

CHRIST AT CALVARY: TRIUMPH IN TRAGEDY

March 26, 2017

Daniel 2:1-45; John 19:1-42

“Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter” Daniel 2:45

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was a God-given revelation of the future, from Nebuchadnezzar’s day until the end of time. He saw a statue, with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, mid-section of bronze and legs of iron, and with feet of mixed iron and clay, all of which was utterly destroyed by a crushing mountain stone. The image symbolized four successive world empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome, which would be destroyed by Christ, whose kingdom would fill the earth.

Christ’s triumph over the world’s governments and their civilization became evident at His crucifixion. There He demonstrated that the forces of the Roman Empire were, in fact, subservient to Him. When Pilate, the Roman judge, threatened Jesus with power to kill Him, “Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).

Rome, the last of four empires represented by Nebuchadnezzar’s image, was doomed by its crucifixion of Jesus. Christ, the stone cut without hands, ended the empire-sequence illustrated by the image. Here we consider three events superintended by Christ from the cross. Though undetected by man, they show the Roman Empire being brought to its demise.

First, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them,” and one of the crucified thieves was forgiven (Luke 23:34, 39-45). The thief appealed to a “higher court,” acknowledging Jesus as the king who could admit him into His kingdom. Crimes for which Rome was executing the thief, Christ forgave. Christ preempted Rome’s death sentence, granting him eternal life. Rome had power over his life, but Christ had power over his will and soul. From the cross, Christ transform his thinking, something Rome with all of its might could never do. And this was accomplished merely by Christ’s word: “Father forgive” (Luke 23:34). On Rome’s cross, Christ overpowered Rome.

Second, on the cross Jesus said “I thirst.” This was not because He intended to drink—when offered drink, He declined. He said “I thirst” in order that Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 19:28). Responding, a Roman soldier put vinegar to Jesus’ lips, fulfilling the Scripture, “in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21). In fact, “the Spirit of Christ” through Old Testament prophets “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ” (I Peter 1:11). Both the giving and the fulfilling of the Scripture was accomplished by Christ, who from the cross orchestrated the force of Rome to fulfill His own Word. Christ, not Rome, was prevailing.

Third, from the cross Christ said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46). Jesus had power to determine the precise moment of His death. He said, “I lay down my life . . . no man taketh it from me” (John 10:17, 18). Rome authorized His crucifixion, but could not take His life. He died when He chose, and well before the soldiers’ anticipated. They broke the thieves’ legs to hasten their deaths, but found Jesus’ lifeless body, which needed nothing to hasten His death (John 19:32, 33). Again, Christ determined the soldiers’ actions, bringing to fulfillment Psalm 34:20: “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken” (John 19:36, 37; Zechariah 12:10). Christ was presiding over Rome.

The stone cut without hands was crushing the iron legs of the image, and would become a mountain that would fill the earth.