

**Kirkwall Presbyterian Church**  
**'The Dividing Curtain'**  
**John 18:1-40; John 19:1-16, 25-30; Matthew 27:50-54**  
**April 3, 2026 – Good Friday**  
**By Keith Marcy**

Matthew records Jesus' death with a few more details than the others. I focus on one sentence in Matthew 27:51: *'At that moment...'* What moment? When Jesus gave up His Spirit. When His battered, bruised, crucified body died – *'at that moment'* the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Why is this worth mentioning? What curtain is this talking about?

Let us have a look. The first picture is an artist's conception of the Temple based on the information given in Scripture. It was a massive structure. Here is a cut-away view of the heart of the temple-- The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In the **Holy Place** was a candelabra, a table for bread, and an altar where a priest would burn incense to God every day. The adjacent room, the **Holy of Holies**, contained the Ark of the Covenant. This was a box overlaid with gold. In the box were two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod and a clay jar of manna. Once a year, the high priest, after thoroughly washing and putting on clean robes, could enter this room and sprinkle the blood of a lamb on the Ark of the Covenant before the presence of God. This was to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. God watched this ceremony. He saw the blood of a substitute lamb and forgave Israel's sins. They were forgiven for the next year.

Separating the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies was a curtain – 60 feet high and 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick. It was woven from layer upon layer of linen. It was embroidered. It was massive and beautiful. It separated the very presence of God from the world.

That is the curtain that was torn in two when Jesus died. Torn by whom? No human could do it. It was torn by the finger of Almighty God Himself!

But why? What is the significance?

Why does it matter?

It matters for the Christian community just as much today as it did then. In this action, God told us a story. More, God made a declaration in this one act. The curtain that divided the presence of God from the world has been torn. Now, the presence of God is among men. Why? Because Jesus' death appeased the wrath

of God towards sinful men. The wall of sin was destroyed by Jesus. God accepted His sacrifice for us!

*'At that moment'* – the moment Jesus died, mankind entered a New Covenant with his holy Maker. The Old Covenant established through Moses became obsolete; the New Covenant came through Jesus, the Son of God! The Old Covenant required lambs, bulls, doves be offered to God regularly. But once a year on a day known as the Day of Atonement, The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of a lamb to buy forgiveness for the sins of Israel. Jesus' death replaced all of that. His death took God's punishment of sin for the whole world, not only for Israel!

The Old Covenant was in place as a temporary solution for humanity's sin problem; the New is eternal! No more animal sacrifices need to be made – ever. God said so in sign language when He tore the curtain in the temple.

God the Father was waiting for this moment in history.

God the Son did not disappoint His Father. He went to the cross, despising the shame.

Mankind was the benefactor. Men and women, boys and girls no longer need to come to God through a human priest. They can come to God at any time because Jesus, the Son, opened the way through the torn curtain. Therefore, we have access to God to present our thanksgivings and our petitions to Him if we believe. But we must be careful that we never forget the magnitude of the cost. The price paid was the suffering and death of Jesus. We come to him in **Jesus' Name**. Did it cost God the Father anything? One thinking person has said, 'Why did darkness come upon the world that day? Because God the Father could not bear the sight of the agony of God the Son dying!' That statement helps us to understand the sorrow in Heaven, but God who does not need the light of the sun to see, felt the agony anyway.

The torn curtain is a precious picture. It is the picture of an unobstructed path leading to the throne of God! He wants us to use that path; often. There is only one Path. It does not have a toll. It has no password or e-mail address. The Holy Spirit will show it to you—when you acknowledge your need of a Savior, and in your soul reach out and embrace *Jesus, my Lord—forever!*

To God be the Glory!!!