

Jesus' Remarkable Conduct In Death.

Text: Luke 23:44-46

Suggested Hymns:

61, 69, 48, 330, 54

1) Even in death Jesus reveals His power over nature

2) Jesus voluntarily lays down His life

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 23:44-46, ***“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. ⁴⁵ Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’” Having said this, He breathed His last. (NKJV)***

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On this day Jesus died. Jesus died — what solemn thoughts this information conveys to our minds! Why is it that Jesus' death touches the Christian's heart with a sensation so peculiar?

Why is it that we commemorate His death with so profound a sorrow, but at the same time, with latent joy because He bought the great sacrifice of His life? Why is it that Jesus' death means even more to us than His birth, and His advent in this world?

We celebrate the birthdays of great men, of those to whom we are indebted for the betterment of our earthly conditions and on their anniversaries we thankfully recall to our minds their great achievements in the world.

With feelings of gratitude we celebrate the birthdays of Martin Luther, the great Reformer, and of the King or Queen of the Commonwealth.

But we soon forget to commemorate the dying day of these heroes, or, if we do remember them, it is nothing compared with the celebration of the day when they saw the light of this world.

Why is it that Jesus' death is not forgotten and that it is so dear to the Christian?

It is because His death is as important to us as His life, because in His death centres and culminates His great work, because by the sacrifice of His life He accomplished the very purpose for which He came into this world, the redemption of the whole fallen, sin-stricken human race— in short, because He died for us, the Sinless One for the sinners, the Righteous for the unrighteous.

How dear to us the last moments are of those of whom we know that they loved us! How sacred to us is their blessed memory!

Let us hear the account which the Word of God gives us of the last moments of Jesus Christ who sacrificed His life for us because He loved us more than father, or mother, or sister, or brother, or friend.

Jesus' remarkable conduct in His suffering and death has been the general topic during this Lenten season. Our text tells how Jesus conducted Himself in death. Let us consider *Jesus' Remarkable Conduct In Death*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Even In Death Jesus Reveals His Power Over Nature.

Our text begins, ⁴⁴ *Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.* ⁴⁵ *Then the sun was darkened.* Our dear Lord was crucified in the third hour of the day and He died in the ninth hour. His suffering on the cross lasted from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon.

But in the sixth hour, that is, at twelve o'clock at noon, when the sun reached its height, there was a most peculiar phenomenon. The sun refused to shine. Darkness hung over the earth like a pall of death. The darkness lasted until three in the afternoon.

Was it an eclipse of the sun? It could not be. For this was the time of the Jewish Passover, and the Passover was always held during the full moon of spring, and everybody knows that an eclipse of the sun can never take place at the full of moon.

As to the extent of this darkness we know from the old historians that it was not confined to Palestine. A record of it was kept in the annals of Rome, and

Dionysius, a learned man from Athens who was converted to Christ by Saint Paul in the city of Athens, remembered well this inexplicable darkness.

After his conversion he tells that at the time he was at Heliopolis in Egypt, and, as he could find no physical cause for this darkening of the sun, he was led to exclaim at the time: *“Either the God of Nature must be suffering, or the machinery of the world is being dissolved.”*

In connection with this peculiar darkness Matthew tells of other most extraordinary phenomena accompanying Jesus’ death. We read in Matthew 27:52–53, ⁵² *and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;* ⁵³ *and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*

Not only was the great orb in the sky, the sun, affected by the death of the Son of God on Calvary, but also the earth, which drank His precious blood, was shocked. It trembled and shook, splitting the rocks and uncovering the graves near the scene of the terrible tragedy.

In some of these graves rested the bones of the saints, of such who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, and after Christ, the first fruits of those who slept, was risen from the dead, they also came forth from their tombs and appeared to those who knew them in Jerusalem, just as Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection.

But the most remarkable sign accompanying the death of the Son of God occurred in the temple. We are told, *and the veil of the temple was torn in two.*

Furthermore we read in Matthew 27:51, ⁵¹ *Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.* The temple was a large building with spacious halls and apartments. But the chief place was the sanctuary, which consisted of two large rooms, the holy place and the holy of Holies, partitioned off by a heavy embroidered curtain. This curtain was moved aside only once a year to allow the high priest to sprinkle blood against the ark of the covenant on the great Day of Atonement.

Was it by chance that this curtain was torn in two, as if torn in two by an unseen hand from the top to the bottom, the moment that Jesus died? No; the

Epistle to the Hebrews distinctly says that *with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*¹

Even while He was dying on the cross, the Son of God was strong enough to cause the veil of the temple to tear and to fall and thereby to show that now the Old Dispensation has ended, that all the sacrifices are abolished which had been but a foreshadowing type and prefigurement of His own great sacrifice, and that the wall is removed which previously had separated Gentiles and Jews.

Even while He was dying on the cross, the Son of God was strong enough to cause the earth to tremble and to shake, and the rocks to split apart, and the graves to open and produce their dead.

Even while He was dying on the cross, the Son of God was strong enough to cause the sun to hide its face in mourning and to cease to shine.

See, then, the remarkable conduct of Jesus in His death! See Him revealing His power over the natural world, which He had entered for the sake of redeeming the fallen human race, and which He is now about to leave so that He might return to heaven!

To the very last moment Jesus is the same who stilled the sea and hushed the storm and whom the winds and the waves had to obey.

See in the Man of Sorrows on the cross the Lord of nature, who even now has the power to make the sun spread a pall of death over the earth and to reveal to the children of men by nature's condolence and by the tearing in two of the veil in the temple that these are the most solemn hours the world has ever witnessed!

2. Jesus Voluntarily Lays Down His Life.

Another most remarkable thing in Jesus' conduct when He died on the cross is that voluntarily He laid down His life.

We are told, ⁴⁶ *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.*

The soldiers who were watching Jesus and the people who were witnessing the tragedy on Calvary were standing in awe during the hours of darkness and earthquakes.

They probably felt that there must be some connection of these signs of nature with the innocent Sufferer. We hear no more of reviling and mocking on their part. But in the third hour of the darkness they were suddenly startled by a loud cry from the lips of Jesus who hung in the middle of the two criminals.

It was a cry which pierced the darkness, and rang in their hearts, and must have been heard at a great distance. It was not a shriek or cry of pain, for Jesus cried the words, *“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit’”* with a loud voice. This was most extraordinary and marvellous indeed!

We should expect that, in consequence of the profuse loss of blood and the terrible pain He suffered, Jesus by this time must have been so exhausted and so weakened that He could scarcely speak in a whisper.

But to the very last moment He is in full possession of His vitality and strength. With, a loud cry He utters His last words and immediately ceases to breathe.

So amazing was this to those who witnessed His crucifixion and death that we read about the centurion in Matthew 27:54, *“So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”*

And of the people we are told in Luke 23:48, *“And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.”*

Jesus' death was a miracle in itself. It was true death in all its bitterness. It was not different from our death in this respect that the soul departed from the body, that the heart ceased to beat, and all the functions of life were stopped in the lifeless form of clay.

But in this respect Christ's death differs from the death of other men that He did not passively submit to the inevitable, but that with Him death was an act of His own free will. While we are powerless when death draws near, Jesus had full power to keep the king of terrors at bay. Death did not approach Jesus, but He approached death and made death take Him in the fullness of life. By His loud cry He shows that voluntarily He lays down His life.

In this sense also we must take the words, *He breathed His last*, or as recorded in John 19:30, *He gave up His spirit*, in an active sense. These words said of Jesus mean more than when said of ordinary human beings. It was not passive submission, but an act of His own power when He gave up His Spirit.

Jesus had distinctly said to His disciples, *I lay down My life that I may take it again.* ¹⁸ *No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*²

From Jesus' death we may learn how to die in peace and how to conduct ourselves when death draws near. He died with holy resignation, saying, *“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’”*

Jesus had already bidden farewell to this world when He said: *“It is finished,”* and now His thoughts were with His heavenly Father, whose will He had performed on earth, bringing the sacrifice of His life for the whole sinful world, and to whom He was obedient unto death.

What better thing can we do when our eyelids close in death than to entrust our soul to the heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been so merciful to us and granted us forgiveness of all our sins and life everlasting by the great work of His beloved Son?

This is what Stephen, the first Christian martyr, did. When the Jews stoned him to death, he called upon God and said, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”*³

This is what also John Huss did when he was led to the stake. When his enemies triumphantly declared that they were giving his soul to the devil, he calmly replied: *“But I commit my spirit into Thy hand, O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast redeemed it.”*

This is what also Luther did. When for the last time he crossed the threshold of his death chamber, he said three times in Latin: *“Into Thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.”*

May the Lord grant us all His grace that, when the time of our departure from this earth comes, we enter into the life which Jesus has gained for us by His death.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁴

While I draw this fleeting breath,

When my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgement-throne:
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hebrews 9:12

² John 10:17-18

³ Acts 7:59

⁴ Hymn 330