

September 18, 2005 by Steve Brandon



The Death of Christ

Matthew 27:45-54

1. Judgment (verse 45)
2. Abandonment (verse 46)
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In very recent days, the Roman Catholic Church released a 220 page volume describing the decline in health and eventual death of former Pope John Paul II. This volume contains entries in chronological order from January 31, 2005, until his death on April 2, 2005, giving a detailed description of his symptoms, the care he received and his response to that treatment. It records how his turn for the worse took place on the morning of March 31 when he was "hit by a shaking chill, followed by a sharp rise in temperature" to 103F. It records the final words he uttered from his mouth just six hours before he finally died. In Polish he said "with a very weak voice and with mumbled words, 'Let me go to the house of the Father.'" They were spoken at 3:30pm. A little before 7pm, he went into a coma. The official time of his death was registered as occurring at 9:37pm.

I'm sure that the Vatican published this report because of the curiosity of many in the Roman Catholic Church who feel the need to know of the event surrounding the death of their much loved Pope. This morning, we will look into the details surrounding the death of one who is far more important than Pope John Paul II. These details are given for us in Matthew 27:45-54, which give us the details surrounding the final three hours of the earthly life of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Over the past few weeks, we have heard about Jesus standing trial, being beaten, being crucified, and being mocked by the crowds. This morning, we have an opportunity to think about His death. Our text deals with the final moments of His life. By way of outline this morning, I want to use four words that help to explain what exactly took place when Jesus died upon the cross. The first word is ...

1. Judgment (verse 45)

We read in verse 45, "Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour." We have no idea how this darkness came to be. We know that it wasn't caused by an eclipse, for the Passover was always celebrated during a full moon, during which an eclipse is impossible. It may have been a sudden cloud cover. It may have been a dust storm. It may have been a rain storm. But I doubt that it was any of these things. I believe that it was something supernatural. Perhaps God, the Father, turned off the sun for a few hours, much like we turn off our light switches. Perhaps God, the Father, thought this moment to be too holy for others to behold with full clarity, and so he made it dark, so that the reality of seeing Jesus die would not be witnessed in the full brightness for all to see. It might very well be the case that it was dark enough for you to be able to see the stars in the sky. The only light during the time of Christ's death was the light of the torches that those around the cross would have lit.

Should you have wanted to take a picture of Jesus during this time, you would have needed a flash bulb. Should you have wanted to see the face of Jesus, you would have needed a torch closely to His face. When Jesus came into this world, there was a shining star above the stable where He was born. When Jesus left this world, there was a condescending darkness surrounding His death.

The question comes, "Why? Why the darkness?" I believe that it was a clear sign of God's judgment. Throughout the Bible, darkness is a sign of judgment. One of the plagues brought upon Egypt in the days of Moses was the darkness that came upon the land of Egypt (Ex. 10:21-29). In the book of Revelation, a portion of the judgment is the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars. Perhaps the most convincing argument that leads us to this conclusion is the darkness spoken of in the book of Amos. The prophet Amos tells of the day in which the Lord GOD would "make the sun go down at noon" (Amos 8:9). This is exactly what took place in death of Jesus. The sixth hour of the day was noon! In Amos, this speaks about a day of judgment, which, I believe, is the meaning of this darkness.

The next question comes, "Judgment upon whom?" I believe that it was judgment upon two groups of people. It was judgement upon the Jews, who committed the most evil sin that was ever done. Think about what the nation of Israel did. They "disowned the Holy and Righteous One ... in the presence of Pilate" (Acts 3:13, 14). They "asked for a murderer to be granted" in His place (Acts 3:14). They "put to death the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15). They "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). Here was perfect love and pure light. They did the worst thing imaginable to Him: they put Him to death.

It is one thing to sin against a fellow human being, whose sin may have stirred up your sin against him in the first place. But, it is another thing to sin against a holy God, who only sent grace into your life. David demonstrates this clearly in Psalm 51, after committing adultery and murder, which are terrible sins. He prayed to the Lord, "Against You, You only, I have sinned" (Ps. 51:4). It's not that his sin wasn't against Bathsheba and Uriah. It's that in comparison to his sin against God, sin against fellow men appears to be small. But, in the case of the Jews, they sinned against God, Himself, directly, putting Jesus to death! Thus, their sin was far greater than that of King David, who sinned against fellow sinners. And so, the dark judgment came upon the entire land of Israel.

But, there was another judgement taking place. God was judging Jesus as well.

I want for you to think about standing before God apart from Christ. You are beholding the throne of God upon which the Lord of Hosts is seated. The throne is high and lifted up. The one seated upon the throne is in dazzling white, that you can hardly stand to look at Him. Around the throne are four living creatures that are constantly saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev. 4:8). And the LORD asks for a video tape to be played of all the sins that you have every committed.

I want for you to think about the realities of all of your sin open and exposed before Him who hates sin with an utter hatred! God is so holy, that even the slightest lie is called an abomination to Him (Prov. 11:1). Those who are guilty before the Lord deserve everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

Such is the judgement that awaits you, if you believe not upon the Lord Jesus Christ. But, if you trust in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, you will go free on that day. The only reason that you will go free is because Christ was judged in your place. Should that video tape be played, Jesus would say to the Father, "Father, I paid for his sins upon the cross two thousand years ago. Let him go free. You cannot punish him, because you already punished Me in his place."

This is what the darkness represents. It represents God's judgment Christ, instead of God's judgment upon you in that final day. The only way that God, the Father, could ever judge Christ the Son was to abandon Him, which leads us to our next word, ...

2. Abandonment (verse 46)

"About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (verse 49). These words are loaded with significance. It has caused theologians to think and ponder hard for centuries to seek to fully grasp what was going on in this moment of time: God, the Father, was forsaking God, the Son.

For thirty-three years of His life, Jesus had known intimacy with the Father. He "came forth from the Father ... into the world" (John 16:28). While in the world, Jesus said, "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). Jesus did the work that God the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4). This intimacy came down even to the words that Jesus spoke. He said, "The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (John 14:10).

Never was there a time in the entire life of Jesus in which He was apart from the presence of God, the Father, until this moment upon the cross. Suddenly, the Father was gone! Jesus no longer felt or experienced the presence of His heavenly Father. Jesus felt truly abandoned and alone for the first time in His life.

Jesus knew what it was to be abandoned by other people. Surely during His life, there were many who were unfaithful to Him. Of the ten lepers that were healed, they all abandoned Him to pursue their own interests, except for one who came back to give thanks to Him (Luke 17:16). How many thousands did Jesus heal that left Him high and dry. Of the 5,000 that He fed, many went against His teaching (John 6:14). Many who heard Him gladly one day would leave Him the next due to His doctrine (John 6:60). Many who cried, "Hosanna" turned to cry out "Crucify Him" in less than a week. Then, there was Judas and the twelve, all of whom abandoned Him during His time of greatest need. So, Jesus knew what human abandonment was like.

Never did Jesus ever vocalize His own agony at those who left Him. When Judas betrayed Him, His words were only compassion, "Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). When Peter denied Him three times, it was only a look that Jesus gave to Peter (Luke 22:61). But, this moment upon the cross was far different. It was far more difficult for Jesus. It caused Him to scream in agony, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (verse 49). These weren't words of gentle whisper. They were "cried out" with a "loud voice."

For the Father to abandon Jesus was necessary for God to judge Jesus Christ in our place. There was no way that God would be with Jesus and judge Jesus at the same time. There had to be this divine abandonment for Him to be judged. So, when you hear Jesus cry out to His heavenly Father, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Listen to heaven calling down to Jesus, "So that I can save My people." Apart from the Father forsaking the Son, salvation would be impossible.

Think about how difficult this was for Jesus to bear. First of all, this was an entirely new experience for Him. He had never experienced alienation from His Father before. Second, His Father abandoned Him when He needed Him most. For all of the martyrs throughout the history of the church, this has not (and will not) be the case. In the hour of greatest need, God has always been faithful to sustain His people. God has promised, "I will never desert you, Nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

When Joshua was soon to lead the people into the promised land, the Lord told him, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Josh. 1:5). When David faced His troubles, he rested confidently in the Lord's help: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?" (Ps. 27:1); Israel was told, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Is. 41:10). We are promised that nothing can separate us from the love of God, "... not death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing" (Rom. 8:38-39). The famous story entitled "Footprints in the Sand" by Mary Stevenson is true!

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
"You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand,
is when I carried you."

Though for us this is true, such was not the case with Jesus. In the hour of His greatest need, God abandoned Him. God left Him to His own strength. "He bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24) without the help of the Father, without the help of the Spirit. He did this all by Himself. This ought to give you an idea of how powerful Christ actually is.

Furthermore, Jesus knew that this abandonment was coming. It didn't blindsides Him. The words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" come from the first verse of Psalm 22, which is known as the crucifixion Psalm. Consider the following verses from Psalm 22:

Verses 7-8 - All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head saying, ... Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."

This is exactly what those who looked upon Jesus as He was being crucified were saying to Him. In mockery, they were saying these things, just as Psalm 22 had prophesied.

Verses 14-15 - I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;

When Christ was upon the cross, it would have been easy for His shoulder to dislocate. Hanging in the hot sun as Jesus did, His throat would most certainly have been dry. John's gospel tells us that Jesus said, "I am thirsty" while upon the cross.

Verses 16-17 - A band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me.

These words are an amazingly accurate portrayal of what Jesus endured upon the cross. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he was nailed by His hands and His feet. When the soldiers came around to break the legs of Jesus to hasten His death, Jesus was already dead. And so, none of His bones were broken, in accordance with this prophesy found in Psalm 22. [\[1\]](#)

Verse 18 - They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

This was done by the soldiers at the feet of Jesus.

As all of these things came to pass before the eyes of Jesus, I'm sure that His mind was drawn to the truth of Psalm 22. Perhaps He spent much of His time upon the cross meditating on its truths. As such, He knew that the time was coming when verse 1 would be fulfilled and His Father would abandon Him. Such anticipation surely added to His sufferings!

Let's look at the third word, ...
3. Fulfillment (verses 47-50)

The abuse that Jesus sustained upon the cross never finished until the moment He died. The thief upon the cross reached a point where he changed his perspective from being a reviler to being a repentant one. But the crowds never did. They continued to hurl abuse upon Jesus right up to the end. This is what we see in verses 47-49, ...

Matthew 27:47-49
And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."

The most obvious sense of these words is that those who were standing by who heard Jesus cry out, "Eli, Eli," misunderstood the words that

were spoken. Rather than understanding them as a call to "My God, My God," which is what "Eli, Eli" means, they may have understood these words to be a call for Elijah.

Elijah was a worker of miracles who didn't die. Rather, he was taken "by a whirlwind to heaven" (2 Kings 2:1). It is probable that there was a Jewish tradition floating around during the time of Christ that believed that Elijah might come and rescue the righteous in their distress without letting them die. ² Putting all of these things together, those who heard Jesus say these things surmised that Jesus was calling for Elijah. And so, one man sought to sustain the life of Jesus a bit longer by taking giving Him a drink of sour wine. The rest were waiting to see if indeed Elijah would come.

And now, I ask you, "Do you think that these people really believed this?" I don't think so. They were skeptical of Jesus all along. There is no reason to believe that they had changed their minds about Him at this moment. I believe that it was all a mockery of Christ to try to show how foolish He was, when Elijah didn't rescue Him.

The point of all this is that this mockery of Christ continued until the very end of His life. Jesus never knew a time in which the people even reached a point of truce with Him. The crowds never came to the point of saying, "Listen guys, let's back off a little bit and let Him die in peace." No, Jesus continued to be the object of their abuse until the very end. In this way, His sufferings reached their fulfillment.

We read of His death in verse 50, "Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit." At this point, Matthew doesn't tell us what Jesus said. We might even think that Jesus let out one final scream of pain. However, John records for us what Jesus said (John 19:30). He said, tetelestai (tetelstai), which means "it is finished!"

How I love to hear these words come from the mouth of our children. "Did you clean your room?" ... "It is finished." "Did you empty the dishwasher?" ... "It is finished." "Did you fold the laundry?" ... "It is finished." And these words of Jesus ought to come the same way into your ears as well. "Did Jesus fulfill His mission?" ... "It is finished." "Did Jesus remain faithful until the end?" ... "It is finished." "Did Jesus satisfy the Father's wrath for our sin?" ... "It is finished."

Never would Jesus need to be sacrificed again. Never would Jesus have to die again. In fact, it gets better than that. Never would there ever need to be a sacrifice for sins every again! The work of redemption was finished! There is no need to add to it any more. His one sacrifice upon the cross satisfied the wrath of God for all time for all who would believe upon Christ.

It is this point that many of the New Testament writers speak of. Paul spoke about how the "certificate of debt" which was created because of our sin, was "taken out of the way, having [been] nailed to the cross" (Col. 2:14). Jesus was the sacrifice that didn't merely cover our sin, but a sacrifice that actually took the punishment for our sin with finality. The writer to the Hebrews picks up these things Jesus doesn't need to offer up sacrifices daily like the high priests of the Old Testament. Rather, Jesus "did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). Jesus was "offered once to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). Jesus fully accomplished all the work that the Father had given Him to do. There is nothing more for Jesus to do. He simply needs to sit down and wait for the consummation of all things.

This talk of the finished work of Christ reminds me a bit of going on vacation. For me, the greatest moment of vacation comes the moment he wheels of our car leaves the driveway. At that point, the work is done and the enjoyment of vacation is all ahead of us. Before that moment, there is much preparation that needs to be done. We need to arrange for our absence by stopping our mail, stopping the newspaper, arranging for someone to come over and mow the lawn, and arranging for someone to come and water our plants. We need to pack our clothes and supplies for our entire family. But, once we are in our car, leaving our house, all the work is done. We don't need to pack any more. We don't need to figure out how to deal with our house when we are gone. This is what Jesus did upon the cross. He accomplished all of His work and sat down. Listen to Hebrews 1:3, "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Finally, let's turn our attention to our last word to bring out what happened at the cross, ...
4. Announcement (verse 51-54)

Once Jesus died, God, the Father made sure that all knew about His death. In verse 51 we see some catastrophic events taking place in Israel. I believe that they all happened to get the attention of the people that something very important had just taken place. When Jesus was baptized, a voice came down from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17). These cosmic disturbances were, in effect, making a similar statement. A tragic thing had just happened. The Messiah was rejected and crucified by His own people. As John said, "He came into His own and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). "People of Jerusalem, take note of these things!"

The first catastrophic event to take place was the ripping of the veil into the holy of holies. Verse 51 reads, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (verse 51). This would have been a devastating thing for the Jews. The other side of the temple was the most holy place in all of the world. Nobody was ever permitted to go past the veil, but for the high priest. And he could only go past the veil one time each year, on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. He would make sacrifice for his own sins, and then he would make sacrifice for the sins of the people. And then, he would leave the holy of holies. Nobody would ever look upon that sacred place for an entire year, until the next year during Yom Kippur.

The Jews were very careful about these things. They knew that it was a matter of life and death. When Nadab and Abihu presented their offerings to the LORD in a way not commanded by the LORD, they were consumed by fire from heaven (Lev. 10:2). In explaining the event, Moses said, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored'" (Lev. 10:3). And the Jews kept this place holy. The Jews indeed honored the LORD in this way. In fact, so holy is this place that they called it the "holy of holies" (Ex. 26:33). The entire temple was holy. Gentiles were not allowed in the temple. But, this particular location was the most holy of all of the holy places in the temple.

With the temple curtain ripped, the holy of holies was opened for all to see. I wouldn't be surprised if the priests quickly sought to secure another veil and covered over the ripped one as quickly as they could, lest others sneak a peak into the holy of holies and the nation of Israel be consumed by the fiery anger of God!

Little did they realize that God ripped this veil down. Notice how the veil was torn. It was torn "from top to bottom." Were mere mortal men to tear the veil, it would be torn "from bottom to top," as two men would tear and tug and the bottom two corners. But, this was God's doing! It was no accident! It was no act of men! It was torn "from top to bottom." And what God has torn down, let no man put up.

By rending the veil, God was making an announcement to the world: You no longer need the holy of holies to access God. You no longer need the high priest to enter into the altar to sacrifice on Yom Kippur on your behalf! Because the ultimate Day of Atonement has arrived! The Son of God has been sacrificed! The Perfect Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.

The yearly sacrifices all pointed to the one sacrifice that would once and for all take away sins! The writer to the Hebrews pointed out quite well that ... "the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. ... It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:1, 4). But Jesus, "by one offering ... has perfected for all time those who are sanctified ... through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:14, 10). "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6). It is "by the blood of Jesus ... [that] we have confidence to enter the holy place" (Heb. 10:19). This is what God was announcing with the ripping of the veil in two!

But, it wasn't only the veil that God used to make His announcement for the world to know what happened that day. He sent an earthquake: "the earth shook; and the rocks were split" (verse 51).

We can only assume that this earthquake was a large one. Matthew explicitly says that "the rocks were split" (verse 51). These may be the rocks of the buildings in Jerusalem or the rocks of the temple mount or the bedrock. For any of these to have been split, the earthquake must have been a violent one. It is difficult to know exactly what the Lord was seeking to communicate with this earthquake. I believe that the Lord was merely getting the attention of all those in Jerusalem that something significant had just occurred!

Yvonne and I were married on June 27, 1992 in California. At 4:57am, before we got out of bed for the first time, the Lord sent an earthquake. I have always felt that it was an announcement from the Lord that "something significant has just occurred!" I have always felt that it was a divine confirmation on our marriage.

All in Jerusalem would have felt the earthquake that the Lord sent upon the earth. Even those who may have been at home sleeping at this time would have been awakened by the shaking of the earth! I remember speaking with a friend of mine who was living in Los Angeles during the time of the Northridge earthquake in 1994. He said that he was in bed sleeping when it hit. He said that he woke up and it felt like somebody was shaking him back and forth. With this earthquake in Jerusalem, everyone living at that in Jerusalem, without exception, would have been alerted to this big event that took place.

The Roman officers, who watched over the death of Jesus concluded that "something significant just occurred. The Centurion and his guard had witnessed many crucifixions in their lifetime, but this one was different than all of them. Never before had they crucified one who had prayed for their forgiveness as they nailed him to the cross (Luke 23:34). Never before had supernatural darkness come across the land during the crucifixion. Never before had an earthquake shook the ground the moment that the victim died. As they witnessed first-hand the timing of these things upon the land, they concluded that God, Himself, was involved somehow in this crucifixion. It was so different than many of the crucifixions that they had witnessed. Look at verse 54, "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God'" (verse 54).

Surely this should have been the conclusion of the Jewish people as well. Whenever strange events happen like this, people talk all about it. You can talk to those people who have experienced an earthquake and they will gladly tell you all about where they were and what they were doing when the earthquake hit. You can talk to those people who have gone through a big storm, and they will gladly tell you about what they experienced. It's the talk of New Orleans right now. "Where were you when the flood hit? How did you get out OK? Did you stay at home? Did someone need to rescue you?"

These events would have been the talk of Jerusalem. I can just imagine the talk of several of the women,

"What were you doing when the earthquake hit?"

"I was out back cooking dinner for my family. The pots and pans began to clatter together. Some of them even broke. Where were you?"

"I was walking down the street. All of a sudden, I found it difficult to walk, like my legs suddenly became like rubber. When I stopped walking, I noticed that the ground didn't stop moving. It was then that I figured it was an earthquake. Where were you?"

"I was with Mary Magdalene and her friends. They knew a man, named Jesus, who was being crucified. We were watching Him from a distance. It sure seemed like the moment that he dropped His head, the earthquake happened. I wonder if there was a correlation. They were all telling me what a righteous man He was. They were all telling me how He claimed to be the Messiah! Could He have been the Messiah?"

As the many in Jerusalem would have talked among themselves, it would have spread that the timing of these events were far more than mere coincidence. The earthquake took place the moment that Jesus died. It was God's method of getting everyone's attention. He tried to shake them up a bit to allow them to see that something incredible had just taken place. The Messiah had been crucified!

Is this not what we do when we discipline our children? When mere words are not enough to obtain their obedience, you try to shake them up a bit. The rod applied to their bottoms does no damage physically to them, but such an action communicates to them in another way that you should be obeyed. So also here. Those in Israel during the days of Jesus saw Him and heard Him. As they didn't listen, God was getting their attention by shaking them up a bit. It was all to announce the marvelous event that just took place.

There was one more event that took place that was more miraculous than the darkness, the tearing of the veil and the earthquake. It was the opening of many tombs. Matthew 27:52-53 reads as follows: "And the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many."

God used the mouths of many who had died to further announce the significance of what just took place. These verses indicate that many God-fearing people who had died were raised from the dead to enter the holy city to be seen by many people.

You don't hear much about this. I don't believe that I have ever heard a sermon even mentioning this. Perhaps one reason is that this is the only testimony we have of this taking place. No other gospel writer records this. None of the epistles refer to this either. With the lack of data, it is difficult to know exactly what took place here. How many were raised? Which ones? Was it only those who had died recently in Jerusalem? Or, were there those who had been in the tomb for years? How long were they in the tomb before coming out? Did they die again? Some commentators that I read this week believe that they all were raised never to die again! They believe that they were raised with spiritual bodies and translated to heaven.

Even with all of these questions, we know that these people were raised from the dead. Verse 53 says that they appeared to many. I believe that the point of this is that they made announcement of the wonderful things that God had just done! It communicated to those in Jerusalem that something unique had just occurred. Perhaps the testimony of these risen saints paved the way for the fruit of three thousand people repenting on the day of Pentecost.

I close with a Puritan's prayer concerning the cross:

Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy,
cast off that I might be brought in,
trodden down as an enemy
that I might be welcomed as a friend,
surrendered to hell's worst
that I might attain heaven's best,
stripped that I might be clothed,
wounded that I might be healed,
athirst that I might drink,
tormented that I might be comforted,
made a shame that I might inherit glory,
entered darkness that I might have eternal light.
My Saviour wept that all tears might be wiped from my eyes,
groaned that I might have endless song,
endured all pain that I might have unfading health,
bore a thorny crown that I might have a glory-diadem,
bowed his head that I might uplift mine,
experienced reproach that I might receive welcome,
closed his eyes in death that I might gaze on unclouded brightness,
expired that I might for ever live. ^[3]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 18, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] It is a good thing to note that at the writing of Psalm 22, crucifixion hadn't even been invented. It was the Persians who invented its first forms several hundred years after David wrote these words. Yet, David, under the inspiration of God, described exactly the suffering of crucifixion.

[2] D. A. Carson, The Expositors Bible Commentary, volume 8, p. 579.

[3] The Valley of Vision, p. 42.

