

THE RENDING OF THE VEIL

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention, Wednesday, May 19, 1948, at Memphis, Tennessee, by W. R. Pettigrew, Pastor Walnut Street Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky.

Text: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matthew 27:51).

The Holy of Holies was a cubical chamber in the Temple. Within its mysterious gloom dwelt God--God, greatly to be feared, distant and unapproachable by ordinary man.

A mighty veil hung before that shrine. The pattern of this magnificent tapestry was a revelation from God to Moses. It was "curiously wrought" in colors of blue, purple, and scarlet. It was sixty feet long, thirty feet wide, a hand's breadth in thickness, and required 300 priests to move it. It was supported by pillars overlaid with gold and hung from hooks of solid gold.

On the momentous moment when the crucified Christ had finished drinking the bitter cup of our redemption, and had dismissed His spirit to the Father, and, as the earth quaked, and, as rocks were rent, and, as graves gave up their dead: "Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom."

What meaneth this sacred sign and this interpretive wonder? It meant: (1) That atonement had been made; (2) That a "new and living way" to God had been laid; (3) That all believers to the priesthood had been ordained.

The Rending of the Veil Meant That Atonement Had Been Made

The high priest dared not go beyond the veil and into the presence of God until first the life and blood of a bullock had been offered up for his, and the sins of his family. Furthermore, when he went beyond the veil he bore in his hands the blood which had been shed for the sins of the people!

Before the veil was rent and the way was opened for all men to come to God, atoning blood for sins of all men had to be shed. Witness that blood shedding!

Come with me to Gethsemane where the Lamb of God prays in agony. Unsandal your feet for if ever you stood on holy ground it's here! With the aid of a full orb'd moon, look and wonder at the ruby drops standing on His sacred brow. This is the beginning of the shedding of atoning blood, which has to be shed before the veil could be rent.

Isaiah had prophesied that the hair would be plucked from his cheeks and that his visage would be marred "more than any man." Before Caiaphas they spat upon Him, buffeted him and smote Him with the palms of their hands. It must have been here also that they tangled vicious fingers in His hair and tore it from His face! If, if -- your eyes can endure to behold the sight, look on His torn, swollen, and bleeding face and know that this, too, is atoning blood that had to be shed before there could be the rending of the veil!

Pilate has condemned Him to be scourged, and He is about to receive the chastisement of our peace and the stripes of our healing upon shoulders that have never bowed under any sins but ours. The rugged Roman with the cruel whip in his hand takes his stance. The metal-plugged thongs of leather zing through the air, cut into His quivering flesh, and blood streams down! This, too, is atoning blood that had to flow before the "new and living way ... through the atoning ^{veil,} ~~blood~~ that is to say, his flesh," could be opened for sinful men to come to God!

Marken ye to the coarse and scurrilous laughter echoing through the stone barracks of the legionaries. The soldiers ridicule Him: "So this is the fellow who says he is a king! Give him a robe!" They drape His bleeding shoulders with an old toga! They force a reed in His hand and call it His sceptre. "A king must have a crown and here is one that will not fall

off, and amid jeers and mockery they press a thorny crown down on the finely chiseled brow of the Son of God. From under the piercing points of each inturned thorn there streams blood--atoning blood--that had to be shed to open the way for sinning men to come to God!

Atop gray, gruesome Golgotha two crosses already stand with their writhing victims. A third cross lies upon the ground and by it stand the Lamb of God. The soldiers strip Him, visiting torturing humiliation upon Him. They stretch His already bleeding body upon the cross and drive spikes through His feet--feet that had followed wandering manking along the torturous path of their sin to their deepest hell.

The cross is lifted and dropped into its place with a sickening thud. The spikes tear His hands and feet. See, from His hands and feet, blood streaming, streaming, streaming down!--atoning blood that had to be shed before the veil between man and God could be rent!

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And the blood flows down!

"If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." "Dost not thou fear God? ... Lord, remember me when thou comest into they kingdom." "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." And still the blood flows down!

"Woman, behold by son! Behold thy mother!" And the blood streamds down!

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And the blood trickles down!

"I thirst," And the blood drips, drips, drips, drips, drips -- drips down!

"It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And the blood drips--drips... drips down!

Atonement--full atonement--had been made! Christ had tasted death for every man and "whosoever" could now come to God. There was no veil between!

The Reading of the Bible at the Feet of the Cross

On that divinely dramatic day when the veil was rent, a "new and living

way" was "consecrated" by which men could with "boldness enter into the holiest" -- into the presence of God.

This new way to God was "new" in that it was not by indirection. This way to God was not circuitous by ways of systems, rituals, ceremonies, ordinances, mysteries, symbols, or intermediaries.

Too often the souls of men are betrayed by our perverting the simple Gospel with pageantry, muddling it with magic, loading it down with litanies, or by ruining it with rituals. Coming to God for salvation by this new way is as simple and direct as was the Israelite's look to the brazen serpent for healing!

Spurgeon, under conviction of sin, sought salvation for five years among the many trappings of religion, not discerning the simple but glorious truth that "there was life in a look at the crucified One." While on his way elsewhere, a storm forced him to worship in a little, primitive Methodist Chapel. In the absence of the minister, a very unlearned layman spoke, using as his text "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Said he:

"My dear friends, this text says look. Now that does not take a great deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot on your finger; it is just looking. Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand pounds a year to look. Anyone can look; a child can look. But this is what the text says: 'Look unto me' 'Look unto me; I am sweating great drops of blood. Look unto me; I am hanging on a cross. Look unto me; I am dead and buried and arisen. Look unto me; I ascend. Look unto me; I am sitting on the Father's right hand.'"

Suddenly the humble man turned upon young Spurgeon and said: "Young man, you look very miserable, and you will always be miserable if you do not obey my text and look to Jesus for salvation."

The boy, who was to become one of the greatest preachers of all ages, looked—simply looked—and was born again!

Let it be your glory that we lift up Christ and cry to dying men: "Look to Jesus: simply, directly, look! There is life in a look at the crucified One!"

Before the veil was rent the people never came into the presence of God except by proxy. The priest represented them before God when he went within the veil. When the veil was rent the way to God was open, not only to the holiest priest, but also to the humblest peasant. An intermediary between God and man became superfluous.

A young father and mother, tortured with grief, came asking that I conduct funeral services for their child. They sobbed out their story:

They and their priest had become estranged. When the baby came the priest had withheld baptism until the parents met certain demands of the church. This had further infuriated the parents and the baby had not been baptized. That had been three years ago; and last night the baby had died, and without the blessings of the church. Believing their baby lost, their grief knew no bounds. The baby was to be buried in unconsecrated ground. Would I be kind enough to conduct some kind of a service over the little body?

In a quiet hilltop cemetery and at the appointed hour, I met them, their relatives and their friends, bearing the little white casket. Standing there by the open grave I told them of how Jesus had said His Kingdom was for little children, and how Jesus had told them who would interpose themselves between little children and Him to stand aside and to

forbid not the little children to come to Him. I explained how "Indirection to Deity" had been done away and that the spirit of their child had been under no necessity to go to God by way of a priest, church, or sacraments. Their baby's spirit had gone directly to be with Jesus, in a heavenly paradise and was not in a hopeless purgatory.

The moment for lowering the little casket had come. Asking that it be opened again, the father knelt down, encircled it with his arms and said: "Oh David, you are with Jesus. Thank God! Mother and I will see you again."

Five men and women who stood by that little grave, including the parents, forsook the devious, indirect, man-made ways to God, and began their walk in the "new and living way" to God. I baptized them upon their confession of simple, direct, personal faith in Christ as Saviour.

Let us ever be saying to this world that the veil has been rent; that the way to God is open and direct to all, and that no church or ecclesiastical group has the right to interpose themselves as essential media between God and His creatures--between the Saviour and sinners.

The Rending of the Veil Meant That All Believers to
The Priesthood Had Been Ordained

Before the rending of the veil it was unthinkable that an ordinary man should go beyond the veil and into God's presence. That privilege belonged to the high priest and to him alone.

When Christ died and the veil was rent, the Holy of Holies came to include the vast domain of all believing hearts. Henceforth God was to dwell in the midst of His people and be directly approachable to all. It was to be true what "They who seek the Throne of Grace

"Find that Throne in every place."

Henceforth the blessings of God were not to be distributed to men through a stratified ecclesiastical society. Henceforth the caste system in

religion was to be done away. The priest in his stately robes and the peasant in his scant rags could come alike into the presence of God. In the hour of the rending of the veil all believers became priests before their God.

The priesthood of believers is a doctrine of priceless privilege. The sinning one may go direct to the God of the rent-veil sanctuary, there confess his sins, and have God say to him, "I absolve thee; I forgive thee; go and sin no more." The nobody may boldly go to his God and God will make him somebody! The nameless may go to God and God will give him a name! The weak and faltering may go directly and boldly to God, and in his presence, be made strong! Thanks be unto God that there is no longer a veil between God and man; that an intermediary is superfluous and that God's people may do business with him without the necessity of a middle man!

The priesthood of the believer is not merely an article of faith but also a challenge to action in faith. The high priest when he went into the presence of God offered an appropriate sacrifice to God. The word "priest" means "sacrificer," and we priests of the rent-veil sanctuary are to fulfil its meaning. What are we to sacrifice? Paul answers:

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

We are to present ourselves to God in holy life and holy deed even unto death.

Henry Martin, honor student of Cambridge, scholar, and refined gentleman, so offered himself unto God when he went to India. There among people who smeared their bodies with revolting filth as an act of worship; there among people whose holy men sat in one position until their limbs as rigid as stone, and their fingernails grew through the back of clenched hands; there among people whose men married little girls

their bodies with lust; there among people whose revolting ~~immoral~~ heathenisms must have sickened Henry Martin--yes, there among these people and for these people he said, "Now let me burn out for God."

Our pastorates, our pulpits, and our places of service must become veritable altars upon which we vicariously live and die for God. When God's believer-priests so come to offer themselves in utter self-abandonment, then and only then shall come the "revival in the midst of the years," and then and only then shall come the rebirth of a hope for a doomed age.

Accompanying the privilege of direct access to God is the responsibility of intercession for them who know not for themselves the God of the rent-veil sanctuary.

Would to God we felt the weight of this priestly duty as did John Welch, who kept a plaid that he might wrap himself when he arose to pray at night. His wife would upbraid him when she found him lying on the ground weeping. He would reply: "Oh woman, I have the souls of 3,000 to answer for and I know not how it is with many of them." There would be a real hope for lost humanity if God's believer-priests felt like that!

It is said that when the high priest emerged from the Holy of Holies, he brought to the people something of the glory of God in his face and something of the love of God in his heart. Peter says that believer-priests "are to show forth the praises" of God. The Christian, having access to God, has the staggering responsibility of abiding in that Presence, until, when he goes out among men he shall convey to them something of the love, light, and life of God.

Some years ago a minister arose in a gathering of ministers and asked to be permitted to relate a story. Said he; "God gave my wife and me a precious baby boy. He grew normally for three years and was our joy. Then a subtle disease recuded his little body to a thin emaciated form. No remedy seemed to help. One day our faithful physician sat by the little bed with his finger on the faint pulse. Suddenly he looked up and said,

'I'm sorry, but your baby is gone.'" The minister faltered and then continued: "I told my wife to heat all the blankets in the house. I tore open my clothes, pressed the little form to my heart and had my wife to wrap about us the blankets. I held him there for nine hours." There was a pause and then the minister said: "That was twenty-five years ago: my son is a minister of the Gospel, and this is his birthday."

Believer priests, we should tarry in the presence of God until our own hearts are so filled with the love and compassion of God, that when we go forth from the Holy of Holies, we may gather the spiritually dead to our hearts and make them alive to God through Christ.

So shall we be worthy priests of the rent-veil sanctuary. So help us God. Amen.