



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 27:50–56

Gospel of Matthew

“‘And the Graves Were Opened,’ or  
Mysterious Visitors from the Spirit World”

TRANSCRIPT

On behalf of the elders, I would like to express our appreciation to you for your generous giving to the ministry here at Believers Chapel. I must confess I am constantly amazed at the fact that in spite of the fact that we seem to make it very difficult for you to give by not even having a collection in the morning service, nevertheless you do give and support the work here.

The Scriptures tell us that as far as I can tell, that the work of God should be carried on by God’s people, and that giving should be giving out of gratitude for that which Jesus Christ has done for us and also as an act of worship. Now you know in the Lord’s work it is necessary for giving to take place. We all know that, but the thing that has made me especially grateful for you, and Believers Chapel has been, the fact that you have given without solicitation. We do not have a pledge system. We do not have a faith promise system, which is a disguised form of a pledge system. [Laughter] We do not send you prayer letters asking you for money with return envelopes enclosed within them.

We appreciate very much your prayer. We do request your prayer, but we want and I think I speak for the elders in this, we want your giving—all of our giving—to be out of gratitude for that which Jesus Christ has done, voluntary therefore, as the Lord has prospered us, and of course for the purpose for seeing that the Word of God goes forth. We are grateful to you. We appreciate the very generous giving that took place over the Christmas season, particularly, and we hope that you will

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continue to pray that God will meet the needs here. I think it’s a testimony to the working of God, and I want you to know that you are a testimony to us in your faithfulness and in the gratitude which you express in your giving.

Our Scripture reading is found in Matthew chapter 27 verse 50 through verse 56. We have, the Lord willing, three more studies in the Gospel of Matthew after this one, so we will, I think, finish 101 studies in the Gospel of Matthew. I’m sorry, I hoped to make it in 100, but I failed.

[Laughter]

Let’s look now at verse 50. Remember, our Lord is hanging upon the cross. He has just uttered that great fourth statement: “My God my God why hast thou forsaken me?” Shortly thereafter he said, “I thirst,” then, “It is finished,” and, “Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit.” Matthew does not contain those statements specifically, but we read in verse 50:

“Jesus when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit.

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were split. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept were raised.

The 53rd verse is not rendered accurately in the Authorized Version, and so I am going to render it very literally. The Authorized Version gives the impression that they came out of the graves after his resurrection and went into the city. Then the Greek text states that they came out of the graves when he died, and after his resurrection went into the city. It should be rendered this way:

“And, having come out of the graves, after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly saying, Truly this was the Son of God. And many women were there beholding afar off, who

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followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among whom were  
Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the  
mother of Zebedee’s children.”

May the Lord bless this reading from his Word.

Our subject for this morning is. “‘And the Graves Were Opened,’ or Mysterious Visitors from the Spirit World.” From nine in the morning until noon, Golgotha was teeming with activity. The passersby shouted their blasphemies at our Lord Jesus and the thieves that were hanging upon the cross. The soldiers uttered their calumnies that were directed at him. The chief priests, the elders, the scribes mocked and derided at him. The thieves at the side of the Lord Jesus, both of them for a while, then one, added their insults to the others, and then at twelve o’clock there came darkness.

What was the means of the darkness? Was it a dust storm that came off of the Arabian Desert? Was it a black sirocco that came from North Africa, sweeping over Egypt and then into the land? Was it an eclipse of the sun? Luke specifically states in his account, “the sun was darkened.” All of these explanations are ultimately unsatisfactory it seems to me. God brought the darkness. It was a supernatural sign of divine judgment. It was the means by which God desired to aide the observers of the interpretation of what was happening there. The darkness explains the cry, and the cry explains the darkness: my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me? It was a time of judgment for the Son. And the darkness is very fitting, for darkness was a sign of the curse of God in the Old Testament, and they would have been acquainted particularly with it with the Exodus. So it was a divine, supernatural sign. It was God who brought the darkness, and we leave it at that. We do think that it helps us to interpret “Immanuel’s orphaned cry,” to use Mrs. Browning’s expression.

Another question that we frequently think about when we think of this statement of our Lord that he made in the middle of his final utterances is this. How could God forsake God? That’s usually the form in which the question is put. Now if the question is simply that, how could God

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forsake God, then we must answer, that is impossible. What we have when our Lord Jesus says, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, is not God forsaking God.

The nature of the Trinity makes that impossible. In the Trinity or in the doctrine of the Trinity, we proclaim that there is one God who subsists in three persons. There can be no separation within the divine essence, and so consequently, God cannot forsake God. But we must not forget that while there is one divine essence, there are also three persons. And consequently, it is possible for the Father to forsake the human nature of the son. That is what was happening. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, possessing a divine and human nature, is suffering eternal judgment. He is dying as a man under the judgment of God, and also as the Son of God. The result is that he is able to be our substitute by his humanity and his offering sufficient in value. It has infinite worth, because it is the offering of the divine son. So it was the Father who forsook the son's human nature. That is what happened. We should not say God forsook God when Christ died upon the cross. God the Father forsook the human nature of God the Son.

This passage, following the desolate cry of our Lord, is also full of content. We have an account of the death—the physical death—which Matthew gives very briefly incidentally. He says when Jesus had cried with a loud voice he yielded up the spirit. And then following that, we have some symbolic events that depict aspects of the meaning of the death of Christ. The veil of the temple is rent in twain from top to bottom, signifying the end of the Mosaic Law and the Levitical cultus. There is a thunderous notice of judgment as the fate of the world, in the earthquake that shook, and in the rocks that were split.

And then in the resurrection or restoration of the saints who came out of the graves, we have a vivid picture of the fact that life flows from the death of the Son of God. Now this passage is also interesting for one other reason. It is the passage that contains the mention, the strange mention of the strange visitors from the spirit world. Who were these saints that came out of the graves when Jesus Christ died? What kind of resurrection did they have? Was it a resurrection like our Lord's resurrection, or was it simply a restoration to life? What happened to them after they appeared to

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many in the city? Some of these questions we cannot answer. Others I think, we can with good inferences, answer.

Now we went to look at first the physical death of Christ as Matthew describes it. Its very simply put in the 50th verse, “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit.” In thinking of the death of our Lord, it is important for us to separate two aspects of his death. The Lord Jesus died both spiritually and physically. He was dying spiritually when he cried out, my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me.

Spiritual death includes the separation of a person from God. For example, a large measure of the significance of the second death is eternal separation from the presence of the Lord. To be eternally separated from God is to die the second death, and to be eternally separated from God, under constant torment, is the biblical picture of hellfire. Our Lord Jesus must die spiritually if he is to die as our substitute. And so when he cried out, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, he was dying the second death, as the Bible puts the spiritual death. He was there suffering our hell in order that we might not have to suffer it.

There are people so speak about hell as being an experience in this life, and that there is no hell following. Coming to the 8:30 service this morning I again heard that doctrine—that false doctrine—over the air. It was stated that the only hell that we have is the maladjustment of our personalities that exist at the present time. There is no such thing as eternal hellfire. The facts are that maladjustment and anxiety and all of the forms of psychological maladjustment that we have today; all of these things are the only heaven that many people will ever have. Hell is something that follows our passage from this present experience. But the Lord Jesus died spiritually when he cried out, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me.

Then a moment later or two, he died physically, and you will remember that according to Luke he said, “Father into thy hands I commit my spirit,” and at that time he breathed his last, dying physically. So our Lord died two deaths. He died a spiritual death, and he died a physical death.

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Now he died them in reverse order. Men who are not believers die physically, and then the spiritual death which they inherit from Adam becomes eternal death and the second death, and they enter into the full experience of spiritual death. But our Lord Jesus, in order to make it very plain that he has died both of these deaths, he died spiritually and then he died physically. Believers have the great experience of having died their spiritual death in their substitute, the Lord Jesus. So when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus, it is said of us in places such as the Gospel of John, that we shall never die; that we have already received from him the blessing of a deathless existence. The meaning of that is that we shall not die spiritually.

Many of the saints have died physically. All of the saints to this present generation with the exception of a few have died physically, and we look forward if our Lord does not come, to a physical death. But the second death we will not experience because of faith in the Lord Jesus. As a matter of fact, it is possible we shall not die even that second death. If the Lord shall come in the air and we are caught up to meet him in the air, we not only escape the spiritual death—the second death of separation from God—that our Lord Jesus has borne for us. But we also escape the physical death. Now physical death is not pleasant, but it is not as significant as the spiritual death which is the ultimate death. It is no wonder the apostles would follow with great anticipation to the coming of the Lord Jesus, because they would escape physical death.

Therefore when we read this text, and it says Jesus when had cried again with a loud voice yielded up the spirit, we are to think of our Lord Jesus as there dying physically, having already died spiritually for the saints. “Death and the curse were in our cup, O Christ was full for thee / but thou has drained the last dark drop. ‘Tis empty now for me,” we often sing in our service around the Lord’s Table Sunday evening.

When he had cried again with a loud voice—now in studying the Bible, we always should put questions to the text. What does this mean when he cried again with a loud voice? Surely there was some content. After all, he had cried with a loud voice just previously and said, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me? Now here again he cries with a loud voice. The implication is that the

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voice had some kind of content; it was not just simply a dying shriek without any significance. When we put this passage together with the passages in the other Gospels, specifically the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John which give us the sixth other utterances our Lord uttered, it becomes evident that what this text refers to is the sixth of the utterances which our Lord made from the cross. It was that cry, “It is finished!” That was shouted out with a loud voice, the Bible tells us.

Now we said I think last week—I’ve forgotten exactly the circumstances—but I think I said last week that when our Lord Jesus cried out, it is finished, it was not the last gasp of a worn out, disintegrated life, but it was the exultant expression of joy because of the completion of the divinely determined work that the Father had given him to do. He did not say, I am finished. He said, it is finished, and by that indefinite “it”—found incidentally in only one word, actually the subject of the verb expressed in the Greek text, *tetelesta*—in the one word, translated “it is finished,” the very indefiniteness of the subject calls to mind all of the things the Lord Jesus intended to accomplish by his ministry here upon the earth. It is finished—the whole divine program.

Now it is I think a very interesting thing that this statement, it is finished, was probably no more than what everyone else on Calvary was saying at that very time. He said, it is finished. But the soldiers, too, were saying things like that when Jesus cried with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. They said, it is finished, and of course what they meant by that was, it’s finished; our work is over now we can go back to what we were doing before we were called upon to supervise the crucifixion of this man who has been an enemy to Rome.

And then it was, it is finished, so far as Mary Magdalene and the ladies were concerned. They too, no doubt, said well it’s all over. There is no hope now, and turned to go off again to the things that they had been involved in.

And you can just hear the chief priests and the scribes and the enemies of Lord also saying, it’s finished; now we won’t have to bother with that blasphemer anymore.

But when the Lord Jesus Christ cried out, it is finished, I want to tell you that the whole kingdom of darkness trembled at it’s foundations for Satan’s empire was finished when he cried out,

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it is finished. And furthermore, the redemption of the saints was accomplished when he cried out, it is finished. This was a triumphant assertion of achievement. It was a conquering shout, and just after what our Lord said, Father into thy hands I commit my spirit, and with that, his spirit burst into the presence of God in heaven and the joy of having done the work which he had come, and after thirty three years had accomplished.

When he had cried again with a loud voice. It is a beautiful statement. It is magnificent in the depths of its significance. It was a difficult thing to do the work that our Lord did. If all the angels in heaven were there to attempt to accomplish this with all the unified strength of these spirit beings, they could not have lifted the burden one inch from the floor. But our Lord Jesus has accomplished the whole of the work by virtue of the infinite worth of his own person and work.

Now there's another thing we want to notice about this. It says he yielded up the ghost, or the spirit. Now you know if we were to declare an intermission, and I were to put in your hands a concordance so that you could look up the expressions which the scriptural writers give us concerning the death of our Lord, and if you were able to also look at our harmony of the Gospels, you would discover a rather interesting thing in the descriptions of our Lord's death given in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

In any one of the cases, stress rests upon the fact that our Lord's death was a voluntary death. Mark and Luke—Mark says it twice I think—Mark and Luke say he breathed his last; he breathed out his spirit or he expired. The idea simply he breathed his last breath. John says he delivered over his spirit. It's the same word that is used to describe the Father delivering over the Son for the work of the cross. It's the same word that is used to describe our Lord's delivery of himself to the cross. He loved me and he delivered himself over for me, and in the Johannine account, the text says he delivered over his spirit over to the Father.

Matthew uses a slightly different word, but it essentially means, to send forth, to dismiss, to release. To render it, he dismissed his spirit—stress rests upon the voluntary character of our Lord's death. No evangelist—this is most striking—no evangelist, no one of the Gospel writers, says that



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our Lord died. Isn't that interesting? Not a one of them says that he died. That might suggest that he was a prisoner of circumstances. That might suggest that he was forced to do something that he did not wish to do. Each one of them stresses the voluntary character of our Lord's death. He dismissed his spirit. He was the conqueror of the moment of his death. All through this entire account you can see it.

There's one other thing. If you had been in Jerusalem at the time of the Lord's suffering, and if you were a believing Jew, it would be your responsibility to slay the Passover lamb. You would have made preparations. You would have, on Thursday or Friday morning, obtained your lamb. You would have had it inspected by the priests in order to see that it was really a spotless lamb, and then on the Friday afternoon you would have taken your animal to the temple courts and there the priests would have slain the lamb. Do you know what time they begin to slay the lamb? About three o'clock. Do you know what time our Lord uttered his cry, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, and then, Father into thy hands I commit my spirit? About three o'clock.

The very moment that the Son of God was delivering himself over the Father in physical death is the moment that the slaying of the Passover lambs was taking place in the temple courts. Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The very moment that they were slaying the typical lambs, the antitypical Lamb of God was giving up his life on the cross as the priest of the sacrifice that takes away all our sin.

O the marvelous providence of God. All of the chief priests, all of the elders, all of the thieves could not prevent the accomplishment of the will of God even in the precise time that our Lord gave up his spirit to the Father. When he had cried again with a loud voice, he yielded up the ghost.

At the moment our Lord yielded up the ghost, suddenly there came a light. The darkness diminished and soon it was light again. Verse 45 says, now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour—that was three o'clock in the afternoon. So when our Lord

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breathed his last, immediately there was light again. Now that of course tells us a great deal now.

That tells us that the curse is lifted, for the curse has been borne by the Son of God.

The physical death was essential, because it was part of the curse. Adam’s sin brought spiritual death to all, and that spiritual death issues in physical death. It is part of the judgment for sin. So when our Lord dies the physical death, the whole of the judgment has been borne, and light again breaks forth.

But that is also accompanied with other signs. We read in verse 51, “And behold the veil of the temple was torn in two, or rent and twain, from top to bottom. That is what I have called in *Believers Bible Bulletin* a dispensational sign, and what I mean by that is simply this. You remember in the Old Testament the solemn day for the children of Israel occurred once a year was the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, the children of Israel, with their high priest in charge of the ceremonies, went through a very important ritual sacrifice. That sacrifice was designed to renew the covenant for one more year. Specific instruction is given to the priests in Leviticus chapter 16, and the high priest in particular, that they are not to go into the holiest of all.

The Tabernacle was divided into two sections: one, the holy place; the second, the holiest of all. In the holiest of all was contained the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat and the cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat. Inside were certain articles, including the Ten Commandments and Aaron’s rod that budded in the tabernacle.

Once a year the high priest went into the holiest of all, but God told Israel and the priests, the high priestly family specifically, in Leviticus 16:2, that they were not to go into the holiest of all but once a year. That was the place of the presence of God. The presence of God was off limits for the children of Israel throughout the whole of the Old Testament. That all was symbolical of course of the fact that the ultimate reconciliation had not yet been accomplished. So on the Day of Atonement, the high priest laid aside his garments of glory and beauty. He put on his linen garments which were used just on this day, and he after a certain ritual went into the holiest of all and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, renewing the covenant for one more year.

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Now the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, after he has cried his last, we read that the veil of the temple—now that is the veil that stands between the holy place and the holiest of all. In the days of the temple, it was sixty feet high. It was made out of gorgeous material and no doubt this was reported by the priests who were in service about the temple. At the moment that our Lord Jesus died in the afternoon when he yielded up his spirit, suddenly there was this awful tear in that curtain that was in the temple, and from the top to the bottom it was ripped in twain. That was designed to signify that entrance into the holiest is now open for every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews who lays great stress on the Day of Atonement, and it's significance for the Christian doctrine of redemption, stresses the fact that now the veil which for him was the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ—we are to think in his thought of the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ as being the veil hindering us from entering into the presence of God because the redemption is not yet accomplished—he thinks of our Lord's suffering and death finally as the rending of his flesh, his death therefore making it possible for us to enter into the presence of God.

And in Hebrews 10:19, he not only says this is possible, but he calls upon the believers to enter the holiest, “Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus by new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

In other words, when the veil was rent in twain, it was God's intention that this great sign should tell us that by virtue of what Christ has done, we may enter into the very presence of God and there worship him, having the privilege at any moment, at any time that that Aaron, the priest alone in the Old Testament, had only on one day out of the year. What a magnificent privilege it is to be able to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, with our worship, with our petitions, in order that we may truly fellowship with him. I want you to know that if there was a Jewish believer sitting in the audience who didn't know anything about this and came to an understanding of what this really meant—for they would have to stand off outside and see Aaron

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alone go in year after year; no one ever saw the inside of the holiest of all—they would jump three feet out of the chairs and shout a lot of halleluiahs. You can be assured of that.

Now that’s the first sign that took place, but there is another. We read in—Oh, I failed to mention this—but then you not expect a person who loves the doctrine of the sovereignty of God to mention this—did you notice that the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom? It was not of human activity. It was not a human accomplishment. It was a divine accomplishment. It was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, as if God in heaven started the rip that ultimately lead to the entrance of the holiest of all. Arminians notice. [Laughter]

There was a physical sign also. There was an earthquake, and the earth did quake and the rocks were split. This of course was simply a sign of the approbation of the sufferer who was suffering, and also a sign of the anger of God against the persecutors. If you’ll study the Old Testament doctrine of the earthquake, you’ll discover that most of the time, earthquakes were symbols of the presence of God, and I think the majority of times earthquakes were the symbol of the presence of God in intervention by judgment. We think of the New Testament, and it’s stress upon the fact that at the sixth seal, there was a great earthquake. Earthquakes predominate in the unfolding of the final judgment sounds. So the earthquake that took place was a sign of the fact that God was angry with those who put Jesus Christ to death, and judgment was ultimately to come.

But finally, there was a third sign. It was a spiritual sign it was a sign of the graves opening. There are several questions that come to us. For example, who were raised? Some have said the Old Testament saints were raised. It was Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David—some of those saints. Well I don’t think that is possible myself, because the text says that they were raised and they went into the city and appeared unto many, and the implication is that when they appeared to many, those that to whom they appeared would have recognized them.

And I would imagine that if David or Abraham—if Abraham was to walk in through this door at the present moment (I don’t think he will) [laughter] but if he should walk in at this moment, I don’t think any of you would say, why there’s Abe [laughter] You wouldn’t say that. You wouldn’t

know what Abraham looked like. You wouldn't know what David looked like. These went into the city and appeared unto many, so it seems more likely to me that they were those who had recently died, who were friends of those who were still living. That would have had a special force for them too.

Now they were raised at our Lord's death and they went into the city after his resurrection. That was not a lengthy period of time. It was just one day. Our Lord died on Friday afternoon on Sunday morning he rose from the dead, or during the night sometime he rose from the dead, so they remained in the cemetery, in the vicinity of the tomb for one day.

Now since that was the Sabbath day, it would not be surprising that they should remain there. I would imagine that they had a few things to say to one another after having had that experience anyway. So they remained there, and on the resurrection day they came into the city and they appeared to many.

What kind of resurrection did they experience? Well some have said they were just ghostly visitants. They were apparitions; that is, they really were not raised as we think of raised, but the people in the cities saw these apparitions, these ghostly visitants that came out of the tombs, such as the vision that the apostles had when Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration. Well, I think that the text would deny that, because we do read the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints—notice there is great stress on the term, body—bodies of the saints that slept were raised, so I don't think that is a reference to any kind of apparition.

Was it possible that they came into the city and came into the city with resurrected bodies like our Lord Jesus Christ had? I doubt that, because they were raised from the grave before our Lord was raised. Now if that is true the Apostle Paul could not say in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that Jesus Christ is the first fruits from the dead. He says that twice. The only person who has ever been resurrected with a glorified body at the present time is the Lord Jesus. Paul goes on to argue that the resurrection order is this: first our Lord Jesus Christ, then those that are Christ's at his coming, and only our Lord has been resurrected with a resurrected, glorified body. Others have been restored to

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life; they were restorations, but these men were restored to life, lived out their life and died. So here it seems to me that we cannot say these are men who have glorified bodies, but rather we must finally reach the conclusion—and incidentally, I don’t want you to think that I am speaking in such a way that I could not be wrong on something like this; after all I want to protect my tracks when we get to heaven, so you won’t come up and say, “Oh you were wrong on that too, Dr. Johnson.” [laughter] It is my opinion that what we have here is restoration to life in a physical body, such as the resurrection of Lazarus or some of the other five or six people in the New Testament who were raised, restored to physical life. I would assume that the Scriptures do not say anything about this, that they lived out their lives and died again just as Lazarus did.

Now having said that, Matthew goes on to say, “Now when the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly saying surely this was the Son of God.” Luke says that the centurion said, truly this was a righteous man. The centurion was a Roman centurion, by the way. In the Bible, the Roman centurions always appeared in a favorable light; not a one appears in anything but a favorable light, they evidently were remarkable, natural men in their time.

This centurion had seen many people die upon a cross, we may assume. But he saw something there that was different from all the other crucifixions that he had ever seen. He saw the darkness that came over the land—a kind of eerie, supernatural, luminous type of darkness, and furthermore, when this individual who was hanging upon the cross breathed out his last, he heard at that very moment the very earth shake, and then after he had died he saw the light suddenly appear again.

He had heard him make some amazing statements, because men who are being crucified usually railed upon those who were putting them to death, upon all who were standing about in curiosity seeing them die. In fact, they uttered such horrible language and such terrible insults at those who were putting them to death and the others who were observing, that the Roman soldiers frequently climbed up and cut out their tongues while they were being crucified, in order that they

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wouldn't have to listen to them. But this man died differently. He was a man who said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. He looked around and he saw a woman, and he said, Woman, behold thy son; behold thy mother, to a young man standing over in the side who had rushed off with the rest, but who had managed to kind of skulk back to the crowd that was around the cross.

He heard him shout out, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, complaining not to men, but addressing his prayer to God. How different from the usual person who died. He had heard him say, I thirst, and he had heard him say, Today thou shalt be with me in paradise. And finally he had heard him say, Father into Thy hands commit my spirit. The text says when the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus saw the earthquake and those things that had happened, he cries out, this Roman centurion, this Gentile, cries out, This was truly a righteous man; and then as if to move from that to higher ground he said, Truly this was the Son of God.

Now the text could be rendered, this is *a* Son of God, or it can be rendered the Son of God—I think the latter is more likely—but there are things that make me sure that that is the sense. In the first place, remember what our Lord has said. He said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do; then he has said, Father just before this, Father into thy hands I commit my spirit. Truly this was the Son of God—why the very term itself in the context of Father directed toward heaven would suggest that he understood that the Lord Jesus was the Son of God.

In the Markan account, it also is evident that this is the meaning, because Mark begins his Gospel by saying, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus, Messiah, the Son of God. Now he is writing to Gentiles, and he wants Gentiles to come to understand that Jesus is both the Messiah and also the Son of God and the climax of this Gospel is this very circumstance here. And when in the Markan account we read that the centurion, this Roman centurion for whom Mark was writing symbolically, specially this Roman centurion, cries out truly this was the Son of God, it's as if Mark says this is the whole purpose of my Gospel, and I have selected this conclusion in order to show you how the Holy Spirit this man came to understand the nature of the person and work of our Lord Jesus that I'm trying to present in my own Gospel. I have no doubt in my own mind that when he writes, truly this

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man was the Son of God, he is not saying that the Lord Jesus is a kind of hero; he is not a kind of demi-god, but he is the true Son of God—a God, the very God.

John Maysfield has written a drama called *The Trial of Jesus* in the light of the tradition that the centurion’s name was Longinus, and he ultimately became a Christian. Mr. Maysfield has the centurion go back to Pilate to hand in his report of the crucifixion of the Lord. The report is given, but Pilate’s wife is sitting nearby, and she calls out to the centurion, and she begs him to tell her what happened on the cross. And so he describes what happens, and when he finishes she said to him, do you think he’s dead? And Longinus says, “No lady, I don’t.”

“Then where is he?,” she says.

He says, “Let loose in the world, lady, where neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth.” In other words, Mr. Maysfield presents him as understanding that our Lord was the Son of God, and furthermore that death was not the end of him. That he truly would be raised from the dead and his truth could not be stopped by anyone. He is the triumphant Son of God.

Well the passage concludes with a reference to the faithful women. The men—the “stronger sex” had fled. One of them, John, had, I say, skulked back to the cross, standing over by the side. The rest of the apostles had fled like wounded animals, and the women remained. The weaker sex, a noble band of women who had ministered to the Lord Jesus of their substance, without any pledge cards or without any prayer letters with envelopes, self-addressed envelopes in those letters. They had ministered of their substance to the Lord Jesus, and here in the final test of things they were stronger in courage and loving sympathy than the apostles themselves. It was the grace of God that he chose twelve men to be apostles. If he had chosen on the basis of courage in the final moments, it would have been twelve women and not twelve men—perish the thought [laughter] but nevertheless.

Well now our time is really up. I hope you will read the *Believers Bible Bulletin*. I don’t want us to lose ourselves in details the most important things here are simply this: that Christ’s death is the end of the legal age; the final sacrifice has been offered; access is available to all. Christ’s cross is the ground of judgment, a judgment to come. My dear Christian friend, when the Bible speaks about



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judgment to come, there is always judgment to come, because the judgment is everlasting. And those who fall into the hands of everlasting judgment, after they have experienced everlasting judgment for ten thousand years, it is still to come, still to come—everlasting judgment.

And Christ’s cross is the source and the resurrection in the life. The cross has been a symbol of unknown of infamy and shame to the natural man, but now it’s the most precious symbol of honor, blessing and redemption for the living saints. His death is the death of death, for he died that spiritual and physical death that is the means by which we are delivered from death. You know, it would weary the arm of an angel to recount all of the wonders of the cross of the Lord Jesus. May the Lord enable us to respond as the centurion: truly this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, again as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, a servant of him [recording ends].