The Earthquake

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[0:00] Let us turn now to the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 27, and we'll read from verse 50.

Matthew, chapter 27, reading at verse 50. And Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, he yielded up the ghost.
And behold, the veil of the temple was rent and twain from the top to the bottom. And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened.
And many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.
And considering our, continuing our look at the signs that accompanied and followed the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary, we come tonight to the second of these signs.
[1:26] The first is read here in verse 51, and what we dealt with last Sabbath evening. was the rending of the veil of the temple in two, from the top to the bottom.

And the next sequence of events runs like this. There was, we read here in verse 51, the earthquake. Then there was the splitting of the rocks.
And the word that is used leads us to believe that the rocks were split vertically. Then the graves were opened.
And then after the resurrection of Jesus, the bodies of the saints in these graves came out and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.
And it was that wonderful sign and supernatural event that we turn for a little this evening.
[2:40] Now, you will know, of course, and recognize, and one has to acknowledge this, that the fact of an earthquake is not in and of itself supernatural.

Those of you who are interested in science and no doubt interested in geology, particularly, if not geography, will be able, would be able to explain, perhaps better than I can, the natural causes which lead to earthquakes.
And many of us have a, there may be some present here tonight, who have been in areas where such earthquakes have occurred.
Our missionaries, for example, in South America, speak of the terror that an earthquake of the smallest dimension strikes into the human heart.
And we know that many of these earthquakes have been associated with great tragedies and tremendous loss and tremendous loss of human life, together with the structural damage that is done to many buildings, necessitating help for the countries so devastated from the people and from countries worldwide.
[4:31] In other words, there is no doubt a physical, geological explanation for the earthquakes that you and I hear of, read of, and now see on our television screens.

But this earthquake was different. And that is why we speak of it as being supernatural. It was, for example, we read here that a reading of it leads us to believe that there was no large-scale damage or destruction caused by the earthquake.
We read of no structural damage done to any of the buildings. And another interesting fact is that it was so localized that it didn't even affect the three crosses that were erected at Golgotha.
They weren't in any way disturbed by the earthquake because we know that the, very shortly after this, the legs of the shin bones of the two manufacturers who were hanged with Jesus were broken in two to hisen their death in the light of the approaching Sabbath day.
And that when the soldiers came to Jesus and found him already dead, they pushed his side with a spear. So the crosses were not in any way affected by this earthquake.

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[6:29] And then, as I mentioned, the rounding or the tearing of the rocks was done in such a way as to lead us to understand that the rocks were actually split open vertically to distinguish from the lateral opening or the horizontal opening of the graves.

because you will remember, of course, that graves in Jerusalem were not like the graves that you and I know of.
They weren't dug six feet into the ground. That these graves that were opened were tombs which were made in the rock structure of the area.
It was into one such that Jesus was placed. And you remember that a stone was rolled over the grave to seal it. And it's possible and highly probable that that was the kind, that these were the kind of graves that are referred to here in verse 52, that the graves were opened.
In other words, there was a movement of the earth that tore the rocks vertically in that area and a movement of the earth that opened the graves, say, horizontally.
[8:02] So that in the course of time, as I see, the bodies of the saints emerged. So that this was no ordinary earthquake of which you can say that the structure of the earth is altered very often by internal combustion.

The surface of the earth and the texture of the earth is so torn that it leaves huge gaps and huge craters. And this is what causes so much devastation and destruction and death.
It wasn't like that. And in that way, we are led to believe that it was a supernatural event and therefore a sign from God, a way by which God was saying something, not only to the people there, but to us, and saying something which is inseparably connected with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.
And there's something else. You will notice here that the opening of the graves and certainly the rising from the dead was a selective event.
God selected those who would rise from the dead. If you notice, as you read there, that it was the bodies of the saints that arose from the graves after his resurrection.
[9:34] Now then, there is no point in trying to ask, to answer the question, were there more graves than those out of which the bodies of the saints arose, opened?

We are not told. It may very well be that the only graves which are opened were the graves of the saints. It is certainly true that the only people, the only bodies, the only people who rose were the saints themselves.
And it's certainly implied that the graves of the unbelievers, if they were not left sealed, it is certain that no unbeliever arose after the resurrection of the Lord.
And if again, someone would argue that the earthquake was caused by natural causes themselves, in that case, and one would not dispute that, but to say this, if it was occasioned by natural causes, it was occasioned because God, unknown to any, was preparing that very area, both in its structure and in its texture, over many years, for this very moment in time, when the earth erupted, and the rocks rent, and the graves are the tombs, were opened.
But the two things I want to mention are these, and I think that these are the important facts, remember here. One is this, that all these events were connected with the death of Jesus.
[11:27] It was because of his death that the veil was rent in twain. It was because of his death that the earthquake came.

It was because of his death that the graves were opened. And it was connection with his death that these bodies rose after his resurrection.
And that's the other point I want to make. Notice the sequence of events. There was the earthquake when he died. There were the opening of the graves when he died.
But, the bodies of the saints did not come out of the graves until he rose himself on the third day.
Which, of course, poses this question. Were these bodies left exposed from the time of the opening of the grave until his resurrection from the dead?
[12:32] The answer is yes. Secondly, why were they left exposed until his resurrection from the dead?

And those of you who are conversant with the Jewish, with the, with traditionalism, with the Jewish religion, will know that because this was the Passover, no Jew was allowed to come near a dead body.
Because if he came near the dead body, he was ceremonially unclean, and therefore was not allowed to participate in the Passover.

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So the Jew would give a white birth to a dead body until after the Passover. But you see, after the Passover, Jesus rose from the dead.
And this is the record. The bodies of the saints whose tombs were opened rose after his resurrection and entered into the holy city, into Jerusalem, and were seen of many.
[13:53] Now then, these are the facts and that's the order, the sequence of events. The question, of course, for us tonight is this, and I deal with it very briefly, what was God saying to these people with this miracle, with this supernatural occurrence, and what is he saying to us in this church tonight as well?

Well, in the first place, he is saying this, and this is what the whole Bible is all about, the thrust of the Bible in connection with the death of Jesus on Calvary at Golgotha.
that there, the power and the presence of God were present and visible. But present and visible. Putting it in brief, God was there. And you know that there are many, many, many instances in the history of some of the people of God in the Old Testament when this was literally true as well.
And when they testified of this themselves, remember Jacob at Bethel, when he had that wonderful vision of the Lord coming to him on that ladder that connected heaven to the place in which he lay, the bare ground that night.
[15:17] And when Jacob arose, and before he left Bethel, this was his testimony, God was there. he had seen the power and he had felt the presence of God.

Elijah, or rather Moses, at Mount Sinai, God came down as we sang here tonight in Psalm 68, God came down in wonderful power and in wonderful presence on Sinai and God was there.
And these were the evidences of his power and of his presence. It was the same with Elijah and I'm just mentioning these three, I could mention many more, but Elijah, remember, at Horeb and also Moses at Horeb when he saw the burning bush, that was God, God was there, invisible power, present, visibly to Moses who testified of that fact.
And it was the same with Elijah and that moment, that experience of his in Horeb, remember, when he saw the earthquake and the fire and he heard that powerful wind but the Lord wasn't in any of them and then he heard the still small white, the Lord was there in a very wonderful way as well.
So it is in Calvary, or at Calvary rather, in the death of Jesus and you know that it is around that great, it's around that wonderful hub that Paul builds a lot of his teaching in the Epistle to the Corinthians.
[16:53] God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself and the trembling of the earth at Calvary and the rending of the rocks and the opening of the graves.

God was there testifying to men, testifying to us tonight that the death of Jesus had a profound effect upon the order of nature itself as it had a profound effect upon the souls and the lives of men both then and now.
The world in which you and I live is a world which cannot be severed from the death of Jesus. And the life that you and I live tonight is a life which cannot either be severed from the death of Jesus because the death of Jesus is either the ground of our acceptance before God and our hope for eternity as individuals or else it is the rock of the fence upon which many people stumble.
Jesus in his death is either indispensable for you tonight or else he is an annoyance an intrusion into the privacy of your life that you could well do without and that you cannot understand and that you don't want to understand.
And there the Lord at Calvary the moment that our Lord died was speaking to the men who were present as he spoke to Jerusalem after the resurrection and was saying to them this death has a profound effect upon and a connection with the natural order of things and a profound effect upon and a connection with the souls and the lives of men.
[19:02] Now then what is that connection which is the second point that we will deal with. Well some may say that at the death of Jesus some people have said that the earth was a that this was a gesture of mourning from the creation itself from the earth that quake and from the rocks that were rent.

Well whatever else we can say about that we can assuredly say this from the letter of Paul to the Romans we could have read it here tonight chapter 8 Hebrews chapter 12 and other passages we can certainly say this whatever else is going to happen to this world the world in which you and I live and I mean by the world there the earth the natural order the structure of this earth the textures of this earth and the very bowels of this earth whatever else is going to happen to this world we know

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that because Jesus died this world is going to become a new earth a new world we know that from for example and I just confined myself just now to Romans chapter 8 and we know more not only and this is one of the wonderful things that Paul one of the wonderful pictures that he draws for us in Romans chapter 8 not only is this world going to become a new order a new creation when Jesus comes to judge the world but we know and this is what is so wonderful and what we find so difficult to understand that in some wonderful way this earth is in sympathy and this is
Paul's teaching in Romans chapter 8 is in sympathy with the Christians who live in the world who are groaning as they live in the world who are oppressed and opposed for their faith in this world the whole creation we read groans and travels and pain until now waiting for the adoption to wit the redemption of the body and what he is saying is this there are Christians in the world they long to get out of the world they're longing for the day when the Lord will come for them and take them to himself and let's make no mistake about this some people say oh well that's not a very worthy reason for the Christian to mourn in the world is it not is it not anyone who has come face to face with the evil and the darkness that is abroad in this world cannot but long for the day when there will be no evil and no darkness to oppress them and to oppose them in this world these are the things that cause so many groanings in the
Christian's life and Paul says this these Christians are living like that but they're longing and they're waiting for the redemption of their body they look forward to a better day to a better environment to a better place in the presence of the Lord soul and body and they long for that day don't you long for it as a Christian tonight are there not times when you're thankful that this is not your rest are there not times when you rejoice to realize to know that there is a hope set before you and that God will not disappoint your hope of course you live like that but this is the wonderful thing the creation in which you live the world in which you grow and this is the picture is in some way groaning with you the world is in sympathy with you it too is looking forward to relivance to redemption to reconstitution to renewal because this world is under the curse of sin brought upon it by the sin of man but the world is going to be delivered from the curse of sin because
Jesus died to remove the curse and the quaking of the earth at the death of Jesus was a fortest to the earth itself and to the world of mankind that the world's renewal the creation's renewal is rooted as much in the death of Christ ours is the renewal and the deliverance of the believer in the world that's the first point that we're making connection with this because as we saw last week and I'm spending too much time on this as we saw last week the the there was the Calvary was a place of judgment Golgotha was a place of judgment the cross was a place of judgment the death of Jesus was the voice of judgment and the death of
[24:26] Jesus was answering this question and answering it in a profound way to whom does the world belong God answered the world belongs to the saviour to whom would the earth belong it would belong to him to whom would the temple belong it would belong to him the veil was rent and he sits king upon his throne a priest at his own altar and he is also lord of all the earth this was a pledge to the natural order that the curse was removed and the day would come when the natural order would be delivered from the delivered completely from that curse but for us and more particularly it was saying something else it was saying in this earthquake and in the opening of the rocks and in the opening of the grave

Jesus was a triumphant event it was a victory remember he died triumphantly he died actively he gave himself to death this was no ordinary death as I mentioned before and I don't want to spend time on it because a very delicate subject for people people in the throes of death they are taken by death taken there comes a moment when they can struggle no more they are overcome but that wasn't the way Jesus died he summoned death and he poured out his soul unto death he was as active in his death as he was in his life he died triumphantly and this earth was made to know that the grave was made to know it that the death of
Jesus had power over the world and over the grave the grave was sealed until that moment because sin sin was giving it its power and its authority if you don't believe in the presence of sin my friend you go down to sand and agonish and grass and cross the bust and have a look at all the cemeteries that your eye can take in and there's the evidence for the reality of sin the wages the wages of sin is death but here's a man here's a person who took our sins upon himself who died our death and who took our sins away and his death spoke to the grave open because I have paid the price of the sin that gives you your authority and as the rocks were rent by the power of his death so the graves were opened by the power and the efficacy and the victory of his death and when the

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graves were opened that was what the death of Christ was saying that the grave was now denied its victory because the price was paid he died for our sins and the effects of the death of Christ on the cross reached down to the very domain of the dead the power of his death was effective to rest the sins from the grave and as we just see ultimately to rest the bodies of the dead from the curse of sin from death itself someone put it like this the moment he entered the realm of the dead the mouth of that realm is made to open and to yield up its contents therefore the bodies of the dead were exposed that's the point on that day and at that hour the bodies of the dead were exposed the mouth of death was made to open and to yield the mouth of the grave and the realm of the dead was made to open and to yield up its contents and that was proof that God was satisfied with the atoning work of Jesus of the death of Jesus that he was satisfied with the merit and the power of his death and the resurrection of Christ and this is why we speak like this is grounded in the atoning work of his death by which
God was satisfied and God gave two visible tokens of that acceptance first of all as we saw the graves were opened and then when he rose the dead rose after him and went into the holy city now if you read and I think that this is important I must say that I had great difficulty with this myself but if you read it that is a sequence of events we read these verses as though the graves were opened and the dead rose the day he died they didn't the graves were opened the day he died the moment he died but the dead the dead bodies of the saints arose after his resurrection they were exposed for two days and then they rose and that leads us to answer thirdly and finally this what was the rising from the dead or what was
God saying to us and to the people of their day through their rising from the dead well in the first place he was saying that they were rising for the sake of Christ they rose because he rose remember that his resurrection is grounded in the power and the merit of his death and they rose because heroes now we are not told who they were but I think that some things can be deduced from the way it was placed you see there are some people who say remember what Jesus said Abraham he said saw my day and rejoiced there are some people who think that Abraham was one of the people who rose others think that Job was one of the men who rose because he said that he would see he would see the saviour in the flesh others say there must be that Moses was there well the fact the matter is we don't know who they were but it is unlikely that they would have been the bodies of people who were dead hundreds and hundreds of years before this because the graves were opened and the bodies were exposed so they couldn't have been there in the graves all that long because the pros of decomposition had not set into an extent that the bodies were not recognisable they were seen as bodies but the significant thing is this it isn't who they were individually but what were they they were the bodies of the saints what's a saint a person who loves and who serves the
[32:39] Lord a person whose life is committed to him by his grace the bodies of the saints arose the bodies of the saints who slept people who loved the Lord who believed people who exercised hope and the fulfilment of his promise and who lived as God would have them live these are the saints and here they are now men and women as far as we know men and women who didn't see the Lord but who longed and who waited for the coming of the Messiah into the world maybe people like Anna people like Simeon who blessed the Lord when he came who saw and who said now let us know thy servant depart and peace from mine eyes have seen thy salvation they were members of the church of God from a past age who looked and who waited and he longed for the coming of the Saviour and now they are all after his resurrection showing this that just as the church of the present day owes its existence to the death of Jesus so does the church of the past so does the church of the past you see there are some people who say that the believer in the

Old Testament his faith was different to the faith of the believer in the New Testament and its nature it was not because the faith of the Old Testament saint looked to exactly the same object as the faith of the New Testament saint the difference is this that the New Testament saint has far more light upon the object of its faith than the Old Testament saint had and that is why this is said of them that day these all died in faith not that they received the promises but believing them they embraced them and they looked for the fulfillment they were like people who were standing at a certain point and they were looking to an object far far away and they couldn't make out as clearly as they would want to what they were in actual fact seeing but they were looking for it waiting for it wanting to see more of it they were looking through a glass darkly because so are we but the glass that they had was darker than the glass that we had they had only part of the word of

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God we have the word of God in its entirety but you see there were saints because they believed God they loved him and they looked for him and they were waiting and longing for the saviour and the church of the past is speaking now to the church of the present when it arose from the dead speaking of the reality and the genuineness of their faith and speaking of the faithfulness of God in the midst of all the difficulties and the objections that met their faith God was faithful and that is why the Old Testament church and the New Testament church and the church tonight in heaven glorified saints and the spirits of just men and women in the presence of God are all united in the death of Jesus you my friend who love the Lord here tonight you are united and associated with Abraham and Moses and Job and David and all the Old
Testament saints as you are united by faith and love in the same Lord to all the saints who love him in the world tonight and associated and united with all the saints in the presence of the Lord Jesus and that's the power and the wonder of his death it united the past and the present and the future and that's what God was saying when the Old Testament saints arose or rather the bodies of these saints arose at his death they arose to proclaim the victory of his death and they arose to point to the Lord who died we are not told what they said to their fellow men in Jerusalem there isn't a single word left in the Bible of what they said maybe they never said a word for all we know we don't know how long they stayed in
Jerusalem either we know nothing of these things we don't know where they went except that they went into the holy city Jerusalem but they didn't need to speak here was living evidence testimony to the people there of the power and the efficacy of the death of Jesus and in that sense they were the forerunners of the apostles but there's something very interesting here you know that on more than one occasion people had said to Jesus give us a sign so that we may believe prove the reality of what you're speaking some people have taught us to say this that people rise from the dead will believe the rich man said that in hell if only someone would rise from the dead they would believe well here is the Lord speaking now to that kind of voice in Jerusalem and saying evidence here's your evidence and yet we don't believe a single person who believed as a result of the rising from the dead but the point is this that there are people in this church tonight who have been spiritually raised from the death of their own sins and from the grave of their own deception by the power of the grace of God and their lives are witnessing to all around them of the reality of that power and of that grace and that's a wonder but let me say this to you we have a greater wonder than that and the wonder if I were to ask you tonight what is a more powerful witness than the life of a saved sinner saved by the power of his grace is there a greater wonder and a more powerful evidence in the life of men yes there is the evidence and the wonder and the power of the word of God coming in the power of the spirit of
[39:49] God it rends the hearts that are rocky it breaks them and moves them in penitence and in faith to come to the Lord when the power of the truth comes it opens the graves of sin and when the power of the truth comes by the spirit it quickens those who are in the sepulcher of their own sin it raises them from the dead it bids them go to their Jerusalem to go to the place of witness to the place of difficulty and to the place of opposition but it also tells them to go to the holy city it denotes them in bonds of fellowship and love to those who are already members of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ I wonder tonight if that is your experience has God spoken in your life by his power as he spoke at

Golgotha by his power through the death of Jesus and has the word of his grace come to you with that effectiveness in your own life and there is something else that that word says to us as well and at this minute Calvary also says to us here is a pledge and a pattern of the future resurrection of the dead you know there is no point in asking such questions as these for example let me just mention two or three to you was the resurrection of these men from the graves the same in its nature as the resurrection of Lazarus from his tomb the answer is yes was the resurrection of these men different to the resurrection that awaits us at the day of judgment the answer again is yes because we don't know for example how long these men were in Jerusalem but we do know that they went back to the realm of the dead and I just want to make this point and this is just pure conjecture if
Jesus ascended heaven into heaven before these people again returned to the realm of the dead what I wonder awaited the eye of their soul as they entered or reentered heaven they saw there what they had never seen the glorified human nature of our Lord after his resurrection resurrection if that was when they were back to the realm of the dead but the point I want to make is this that in their resurrection we have a pattern of our resurrection you see we read here they came out of the

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graves after his resurrection and that's the way it will be when he comes again to judge the world he will come and then they who are the
Lord's will rise first from the grave the voice of the archangel shall call forth the dead but the dead in Christ shall rise first he will speak and he will raise and he will raise those who love him I don't know in what way this is going to happen but perhaps you can imagine this when the Lord comes he will speak to the likes of Peter and Paul and John and James and Ruth and Mary to rise from the dead first those who are his I wonder my friend if you will be amongst them will I be there I wonder how many of us can say with the assurance of the hymn writer when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more when the morning breaks eternal bright and fair when the
Savior on earth shall gather over on the other shore and the role is called up yonder I'll be there do you think you can say that tonight have you by the power of his grace been delivered from the grave of your sin has he set you free from the sepulcher of the service of the devil have you been enabled to step out into the light of his favour and his grace and has he enabled you by his power to return to you Jerusalem to witness to those who knew a life that was once lived in the service of sin but now hopefully claimed for the
[45:39] Lord who died and have you by his grace been united to the holy Jerusalem are you there well if you are you too can have the assurance that you will rise from the dead after he comes and you will rise first with all those in the world who have served him what a company to be in what a prospect is held out before you what a tragedy that you should live your life in any other fellowship or in any other association when he who died on the cross bids you once again look unto him and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth for I am God and there is none other will you come to the

Lord who died and who lives and who reigns and who's going to come again and for whose presence there are many in the world tonight longing looking hoping and waiting and saying with the church in heaven oh Lord how long let us pray oh do thou bless our hearts and do thou take us we pray thee and unite us to thyself in the bonds of faith and love help us to live to thy glory and to rejoice in the knowledge that thou hast triumphed over death and over the grave do thou help us to step out with thyself into the newness of the life that thou hast died to purchase for lost hell deserving sinners that we can say because he lives
I live also have mercy upon us and part of thy blessing for Jesus sake amen

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