

## The Torn Veil — Mark 15:33-39

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. The Talmud <sup>[1]</sup>

1. This coming Friday evening marks the beginning of the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur on the Jewish calendar.
2. Yom Kippur means the “Day of Atonement” when in the ancient temple, the high priest would enter the Holy of holies and sprinkle the blood of a goat on the lid of the box called the ark of the covenant which held the 10 Commandments.
3. The blood provided atonement, a covering of protection from God’s judgment for one more year — till the next Yom Kippur when the blood would have to be reapplied.
4. You see, inside the Holy of holies, the visible presence of God dwelled.
  - a. it appeared in the form of a bright cloud that appeared over the ark,
  - b. between the outstretched wings of the two cherubim that formed the lid of the ark — called the mercy seat.
  - c. God’s desire was to be in fellowship with His people,
  - d. but sin drives a wedge between God and man —
  - e. so God provided a place and way for sin to be atoned for and covered over at the mercy seat.
  - f. this atonement was provided once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement — Yom Kippur.
5. But all of this took place in the ultra-secret privacy of the Holy of holies which was buried deep inside the inner rooms of the temple.
6. The high priest had to pass through a thick curtain that hung across it’s single door when he entered to make atonement — no one witnessed the spreading of the blood and the atonement made there.
7. So God provided another ritual so all the people waiting outside could know what was going on inside, behind the veil.
8. At the same time the goat was selected for the sacrifice of the atonement blood, another wasn’t selected to be the scapegoat.
  - a. this goat was sacrificed — it was chosen for another role.
  - b. the Jewish Talmud, which is a collection of commentaries on

- the OT, tells us the priests tied a red ribbon to the head of the scapegoat.
- c. then the people would line up, making a pathway out of the temple grounds, and stretching for miles to the east, all the way to a hill far out in the Judean wilderness.
  - d. they would then turn the goat loose, and begin making all kinds of racket behind it, scaring it away from the temple toward the wilderness.
  - e. as it went, the people would watch the ribbon,
  - f. for the Talmud tells us that at the moment the high priest sprinkled the blood in the Holy of holies and made atonement for the people, the ribbon turned from red to white, a sign their sins were forgiven.
9. But the Talmud also tells us a terrifying thing happened on the Day of Atonement around 40 years before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.
- a. one year, as the people waited, the ribbon never turned white.
  - b. and though the goat went off into the wilderness,
  - c. the people returned to Jerusalem in despair — never had such a thing happened.
  - d. what added to the trouble of this day's concerns was that the locked ceremonial gates of the temple swung open of their own accord.
  - e. these gates were massive & tightly shut; no wind could have stirred them.
  - f. so the scholars gathered to discuss what these things could mean.
  - g. they concluded God was sending them a message:
  - h. that He was no longer accepting the atonement sacrifice & His presence had left the temple.
  - i. in light of this, they concluded the destruction of the temple was not far away. 10. They were right — in 40 years it would be completely dismantled by the armies of the Roman general, Titus.

### **B. Today**

1. Our passage today explains why God stopped honoring the Day of Atonement,
2. And why the gates of the temple opened on that particular Yom

Kippur in 30 AD.

## II. TEXT

### A. Set The Scene

1. As we come to our text, Jesus has been fixed to a Roman cross at a place just outside the walls of Jerusalem called Golgotha — which means, “Place of the skull.”
  - a. it was called that because rock had been quarried from the hill that framed the backdrop of the site.
  - b. the holes left by the quarrying made the hill look a lot like a human skull.
  - c. now, I know the popular image we have of the crucifixion is that it took place on top of the hill,
  - d. but that is not where Romans crucified their victims.
  - e. they placed them alongside busy roads where those who passed by could see them up close and take notice.
  - f. they wanted to send a warning — “Mess with Rome, and you’ll end up like this.”
  - g. a main highway passed right by the foot of the hill of Golgotha,
  - h. and it was at the edge of this road the Romans placed their crosses with the hill behind them.
2. So there’s Jesus, impaled by three spikes, surrounded by a crowd of angry priests & Pharisees who’ve just been itching for this moment.

### B.V.33

**Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.**

1. The 6th hour was 12 — Noon. For 3 hours, until 3 p.m. there was a thick darkness that covered the land.
2. This couldn’t have been a solar eclipse because it was the Passover, which is always set by the full-moon.
3. So this had to be some kind of supernatural phenomenon that drew a curtain over the scene.
4. Why God dimmed the lights we’re not told — but I think we can venture a good guess.
  - a. it was during this time that Jesus was made sin.
  - b. as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21

**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us,**

**that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

- c. sin brings shame — so the Father drew a curtain of darkness across the scene to protect the dignity of His Son from the eyes of those who would mock Him.
- d. but then again — maybe the darkness came to protect, not the Son, but those who stood looking on!
- e. for in those 3 hours, Jesus suffered the collective weight of all of mankind's sin
- f. how hideous that torment — how appalling the consequences of all that sin.
- g. to witness Jesus' agony may have simply been too much for anyone to endure —
- h. especially the women who were huddled at the foot of the cross; His mother, Mary Magdalene & the others.

**C. Vs. 34-36**

**34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

- 1. As the period of darkness came to a close & Jesus' suffering for sin reached its apex, He cried out in Aramaic the opening words of Psalm 22.
- 2. This Psalm, written by David about a thousand years before Jesus, is an eerily accurate picture of crucifixion, a form of execution that wasn't even invented until hundreds of years after David's time.
- 3. Listen to the Psalm 22 —

**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? 20 My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. 61 am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"**

- a. this is exactly what the priests said as they mocked Him!

**Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none**

**to help. 12 Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. 3 They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. 15 strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.**

b. an apt picture of the sufferings of the scourging & crucifixion.

**16 dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.**

c. how clearly this was fulfilled in the cross.

d. though many of His joints would dislocate in the crucifixion, not a single bone was broken.

**18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.**

e. there, just a short way away the soldiers were gambling to see who would win His clothes.

4. The last half of the Psalm tells how the Lord will deliver His Servant and cause His salvation to extend to the ends of the earth & all nations.
5. Jesus uttered this cry to point those who looked on to think back to the words of David & realize what they were seeing before them was nothing less than the literal fulfillment of the Psalm.
6. It was a prophecy of what the Messiah would endure so that salvation could come.
7. But what Jesus said here was also literally true.
  - a. in this moment, as the climax of suffering for sin arrived,
  - b. God turned his face from Jesus, & the fellowship He had enjoyed with God for eternity was suspended.
  - c. it was this that made for the greatest torment Jesus endured.
  - d. for His whole life was His communion with God.
  - e. but the holiness of God demanded that a division take place, even if it were for just a moment as Jesus became sin for us.
  - f. this separation between Jesus and God is what made for the greatest agony of the long ordeal that day.
8. Some of the commoners who happened to be standing round heard

these words and thought he was crying out for help from one of the prophets...

**35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, “Look, He is calling for Elijah!”**

- a. these were uneducated folk who didn't know the words of Psalm 22 but did know about the great prophet Elijah.
- b. when they heard Jesus cry out the Aramaic word for God “Eloi, Eloi,” they thought he meant ElUah.

**36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, “Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down.”**

9. Jesus has been on the cross now for 6 hours.
  - a. the loss of blood & exposure would mean that he was incredibly dehydrated.
  - b. this is another of the agonies of crucifixion.
10. John tells us in his gospel, Jesus said, “I thirst.”
  - a. there were just a few more minutes left till the end
  - b. and He had some very important last words to say
  - c. His mouth was so dry, forming the words was hard,
  - d. so He asked for something to moisten His mouth
11. Someone grabbed a sponge, dipped it into vinegar, put it on a short pole, and lifted it to His lips.

#### **D. Vs. 37-39**

**37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.**

1. There were two final utterances Jesus made.
2. The first He shouted out — “It is finished!”
  - a. His mission of providing atonement for sins was now accomplished.
  - b. His blood had been poured out and redemption had been made.
3. His last words were breathed out with His last breath — when He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.”
4. How important these words!
  - a. for they tell us that Death did not take Jesus.
  - b. Jesus did not battle death & lose as every other person in history.
  - c. no — Death did not take Jesus; He took death.
  - d. He breathed His last & surrendered His life, placing it in the

Father's hands.

5. When Jesus became a man in Mary's womb & took on a body, He willingly stepped into it.

6. Now, at the end of His mission, He stepped out of it.

7. And as He did, a shudder ran through all of nature...

**38 the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"**

8. The other gospels tell us that a large quake rocked the earth and caused much damage to the region.

9. The Roman centurion in charge of the execution detail had witnessed many crucifixions and knew that no one had ever died in the manner Jesus had.

a. he was used those upon the cross cursing those who looked on.

b. he was accustomed to being spat on by the condemned.

c. the victims of the Roman cross were usually pitiful specimens of the dregs of humanity.

d. but Jesus didn't appear as a victim at all — despite His obvious agony, He seemed to be pursuing some mysterious goal, and the cross was but the vehicle to it's end.

e. when Jesus died with a shout of victory, the echo of His voice literally shaking the ground beneath his feet, the centurion knew Jesus was far more than just one more man who'd been the victim of a cross.

f. He was the Son of God — and the Cross was the means, not of shame, but of exaltation.

### ***E. The Veil***

1. It's v. 38 I want to focus on today.

2. The gospels tell us when Jesus breathed His last, the veil that separated the most holy place from the rest of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

3. The Talmud says this veil was a palm's width thick.

a. but the Talmud is often given to exaggeration in such details and we can assume that's the case here —

b. but the point is — the veil that's mentioned here was no filmy gauze.

c. this was no light, lace cloth — it was a thick curtain

- d. it's whole purpose was to provide a barrier between the most holy place & the outside world.
4. No one was allowed in that room where the presence of God was manifested except the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement.
  5. In the time of Christ, since the ark of the covenant was lost, the most holy place was empty, & the high priest had nothing to sprinkle the blood on.
  6. Still, he would enter in, passing through the veil with the blood of atonement.
  7. But at the moment of Jesus' death, that veil, which had formed a barrier between God's holy presence & the world of sinful man was torn asunder.
  8. And when, on the next Day of Atonement 5 months later, the high priest went into the Holy of holies to make atonement, God made clear that His presence had left the temple by opening the temple gates.
  9. He made clear that the work of the high priest no longer availed to atone for sins by not turning white the red ribbon tied to the head of scapegoat.
  10. The message was clear — Jesus had forever fulfilled the rituals of the Law.
    - a. His blood brought perfect atonement.
    - b. the Blood of the Lamb of God makes the blood of the atonement goat unnecessary.
    - c. and the barrier between God & man has been forever removed in Christ.

### **III CONCLUSION**

#### **A. What It Means**

1. We need depend on a priest no longer to represent us before God.
2. Jesus is our High priest Who ever lives to make intercession for us.
3. His blood paves the way for us to come right in to God's presence.
4. Hebrews 4:14-16 puts it this way...

**14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in**



**all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

5. When the Jewish high priest went into the most holy place on Yom Kippur, he was anything but bold;
  - a. he was filled with fear & trepidation.
  - b. God's glory was so strong it was terrifying!
  - c. His holiness so pure, the high priest's own sinfulness was brought into high relief.
  - d. no, boldness was not a part of his service before God — terror is a far better description of what he felt.
6. But now, through Christ whose work on the Cross provides salvation & the forgiveness of sins — we can come with absolute confidence before God, knowing that it is not judgment we face, but mercy & grace.
7. Christian — the veil between the holy place and the world was removed when Jesus died.
  - a. that means we each have equal access to God.
  - b. we don't have to go through a priest anymore.
8. And we don't have to follow a ritual or routine in approaching God.
  - a. the veil is gone, which means the barrier is lifted.
  - b. the whole world now has become part of the holy place.
  - c. what the Lord wants us to realize is that His death brings the redemption of Earth.
  - d. it all belongs to God now — and no matter where we are, God is there and ready to commune with us.
9. Worship isn't just for some hill in Jerusalem, or some church building in Oxnard.
10. Worship is for every time & place because the Earth is the Lord's!

### ***B. Practice it***

1. The message of the torn veil is this — where ever you are, God is.
2. And He is there in all His presence & power. God is no less real & present in your life than He was in the Holy of holies when He appeared in the cloud of light.
3. He's there a
  - a. when you get up in the morning
  - b. when you take your shower

- c. when you brush your teeth
  - d. when you grab that first cup of coffee
  - e. when you drive to work or go about the morning chores at home
  - f. He's there when you're on the phone,
  - g. when you go to lunch, when you're doing the laundry,
  - h. when you pick up the kids, when you go to the polls on election day,
  - i. He's there when you shop, pay the bills, play a game on the computer
  - j. go to the show, go out for dinner, park it on the sofa & flip on the tube.
4. He's there.
  5. Jesus died to remove the barrier between God & man — the torn veil is the evidence His mission was successful.
  6. May we now live boldly in His presence — with every moment being unending worship to Him

---

[1]

Eastman, Mark The Search for the Messiah pg. iii