

The Torn Veil

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[0 : 00] Good evening. My name's Jim Crooks and I'm your guest speaker tonight at the Bible Teaching Service for Brunnsfield Evangelical Church. Very grateful to Graham for asking me to share in God's Word with you.

And when I asked him what topic it would be for tonight, he said it would be one of my own choosing. So presently I'm reading a lot in the book of Exodus and the reading for today was actually about the veil of the tabernacle, that portable temple that God designed and that he gave as a blueprint to Moses.

And the passage is about this particular veil and the curtain that was in there. And I thought that we could usefully spend just a short time thinking about the significance of that, even in our own lives, and apply some teaching to us.

So without any further ado, I just want to read the passages that were on my heart. So Exodus chapter 26 is my daily reading for today.

And in it there is one verse of relevance and it says, And the veil shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy.

[1 : 29] Going into Hebrews chapter 10 we read, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Matthew chapter 27, one verse there, verse 51. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

From top to bottom. So that's our readings, and we're going to try and stitch all of these things together, reading from Exodus, and then in Hebrews, and then in the Gospels in Matthew.

So, first of all, just a little bit of background about the veil. You'll have seen from the readings that we had that the veil, or the curtain, was in the portable temple called the tabernacle.

[3 : 14] Eventually, when the Jews built a temple under Solomon, then they did put a veil in there between the two most sacred rooms in the temple.

But here in the tabernacle, in the reading in Exodus, first of all, was that a veil went in to divide two rooms, let's see, at the heart of the tabernacle.

In the very heart of the tabernacle, the place reserved for the presence of God, that was called the holiest of all.

And it was a room that was ten cubits cubed. A cubit is from your elbow to the tip of your finger. But ten cubits cubed. But the room that preceded that was the holy place, not the holiest of all, but the holy place.

[4 : 20] And in that room, they kept things like the menorah, the lampstand, a table of bread.

There were twelve loaves in it, and it was changed every week. And they also had an altar of incense. And it was there that the priests went in to worship God.

So there was the holy place, and then a veil, and then the holiest of all. And the veil was there to separate the two rooms. Now, the words that are used in Exodus 26 include the word for veil, but also include a word for a screen.

And if you like, the meaning of the words is one is to cover, to keep in, to surround, and the other is to separate.

So if you're looking towards the holiest of all, then you were separated from it by this screen, this veil.

[5 : 32] And if you were inside the holiest of all, you were contained within it. So we've got the idea that there is something to be contained in, and there are other things to be kept out.

And into the veil there were woven cherubim. Cherubim were angelic creatures, and we first read about them in Genesis in chapter 3.

Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, and you may remember the story of how they disobeyed God's instruction, and they took of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And as a result of that, they broke their communion with God. And because all of humanity, if you like, were in the loins of Adam, they were all to be born from Adam.

He was our representative head. And because he sinned, all of humanity were separated from God. And God cast them out of the garden because of their sin and their disobedience.

[6 : 47] And at the entrance to the garden, so that they couldn't enter in again, God appointed two cherubim. And the cherubim served as a guardian to the garden.

So they kept what was in there holy and separate. And they, if you like, preserved the holiness of God.

But also they prevented others from breaking in. They were guarding there. So there was this whole idea of separation.

And the cherubim were woven into the veil of the tabernacle. And it was another picture of separation between God and man.

It must have been a beautiful sight, this screen. But the principle that was involved was that of separation. And in fact, as God gives the instruction to his people of ancient times, that was the key word to understand the whole priestly ministry.

[8 : 01] that there was to be a separation between that which is clean and that which is unclean. Between that which is holy and that which is profane.

And there was a separation between God and man. And yet God provided the system of worship so that man could come into the presence of God.

and could only come in, of course, with blood of sacrifice. So reading the Old Testament and discovering all of these things is very important for us to think about our own relationship with God. God in his holiness and we in our sinfulness. And how that a sacrifice and blood has been provided so that we can go into the presence of God.

And that's where we're going with this teaching. But when I was in Romania, I used to go to Romania quite a lot. I was in the Patriarchal Cathedral in Bucharest.

[9 : 10] I was on an official visit in my capacity as Assistant Principal of a college and we were meeting with other colleges out there.

but we had an official tour of the Patriarchal Cathedral. And as we went in, the guide was explaining about the iconostasis, that barrier, if you like, that's presented just behind the altar.

On that screen, there were various icons and it was gilded and precious stones. But you'll see just behind the two men in the middle that there was a gateway.

And there was a curtain over that. And I remember our guide saying, do you know, if we're very fortunate, we will catch a glimpse of the Patriarch doing some priestly activities behind that curtain. And you know, it was just too good an opportunity for me. And I had to explain what had happened in Judaism, how that there was a curtain, a screen, a veil, a barrier, but that when Jesus died, as we've read, that barrier was removed and the way into God's presence was clear and plain and available for everyone who wanted to come to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 49] We had an interesting conversation. But what had happened basically in the early church is that those who couldn't leave the Jewish religion behind when they became Christians, they wanted to take so much of Judaism with them.

They're called the Judaizers. And the Judaizers had a great influence in the early church. And out of the early church, of course, both Catholic and Orthodox movements began and they retained some of the features of the tabernacle and the temple.

And sadly, the screen is one of them so that only the priests can go behind the screen and administer in the presence of God.

But as we'll see, this is a great shame because what happened was that the screen of the tabernacle and temple was torn literally and symbolically or figuratively to show that the way into the immediate presence of God was available for all.

So, why was it torn? Part of Matthew's narrative in his Gospel includes, of course, the preparation for Calvary.

[12:12] And we've been remembering that just last weekend at Easter time. But underpinning all of Matthew's Gospel is this journey that Jesus is taking from his earthly ministry, well, right from his nativity through to his adolescence and then into his earthly ministry and he's journeying towards the cross.

And the death of the Lord Jesus is part of that narrative. And it is an expected death and even the Lord Jesus says, and Matthew records it, the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him and he will be raised on the third day.

We also know that the death of the Lord Jesus is understood by Matthew as being necessary and he includes the words of the Lord Jesus or the statement about him.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. Matthew also tells us that in the words of the Lord Jesus that his death was to be vicarious. That is not on behalf of Jesus himself but on behalf of us.

[13:41] And the Lord Jesus says, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And so when the narrative reaches is the crisis of Calvary and the Lord Jesus is crucified on the cross.

The expressions used by Matthew and the other gospels are very brief, very terse because the narrative has been building up to that point.

But as we read there were some unexpected things that happened at Calvary and so we read in Matthew's narrative from Matthew 27 verse 51 and we read that that the behold the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom.

But Matthew uses this device to introduce something that is a surprise. he uses the word behold and it's in the same kind of way that we would say and do you know what happened next?

And as he presents the death of the Lord Jesus he wants to present a very unusual detail and that detail is about the about the curtain being torn in two.

[15:12] Behold the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Matthew uses that little word behold when he introduces surprises.

So for instance in the narrative of the nativity an angel appears and warns the holy family not to go to Egypt because Herod was plotting to kill the children and then when the Lord Jesus comes to be baptized Matthew uses another behold there was a voice from heaven and exactly the same is used in Matthew 17 there it's another voice well it's the same voice from heaven it's the same one God the Father but it's the record of a voice from heaven being used and then the Lord Jesus uses it as well in his own words as he ends his earthly ministry and he says to his disciples behold although I'm going away do you know what happens next I am with you always and so Matthew uses this to if you like accent to highlight that's what is going to happen here is something that's very significant and this tearing of the temple curtain is very significant he includes the detail that it's torn from top to bottom that it's a very deliberate act that something that may have been required like a covenant a promise a legal contract has been torn into from the top to the bottom and it implies that God himself has torn the veil that the veil which he instructed to be made for the tabernacle and which he instructed to be made for the temple is now done away with it's rendered obsolete and it is torn in two it's not just a little bit torn but it is torn up if you like and it is completely separated that the both sides of the curtain now hang listlessly and redundantly on both sides of the entrance into the holiest of all and what

God is demonstrating is that in the death of the Lord Jesus this planned sacrifice of the son of his love that this is a significant world event and that there is the turning of history about on this pivot and to symbolise that the temple curtain was torn in two so it's not just that there is a literal tearing but there is a symbolic doing away with barriers that there were between God and man that which had to be contained within that which had to be held out has been done away with and now God stands in all his majesty and his glory in all his grace and his mercy and he is saying I'm available to everyone and that is the theological significance so I just want to do highlight two lessons around that simple principle and the lesson first of all is simply that when Matthew records

this tearing of the temple then Matthew is demonstrating that the heavens are now open for God to declare that Jesus was the Son of God just as he did as he tore aside the heavens in chapter 3 verse 17 and in chapter 17 verse 5 of Matthew's gospel so now God tears aside everything that stands in the way and he declares that the

[19 : 52] Lord Jesus was the Son of God and that he was making sacrifice on behalf of God and the curtain is permanently opened and so standing at the cross not in the temple but standing at the cross here is the voice of a centurion not the voice of God himself but the voice of a Roman centurion not a Jew but a Roman and he says truly this was the Son of God and God has spoken fully and finally in his Son and in the death of his Son God reveals completely and beautifully all his love and he reveals his very heart and he reveals everything that he desires so although the Lord Jesus and his life are of great significance to us in the gospel and that there's a build up to this point here we have the full demonstration of the love of God the God who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son the second lesson is just simply this and it was really taken from our reading in Hebrews that in Jesus' death and in his broken body symbolized by the torn curtain as well that this is the means by which anyone who would have access to the presence of God must come must come to Christ must come to Calvary must have their sins dealt with there because Jesus as the Lamb of God has presented the blood of the sacrifice in the holiest of all and his sacrifice has been accepted and the way unto God is forever made clear and there is no more sacrifice for sins there is nothing that humanity can do to earn

God's favour God in his mercy and his grace provided the Lord Jesus and his sacrifice on Calvary has given full satisfaction to a holy God and so the writer to the Hebrews as he goes on to explain the significance of this access to God he says that we can have confidence to enter the holy places and so he encourages us with what I've called at another time a salad sermon because it always begins with letters he says letters draw near to God do you know we ought not to be flippant about this at all but what was a privilege that was not granted to millions upon millions throughout all of human history access was only granted to one person once a year and with the blood of a sacrifice the high priest in Israel he alone could go behind the curtain once a year but now that curtain is done away with our high priest is there permanently for us interceding for us and because he is there because he has taken away the curtain then we can draw near to God

I usually describe prayer as one of the most portable items in all of the world you don't have to carry it with you in some kind of special box or in beads or in any artifact but you carry it in your heart and anywhere you are in the world and at any time of the day or night and in any circumstance we can pray to God we can draw near to God he is permanently forever near to us and for we who have come to know forgiveness of sins at Calvary and have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have this means to draw near to

God at any time and in any place and so we're encouraged to do that just this week one of the young brothers that I walk alongside when he was talking about confessing sin and seeking God's help to know victory in his life he said then what do we do Jim then what do we do and of course all I could say was well we are in the presence of God and we abide there we need to take time to know the presence of God with us to be silent before him not always to be making requests but in that position that place of quiet solitude and silence and serenity before God to give in to the worship that we must feel and just to be in his presence we're also encouraged to let us hold fast unwaveringly let us hold unwaveringly to our confession of faith because there is one in the heavens who represents us one who is there all of the time because we can avail ourselves of his presence and his help at any place and in any time then we have grace to help in time of need we profess our faith to a watching and a listening world and in silence and sometimes with speech we are in the presence of God to gain all the strength that we need for daily living and to live consistent lives before him and then we're also encouraged to do let us stir one another up to love and good works now the old rendering of that in the

[26 : 47] King James version of my youth was let us provoke one another well let's provoke one another to love and to good works but the meaning is made much more clear here isn't it stir one another up we've not to provoke one another but we've to stir one another up to love how do we stir love well we stir up love by loving people first and then we encourage them to step out and love others not to love us back in return but for them to love others and that is the loving life of the Christian of sacrifice for others and also we are to embark on a life of good works of course faith is the gateway to the presence of God we can't come to God by any other means we cannot work for

his grace and favour in our lives but once we come by faith our faith must be demonstrated by our good works we must show the evidence of the revolution that has happened in our lives and lastly as we consider the torn veil and our continual drawing near to God then we are to also meet together to encourage one another in the faith that has been so difficult hasn't it during the

Covid restrictions but things will come back to normal but I would certainly hope and pray that things aren't going to be the old normal but that we really are enthused by meeting together by corporate worship by fellowship together by loving deeds and loving language that we will be able to use amongst one another and so we've got this principle that we have been taught by the torn veil veil that it's access to God completely the coronavirus has been there and there's been no access to all kinds of things but that never affected our access to God nor can anything affect our access to God and just as we think then about that torn veil again it's to remember that the way into the very presence of

God is completely free and open it's an immense privilege and we should avail ourselves of it to draw near to him to hold fast to have consistent profession of our faith to demonstrate love for each other and to reflect the revolution of God in our hearts by our good works and then also to be meeting together to encourage one another in the faith may God bless you as you enjoy the presence of God let's briefly pray Father thank you for this incredible design in the tabernacle and then in the temple and we thank you Father that it comes right through to the gospels and also the epistles we thank you for the unity of the book and for this unintended consequence in some ways or coincidence that there is a veil that is to be torn and symbolising the way into God is made free to all that you are accessible by all through the

Lord Jesus and through what he did in Calvary Father we pray that we might use this most portable of gifts and that we will pray without ceasing that we will have lives that are worshipful we pray that our lives will be marked by a closeness to you that we will be consistent in our profession of faith and we have hope through the curtain to be one day in your immediate presence and we thank you Father that we will be able to stir one another up to love and good works and as we continue to meet together we pray our Father it will be for your glory as we encourage one another in our faith and we pray for your blessing towards this end we give you thanks in Jesus name Amen Thank you very much for listening and I do trust that the Lord will encourage your hearts as you serve him to draw near we have confidence to enter the holy places

God bless