

# The Death of Christ

by J.C. Ryle

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*The death of Jesus Christ was a solemn event that accomplished the work of atonement for a world's sin and opened the way for all believers to draw near to God with boldness.*

**Scripture:** Mark 15:33

**Topics:** "Atonement", "Hope in Suffering"

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## Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound significance of Christ's death, marking it as the moment when atonement for sin was completed and access to God was granted to all believers. He highlights the miraculous events surrounding the crucifixion, such as the darkness that symbolized the gravity of sin and the tearing of the temple veil, which signified the end of the ceremonial law and the opening of a direct relationship with God. Ryle reflects on Jesus' cry of abandonment, illustrating the depth of His suffering and the reality of being forsaken by God, yet still being His beloved Son. He encourages believers who feel forsaken to remember that such feelings do not equate to being cast off forever, urging them to maintain hope and trust in God. The sermon serves as a reminder of the depth of Christ's sacrifice and the assurance of God's love even in times of spiritual darkness.

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## Transcript

"And when the sixth hour had come, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is translated, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And when some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, Behold, he is calling for Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave him a drink, saying, Let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." (Mark 15:33-38)

We have in these verses the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. All deaths are solemn events. Nothing in the whole history of a man is so important as his end. But never was there a death of such solemn moment as that which is now before us. In the instant that our Lord drew his last breath, the work of atonement for a world's sin was accomplished. The ransom for sinners was at length paid. The kingdom of heaven was thrown fully open to all believers. All the solid hope that mortal men enjoy about their souls may be traced to Jesus giving up the ghost on the cross.

Let us observe, in these verses, the visible signs and wonders which accompanied our Lord's death. St. Mark mentions two in particular which demand our attention. One is the darkening of the sun for the space

of three hours. The other is the rending of the veil which divided the holy of holies from the holy place in the temple. Both were miraculous events. Both had, no doubt, a deep meaning about them. Both were calculated to arrest the attention of the whole multitude assembled at Jerusalem. The darkness would strike even thoughtless Gentiles, like Pilate and the Roman soldiers. The rent veil would strike even Annas and Caiaphas and their unbelieving companions. There were probably few houses in Jerusalem that evening in which men would not say, "We have heard and seen strange things today."

What did the miraculous darkness teach? It taught the exceeding wickedness of the Jewish nation. They were actually crucifying their own Messiah and slaying their own King. The sun itself hid its face at the sight. It taught the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the eyes of God. The Son of God himself must needs be left without the cheering light of day when he became sin for us and carried our transgressions.

What did the miraculous rending of the veil mean? It taught the abolition and termination of the whole Jewish law of ceremonies. It taught that the way into the holiest of all was now thrown open to all mankind by Christ's death. It taught that Gentiles as well as Jews might now draw nigh to God with boldness through Jesus the one High Priest, and that all barriers between man and God were forever cast down.

May we never forget the practical lesson of the rent veil. To attempt to revive the Jewish ceremonial in the Church of Christ by returning to altars, sacrifices, and a priesthood is nothing better than closing up again the rent veil and lighting a candle at noonday.

May we never forget the practical lesson of the miraculous darkness. It should lead our minds on to that blackness of darkness which is reserved for all obstinate unbelievers. The darkness endured by our blessed Surety on the cross was only for three hours. The chains of darkness which shall bind all who reject his atonement and die in sin shall be forevermore.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, how truly and really our Lord Jesus Christ was made a curse for us and bore our sins. We see it strikingly brought out in those marvelous words which he used at the ninth hour, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It would be useless to pretend to fathom all the depth of meaning which these words contain. They imply an amount of mental suffering such as we are unable to conceive. The agony of some of God's holiest servants has been occasionally very great under an impression of God's favor being withdrawn from them. What then may we suppose was the agony of the holy Son of God when all the sin of all the world was laid upon his head, when he felt himself reckoned guilty though without sin, when he felt his Father's countenance turned away from him? The agony of that season must have been something past understanding. It is a high thing; we cannot attain to a comprehension of it. We may believe it, but we cannot explain and find it out to perfection.

One thing, however, is very plain, and that is the impossibility of explaining these words at all except we receive the doctrine of Christ's atonement and substitution for sinners. To suppose, as some dare to do, that Jesus was nothing more than a man or that his death was only a great example of self-sacrifice, makes this dying cry of his utterly unintelligible. It makes him appear less patient and calm in a dying hour than many a martyr or even than some heathen philosophers. One explanation alone is satisfactory. That explanation is the mighty scriptural doctrine of Christ's vicarious sacrifice and substitution for us on the cross. He uttered his dying cry under the heavy pressure of a world's sin laid upon him and imputed to him.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, that it is possible to be forsaken of God for a time and yet to be loved by him. We need not doubt this, when we read our Lord's dying words on the cross. We hear him saying to his Father, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" and yet addressing him as "my God." We know too, that our Lord was only forsaken for a season, and that even when forsaken he was the beloved Son in whom, both in his suffering and doing, the Father was "well pleased."

There is deep experimental instruction in this which deserves the notice of all true Christians. No doubt there is a sense in which our Lord's feeling of being forsaken was peculiar to himself, since he was suffering for our sins and not for his own. But still after making this allowance, there remains the great fact that Jesus was for a time forsaken of the Father and yet for all that was the Father's beloved Son. As it was with the great head of the church, so it may be in a modified sense with his members. They too, though chosen and beloved of the Father, may sometimes feel God's face turned away from them. They too, sometimes from illness of body, sometimes from peculiar affliction, sometimes for carelessness of walk, sometimes from God's sovereign will to draw them nearer to himself, may be constrained to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It becomes believers who feel forsaken to learn from our Lord's experience not to give way to despair. No doubt they ought not to be content with their position. They ought to search their own hearts and see whether there is not some secret thing there which causes their consolations to be small. But let them not write bitter things against themselves and hastily conclude that they are cast off forever, or are self-deceivers and have no grace at all. Let them still wait on the Lord and say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Let them remember the words of Isaiah and David, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God." "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him."

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