Three Earthquakes

(by Kent Heaton)

***“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many … Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.”*** (**Matthew 27:51-53**; **28:1-2**)

The death of Jesus was remarkable in many ways apart from the death of the Son of God. Darkness enveloped the sky from noon to around 3:00pm. Upon His death, the veil of the temple was rent in two from top to bottom. The earth shuttered and moved in response to the death of the Creator. After the resurrection of Jesus many bodies of the saints arose from the dead appearing to many in Jerusalem. But the events of surrounding the death of Jesus did not end on that day. On the first day of the week there was another earthquake as the angel of the Lord descended from heaven rolling back the huge stone sealing the tomb of Jesus. ***“He is not here; for He is risen”*** said the messenger of God.

The first earthquake was the living earth responding to the death of its Maker. Throughout the ministry of Jesus He showed His power over nature but also showed His relationship to the world. He could walk on water because He had power of the forces of nature. Turning water to wine illustrated His working within the schemes of natural law to show forth His own power. Jesus and nature were one. When His body died the earth could do nothing but react in shock. The first earthquake shows the Jesus is Creator.

  The second earthquake came when Jesus rose from the dead. Two earthquakes in three days had to rattle the nerves of everyone in the area. Did anyone connect the events of the first earthquake with the early morning quake on the first day of the week? It did not seem to sink in to the minds of the disciples as they were still hiding in fear. The Sunday morning quake was the greatest victory for mankind. Jesus rose from the dead and His power over Hades and sin was assured. Satan’s fate was sealed with that earthquake. The message of the gospel is powerful (**Romans 1:16**) and when allowed to touch the heart will move it like an earthquake.

  But what of the third earthquake? This one has not happened yet but it will be the largest and most powerful quake since creation. ***“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up … the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat”*** (**2 Peter 3:10-12**). Jesus will come back when this quake happens (**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10**) and everyone will hear His voice (**John 5:28-29**).

  The first earthquake honored Jesus as Creator. The second earthquake announced Jesus as Lord and Savior. The third earthquake will be when Jesus returns as Judge.

Living Letters

(Dan Shipley)

The life of every person is a message. We say something by the way we live. The apostle Paul made this very point in **2 Corinthians 3**. Apparently, Paul and his work had been greatly discredited by his enemies in Corinth. So much so, in fact, that he asked, ***“or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?”*** (**v 1**). It is not surprising that the false teachers would need letters of commendation. But Paul? The very one who had wrought the signs of an apostle among them; the one who had wronged no man; who had corrupted no man; who had taken advantage of no man?

Why, ***“Ye are our epistle,”*** he continued, ***“written in our hearts, known and read of all men…”*** (**v 2**). The Christians at Corinth bespeak of Paul’s great work; his influence can be seen in what they themselves had become (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). In **1 Corinthians 9:2** he calls them ***“the seal of mine apostleship.”*** That is, as a seal they attest to the genuineness of his claims. But, not only do their lives reflect the influence of Paul, they reflect the influence of Him who influenced Paul.

Accordingly, Paul writes: ***“…ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh”*** (**v 3**). All men are letters, but not all are letters of Christ. The life of every man says something, but it just doesn’t read the same without the Lord. Those who imagine themselves as well off without Christ bear an effective but discouraging message to all who know and read them. Even children can read such living letters, and worse, be immeasurably influenced by them.

On the other hand, those who are epistles of Christ are “made manifest” as such, Paul says (**v 3**). It is how we live more than what we claim that demonstrates a Christ-controlled life. Such living is but the expression of what has been “written” on the heart. It is one thing to have the word of God in hand, that is, written in ink or on stone. But to have God’s word in the heart is far better! Many have Bibles who have not taken God’s word to heart. A prophecy from Jeremiah referred to in **Hebrews 8** says, ***“I will put My laws into their mind. And on their heart also will I write them”*** (**v 10**). God’s faithful are such as appropriate and apply His word to their everyday living – they are truly epistles of Christ, and others know it.

For this reason Paul writes, ye are ***“known and read of all men.”*** While men cannot read the heart, they can and do know the kind of life that issues forth from the heart. To put it in space terminology, the heart is man’s guidance system. It directs and controls his every activity. When Christ controls the guidance system, men will “read” our good works and, hopefully, glorify God (**Matthew 5:16**). The apostle Paul was an impressive letter of Christ. ***“For me to live,”*** he said, ***“is Christ”*** (**Philippians 1:21**). None could deny the remarkable influence of Christ in his life. Now, as the Corinthians and others saw Christ in Paul, so ought the world read the same in all Christians. ***“Among whom ye are seen as lights in the world”*** (**Philippians 2:15**).

***“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* Galatians 2:20**