

November 18

Mark 15

Matthew 27

John 19

There are seven words from the cross: 1) "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" -- Luke records that statement. I am sure that it was made either while or right after the soldiers nailed Him to the cross. 2) "Mother, behold your son, son behold your mother" (from John's gospel) to Mary and to John at the foot of the cross. 3) "Today you will be with me in paradise" to the repentant thief who asked for Christ to remember him when He came into His kingdom. 4) In today's reading, "I am thirsty" - it brought yet another part of the 22nd Psalm to John's mind. 5) "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That anguished cry is a direct quote from verse 1 of Psalm 22. Both Matthew and Mark record that Christ said this from the cross. 6) "It is finished" and 7) "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." He would have said that, as Luke records, right before He died.

Let's unpack a few of these in today's accelerator as a way to understand the death of Jesus.

It is in the context of Jesus' understanding of His impending death that His words on the cross, recorded by both Matthew and Mark, must be understood. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" Those words underscore the fact that Jesus Christ was the sin-bearer, and God in His righteousness turned away from His own begotten son. In those hours of darkness hanging on the cross, He was bearing our sin, paying the penalty for our sin, and He was separated from God. That was the cup Jesus didn't want to drink, but God's will was done, and He bore our sins and He paid our debt.

At the moment of Christ's death, after He said, "It is finished" and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. It was a supernatural act. The Temple veil was a huge, heavy 6 inch curtain. Nothing less than a supernatural act could have torn it that way at just that moment. That veil is what separated the people of God, from God's direct presence in the "Holy of Holies." Only the priest went there and only once a year. When the veil was torn, it was God saying – now there is no barrier between God and people! Everybody has access to God through Jesus and his death in this very moment. It was a symbol God had set up hundreds of years before to send a clear message to you and me that we have access to God!

The last detail that only Matthew records for us is the fact that special efforts were made by the Jews and Romans to secure the grave of Christ, because they

knew about Christ's prophecy that after three days He would rise again. They didn't really believe that He could, but they were concerned about a clever deception on the part of His disciples who might break into the tomb, steal the body and then say, "He is risen!" So they set a guard and they sealed the tomb. There would have been two very strong deterrents. Roman centurions who failed to achieve their object on duty were liable to be killed. That made them fairly diligent and the penalty for breaking a Roman seal was also death. The fact of the guard and the seal, the fact that the Jews were guarding against a fake resurrection, only makes it more certain that when the tomb was discovered to be empty it could only have been because Christ really rose! The enemies of Christ helped to prove the resurrection!!

A few quotes worth noting from John's account... First, John mentions the appeal by the Jewish leaders for Pilate to change the wording of the sign over the cross from "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" to "He said He was the King of the Jews." Pilate refused their request. He said, "What I have written I have written." One more sign from God that Jesus is the king people were waiting for.

Secondly, John takes a special interest in pointing out the connection between some of the things that happened that day and the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah. He connects the gambling for Christ's garments to Psalm 22, the word "I am thirsty" to the fulfillment of that same Old Testament Psalm. The fact that His legs were not broken is linked to the Old Testament as well - probably John was thinking of the Passover ritual and also of Psalm 34:20 at that point. He also quotes Zechariah 12:10, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

Third, John records three of Christ's statements from the cross that are omitted in the other gospels. He alone reports the brief word to Mary His mother and to John who identifies himself in chapter 19 as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." It makes sense that John would record this part since he WAS "the disciple whom Jesus loved." They, along with Mary's sister and two other Mary's were standing right at the foot of the cross. "Dear woman," he said indicating John, "Here is your son" and to John He said, "Here is your mother."

Later John tells us He said, "I am thirsty" prompting the offer of some wine vinegar on a sponge and then at the end He said, "It is finished." Jesus was not simply signaling the end of His life, but rather was telling us that His mission had been accomplished by the remission of our sins because by His substitutionary death on the cross He had completely paid the debt for our sin.

The second thing he said...which is last in this accelerator is "Today you will be with me in Paradise." He did it because of a small statement of a thief who died next to him requesting "Remember me when you come into your kingdom?" Of

course, Jesus welcomes all who trust in him... even if they don't have good theology or a good moral record. Jesus welcomes the thief. And he welcomes you if you believe that on the cross "It is finished." If you believe that Jesus died for you. If you believe that God gave his son as a substitute for you. He accepted the thief. He holds his nail scarred hand out to you too. Why don't you take that hand today?