciples were witnesses to the glory of God in Matthew 17:6.

Unnatural, or supernatural, timing. The timing of Jesus' burial is not what anyone would typically expect. **Mark 15:44** tells us that even Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had already died after only 6 hours.

But God's timing is perfect. After all, Jesus had taught



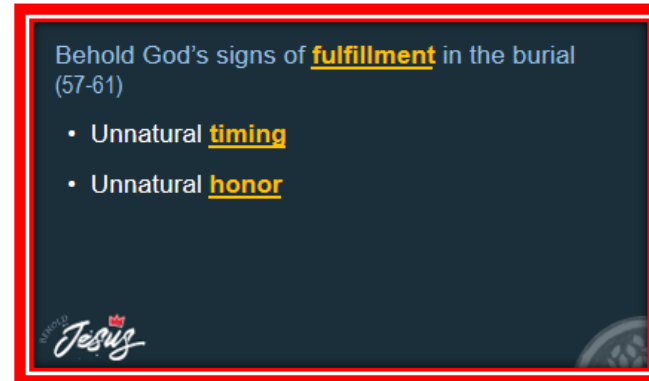
in **Matthew 12:40**,

As Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

According to the Jew's way of keeping time, where each day ended at 6pm, that meant Jesus needed to be buried before 6pm on Friday afternoon, in order for him to be in the grave for three days and still be resurrected early on Sunday morning.

So if Joseph would have gone to Pilate any earlier than 3pm, Jesus would not yet have been dead. Any later, and he would not have been buried before the end of the day on Friday.

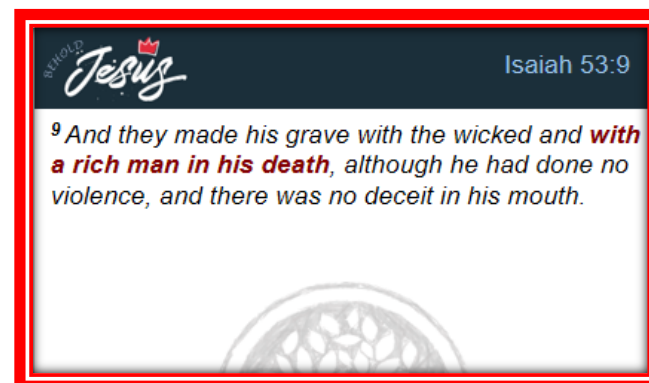
But God is here showing powerful signs of His fulfillment of Scripture even in the burial. First in the unnatural timing, and then second in the,



Unnatural honor of a rich man's burial.

After all, Rome typically just threw crucified bodies into a mass grave. Criminals didn't get any honor.

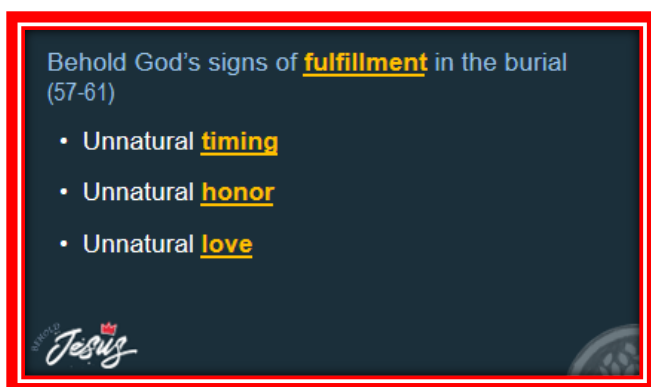
But 700 hundred years earlier, God had spoken through the prophet **Isaiah** that,



The Suffering Servant would have his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death

So don't miss this amazing sign of God's promises being supernaturally fulfilled in the burial of Jesus. The death of Jesus was all according to God's plan – that sinners like you and me might be rescued and reconciled...and welcomed back into the presence of God forever, and that His Son would be exalted and honored even with the burial grave of a king.

Finally, I want to point out the,



Unnatural love that is pictured in Joseph of Arimathea's sacrificial burial of Jesus. We know from the other Gospel accounts that Joseph was a respected member of the Sanhedrin, who was a secret disciple of Jesus who had not consented with their decision to put Jesus to death.³⁶

But now, after Jesus died, this secret follower shows a supernatural willingness to go public with his love for Jesus.

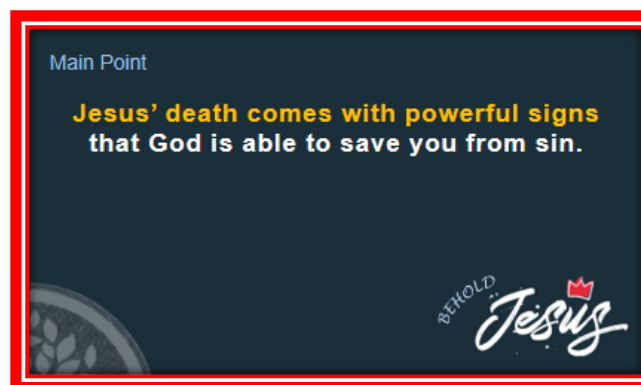
³⁶ Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51; John 19:38-39

³⁷ Mark 15:43

Please realize that this action costs Joseph more than just a very costly tomb. Simply talking to Pilate required much courage,³⁷ as just 7 hours earlier Pilate had condemned Jesus to death. But simply entering the Roman praetorium to speak with Pilate would ceremonially defile Joseph and keep him from observing Passover with his family later that evening. And certainly touching Jesus' dead body would defile Joseph from all Sabbath and Feast observance the next 7 days.

In other words, Joseph and Nicodemus who came and helped Joseph,³⁸ both picture the unnatural and costly love for Jesus that is not explainable on human terms.

After the cross, these religious leaders cared more about Jesus than they did about religious ceremony and the approval of the religious establishment. The death of Jesus brought the secret followers into the light – even while the public followers of Jesus were fleeing in fear.



So loved ones, stop and consider afresh the powerful signs that accompany Jesus' death: Behold God's signs

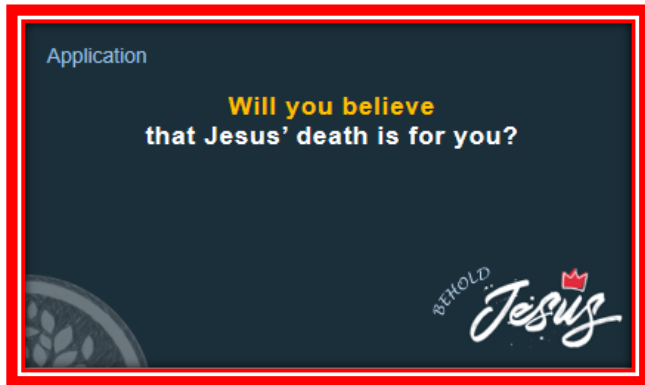
³⁸ John 19:40

of judgment at the cross. See the darkness, the disconnection, and the sacrificial death of Jesus who died in your place.

Behold God's signs of life after the cross. See reconciliation, resurrection, and reception made possible for all people ... just like you.

And behold God's signs of fulfillment in the burial of King Jesus. God's promises are kept in the perfect timing, honor, and love that our Lord received in His burial.

So now, how will you respond to the death of Jesus?



Will you believe that Jesus' death is for you?

Your eternal hope depends on your response to Jesus' death. Will you surrender your pride, and turn from your sin, and believe that Jesus died to pay for your sins and rose from the dead 3 days later to bring you to God and give you eternal life?

Christian, will you see that the cross of Christ freed you from sin's power, so that now you no longer need to continue living in sin?³⁹

Because once you believe Jesus' death is for you, you will delight to proclaim this good news to others. You will no longer content yourself to be a secret follower. Your hope in your eternal life with God will be sure and steadfast, and your confidence in God's rescue plan for sinners will empower your humble and courageous witness to others.

So dear friends, ask God to increase your faith today. Believe that God is able to save you from your sins. Believe that Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to the Father to give you everlasting life.



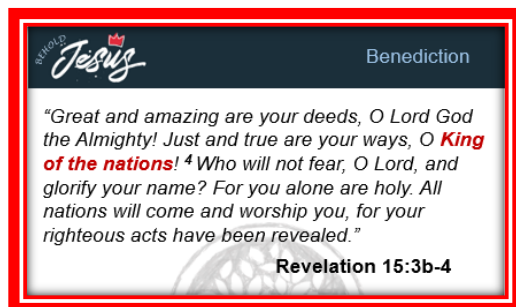
May God help us all to boast more in the power of the cross in our worship and witness for Jesus.

Let's pray.

<<And Can It Be?>>

³⁹ Romans 6:1ff; Galatian 5:1ff

Let's pray our benediction together:



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on The Cross' Power:

- Deuteronomy 21:22-23
- Psalm 22:1, 6-8, 12-18; 69:21
- Isaiah 53:9
- Ezekiel 37:12-14
- Matthew 12:40
- Mark 15:33-47
- Luke 23:44-56
- John 19:28-42
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-23
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 3:13
- Hebrews 6:19-20; 10:19-22

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-veil-was-torn-in-two>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/temple-veil-torn.html>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/veil-torn-jesus-cross/>

- *The Garden The Curtain and The Cross*, Laferton
- *The Darkness and the Glory*, Harris

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 27:45-61. Discuss how the following attributes of God are displayed in the cross: sovereignty, righteousness, wrath, and love. Explain which supernatural sign of God's power is your favorite (and why) at the cross.
2. Read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Discuss several ways in which the cross fulfills Old Testament prophecies and expectations.
3. Read Mark 15:43, Luke 23:50-51, and John 19:38-39. What must have compelled Joseph and Nicodemus to defile themselves on Passover and so publicly associate with Jesus before their fellow leaders on the Sanhedrin? Share an example of when your love for Jesus overcame your fear of man.
4. Read Hebrews 6:19-20 and 10:19-22. What gives you confidence to enter into our holy God's presence today, and not be consumed? What does it mean for you to enter into God's presence?
5. Read Ezekiel 37:12-14. How does the cross of Christ fulfill this new covenant promise? (C.f. Mt 27:52-53) Discuss together how Jesus' death brings eternal life for all who believe (John 11:25-26).