My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

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[0:00] Let's read God's Word from Matthew chapter 27, verses 45 to 54. And as you turn there, I'll pray. Lord, we ask now, as we turn to your Word, that you would open our eyes to see the truths of the Bible.

And we know, Lord, that without the help of the Spirit, we cannot see, we cannot desire, we cannot know truly and deeply. We cannot know by way of experience. And so we ask, Lord, that you would give us the gift of illumination, the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, to hear and understand and believe and believe your Word.
So we ask for that now, and that you would help your servant David as he helps us to see what's so important about this great question Christ asked at the cross. And we ask for that in Jesus' name. Amen.
Now, from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, Lima, Subachthani.
That is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, This man is calling Elijah. And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink.
[1:22] But the other said, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and they said, Truly, this was the Son of God.
This is God's holy word. Why? Sometimes you hear that question asked from a bed in a hospital ward, from dying lips, through features perhaps contorted by pain.
It's asked of the doctor. Why, doctor? Why? Sometimes it's asked at a funeral, by the graveside or the crematorium.
Perhaps it's asked of the minister. Why, reverend? Why? Sometimes, perhaps more commonly, it's asked in private, in the inner recesses of the mind and heart.
[2:51] And it's asked of God Himself. Why God? Why me? Why her? Why? Why? Why? Why? The question why is the almost universal human response to suffering.

Even professed atheists, it seems, cannot help themselves. It's the instinctive, it's the gut reaction of human beings to personal suffering.
Within our hearts, there is a profound intuition that human suffering and pain demand an explanation. In the midst of suffering, it makes sense to us to ask and perhaps even to demand an answer to the question, why?
Why? There is, I think, only one place in the New Testament where that question, why me, is asked. And it's here upon the cross.
And the question comes from the lips of Jesus Himself. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
[4:08] And that's strange, isn't it? Here is this man who claimed not just to know God in a special way, but who in many different ways claimed to be the very Son of God.

And here he is asking the question, why? It makes you wonder at this moment what on earth was going on.

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Just why did Jesus cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Was it out of self-pity? Had He abandoned trust in His Father?
Was this simply a cry of defeat and despair? What do these words tell us about Jesus and the meaning of the cross?
Up till now, in the gospel accounts, the questions Jesus asked have been of men and women. But on the cross here is a question directed towards God Himself.
[5:15] R.A. Finlayson, a free church theologian of a bygone age, writes, His dealings with men are finished, now He is dealing with God alone, with God for men.

In other words, here are words that take us to the very heart and substance of the Christian gospel. And as many of you will know, these words are in fact a quote from the opening verse of Psalm 22. Here in this moment of extremis on the cross, Jesus speaks and proclaims the Word of God. They are surely on our Lord's lips among the most incomprehensible ever spoken.
Martin Luther wrote, God forsaken God. Who can understand it? Who indeed?
So let me tonight highlight just three things that I think we can learn from this question about the forsakenness of Jesus Christ.
[6:27] And the first of these that I want to highlight is what we'll call the reality of Christ's forsakenness. What is this forsakenness of which Christ speaks here on the cross?

I think we must understand these words of Jesus as communicating a real experience of forsakenness. I know that there are those who would want to soften the edges of this cry, who would explain it perhaps just as a quotation from Psalm 22 or as an expression of human weakness, or just as a feeling that Christ had.
Some, for example, want to say that Christ only felt abandoned on the cross. Now, we know from our whole human experience that people can feel things intensely, and yet they're not actually true. We can feel abandoned, but we're not actually abandoned. He wasn't truly forsaken, they say. He was only overwhelmed by a feeling of divine desertion.
But you'll notice how Matthew is very careful to record both the original Aramaic words that Jesus spoke and their translation. I think he doesn't want us to miss their meaning and significance.
[7:58] And you'll notice, too, that Jesus' cry, he tells us, was uttered with a loud voice. In other words, this question is, if I put it this way, it's screamed, not whispered.

It's not a theatrical gesture. It's not a pious recital. It is the agonized shriek of an abandoned soul. And the forsakenness here is not an illusion.
It's not just a feeling. It is the experience of the second Adam bearing the curse of the broken covenant. Jesus is here experiencing the reality of which Gethsemane was but a shadow.
The cup that was placed in Jesus' hands in the garden is now being drunk down to the very dregs. And as he takes that cup to his lips, he now tastes in his soul what it means to be utterly forsaken by God.
And so that cry of forsakenness, I think, captures for us something of the meaning and the spiritual reality of the crucifixion. Much worse than the shame and the nakedness and the mockery and the scourging and the torture and the physical suffering.
[9:21] Was this. That in some mysterious sense, the father had deserted him. He who had lived on earth in such close harmony and fellowship with God now finds himself abandoned.

The fellowship that had been the very atmosphere of his life was withdrawn. And he calls out, my God, my God.
Now that, of course, and we were thinking about that this morning, is still the language of intimacy. Covenantal language. It's the language of a close relationship.
We know that throughout the Gospels, Jesus prays to Abba the Father. All through the Gospels, Jesus enjoys the smile of his Father.
He is the Son of his love, the Son with whom he is well pleased. But not here. Not at Calvary. He is my God, but he is not my Father.
[10:30] And there is for Jesus, it seems, a loss of filial consciousness. Because on the cross, that sense of sonship and love is eclipsed by wrath and judgment.

Blotted out by the horror of sin. The sin that he bears now makes it impossible for him to speak to God as Father.
I mean, if a member of the church here comes to me and says, David, I never want to see you or talk to you again.

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I feel very hurt. But if my wife, Allison, or one of my children, was to say that to me, I would feel a lot worse.
The deeper the love, the closer the relationship, the greater the pain at its loss. And that forsakenness is a reality for Jesus as he bears the sins of his people.
[11:36] Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here is the scapegoat banished into the wilderness. The curse of sin. Separation from God.

Cast away from his presence. Cut off from the source of all that is good. And so on the cross, Jesus becomes an accursed thing. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, He made him to be sin who knew no sin.
And in his humanity, Jesus experiences something he has never, ever felt before. We have a little video of our eldest grandson.
Being given something for the very first time in his high chair. Hitherto, he had known only his mother's milk. And what I would describe as tasteless mush.
But this is a little clip of him being given. It was a piece of mango. Up to this point, he's never tasted any fruit. And as he stuffs it into his mouth, you can see he is completely nonplussed by the taste.
[12:45] His eyes literally popping out of his head. He's never tasted anything like it. And you can tell. And here is Jesus, tasting something for the very first time.

And it's not a sweet taste. It's bitter. It's foul. It's poison. Here he is sucking out the venom of the serpent's bite.
And it brings not joy and delight, but agony and questioning despair. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Here Jesus bears the curse of the law, the curse of sin, by becoming a curse for us. He stands in the place of sinners, bearing the legal, moral guilt of all our sin.
It is something terrifyingly real. He bears not his own sins, of which there are none, but the sins of others.
[13:49] And here the full gravity and reality of sin becomes clear to us. Jesus bears upon his own body that sense of God's antagonism against sin.

His experience here reminds us that from the divine perspective, there is not and cannot be any compromise or accommodation with sin. He came across these words of the Puritan Richard Sibbes.
He writes, If you would see the most ugly colors of sin, then see it in Christ upon the cross. See how bitter a thing it was, forcing him to send forth strong cries to his Father.
My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Here Jesus experiences the wrath of God against sin.
Wrath that was not his own, yet became his by imputation. Here is the doctrine of penal substitution. For if Christ was not truly forsaken, then the curse has not been borne.
[15:05] If the darkness was only apparent, then our peace is only apparent. But friends, Scripture will not allow us that comfort.

It was the will of the Lord to crush him and put him to grief. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.
And in that laying on, there was a real withdrawal of the light of the Father's countenance. The reality of Christ's forsakenness.
And that brings me to the second thing here. And we'll call this the mystery of Christ's forsakenness. J.C. Ryle comments on this verse, There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom.
Don Carson, the New Testament scholar, theologian, writes, We hover breathlessly at the edge of the mystery of the Trinity as the triune God's matchless love is displayed in the sacrifice of the cross, in the penal substitutionary death of the eternal incarnate Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us.
[16:21] But just how can the eternal Son experience forsakenness? How can He who is one with the Father in essence cry out as one abandoned?

It's a mystery. But the answer, I think, lies, I think as Carson's words indicate, in the wonder of the incarnation. Because the person who suffers is the divine person.
But the nature in which He suffers is His human nature. In His human soul, He experiences the full weight of divine displeasure against sin.

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His exclamation here represents the nadir of all Jesus' sufferings. In this cry, Jesus reaches the lowest point of His humiliation as the incarnate Son.
Here He descends into the essence of hell, enduring the most extreme suffering ever experienced. So dense, so infinite, so horrendous as to be utterly beyond our comprehension.
[17:33] His cry doesn't diminish His deity. He doesn't cease being God before, during, or after this. His cry does not divide His human nature from His divine person, or in some way unravel the Trinity.

It doesn't detach Him from the Spirit. His forsakenness is related to His human nature. He bears our sins in His physical body.
So what does it mean that the Father forsook the Son? We're not seeking to deny divine impassibility.
The Son did not cease to be God, nor did the Father cease to love the Son. Yet in the economy of redemption, there was a real judicial abandonment.
The Father is the righteous judge, treating the Son as the sin-bearer. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. Christ's forsakenness lay in the withdrawal of the Father's favor while He bore the curse.
[18:43] In His humanity, in His body on the tree, Jesus is utterly alone. In His hour of greatest need, there comes this searing pain, unlike anything the Son has ever experienced.

And yet at this moment when He most needs encouragement, no voice cries from heaven, this is my beloved Son. No angel is sent to strengthen Him.
No well-done and good faithful servant rings in His ears. The women who supported Him are silent. The disciples, cowardly and terrified, have fled.
Feeling disowned by all, Jesus endures the way of suffering, alone, deserted, and forsaken in utter darkness. Of course, it's a cry that takes us to the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation of the Son.
But beyond that, it takes us to the mystery of God's love for sinners. Why would God bruise His only dearly beloved Son? It was because Christ was made sin for us, acting on behalf of His people as their representative and for our benefit.
[19:54] His suffering is vicarious. He suffered on our behalf, in our place. He didn't simply share our forsakenness. He came to save us from forsakenness.

He endured it for us, not with us. And so, through faith in a crucified Savior, all God's people are immune to condemnation.
Now, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Christ suffered on our behalf, in our place.
Professor MacLeod wrote, The gospel of the dereliction is not that Christ shares our forsakenness, but that He saves us from it. He endured it not with us, but for us.
We are now free from the curse and condemnation of sin, precisely because Christ took it upon Himself and went in our place into the darkness and the abandonment and the forsakenness.
[20:52] It is the wonder of Christ's obedience to the Father. It is death, even death on a cross. There's an old hymn that we used to sing back in the day.

It was entitled, Give Me a Sight, O Savior. The chorus goes like this, Friend, Jesus Christ bore your sin and mine.
Not as some abstract concept, but real sins and offenses against God. Our lies, our lust, our anger, our selfishness, our idolatry, our pride, our apathy, our hatred, our cruelty, our gossip, our bitterness.
Under the weight of all our sin, Jesus was pitched into that dark hole of despair, dereliction, and damnation.
Well, over 150 years ago or so, John Rabbi Duncan was professor of Hebrew and Oriental languages just along the road there at New College here in Edinburgh.
[22:17] And in his classes, he was famous for going off on tangents and digressions. And he would move off from the Hebrew he was supposed to be teaching to embark on a variety of theological reflections.

And on one famous occasion, he threw out the following question. Do you know what Calvary was? Aye, aye, do you know what it was?

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Dying on the cross, forsaken by his Father. Do you know what it was? And then having waited a little and having walked up and down in front of the class in silence, he looked at them again and said to them with tears in his eyes, it was damnation, and damnation taken lovingly.
Friends, here we see the mystery of the love of Christ in all its splendor. For here is where Jesus, damned and forsaken for the sake of sinners. And that tells us this, there is no other way of salvation.
There is no other path or route we can take to come to God and to be in His presence. There is only one way, and that is through Jesus Christ, the crucified one.
[23:37] For hearing Christ's cry of forsakenness, we have a window into the mystery of God's love for sinners like us.

The reality of Christ's forsakenness. The mystery of Christ's forsakenness. And finally, here and briefly, what I'll call the glory of Christ's forsakenness.
Because this cry of dereliction is, of course, not the end. Yes, Jesus travels alone into the far country of suffering and isolation and despair, but He does not remain there.
This dereliction is an intermediate point on a road leading somewhere else. His suffering will give way to death. His death will give way to burial.
His burial will give way to resurrection. And resurrection will give way to ascended glory. The one who was with God comes to be without God in order that we should be with God.
[24:45] Remember Peter, his first epistle, 1 Peter 3.18 says, He died to bring us to God.

Jesus does not return empty-handed, as it were, from the far country. For He brings with Him a multitude that no man can number. Through the Son's forsakenness, we are brought close to God. So close that He can wipe away every tear from our eyes. And so the cross is not a tragic defeat. It is rather a glorious victory. As Christ is lifted up, exalted and elevated on the cross of Calvary. Remember, John in his gospel refers to the cross as Jesus' glory.
That's why the theme of Paul's preaching was what? Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That's the message. And we read in all the gospels that the shame and the disgrace of the cross soon gives way to resurrection and ascension.
[26:00] Suffering gives way to glory. We need to see everything in the light of Jesus' victory and exaltation and glory.

It's good to remember that in God's economy, suffering gives way to glory. Look at the darkness Jesus was in when He cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
And you will see that you have a Savior to whom you can come in the very darkest moments of life. When you feel God is nowhere near you.
He's actually been there. He didn't just feel abandoned. He was abandoned. And so, your Savior has a tenderness towards you that no one else in this world could ever have for you.
Jesus' cry of dereliction is a reminder that even when the circumstances of our lives make us feel that God has forsaken us, or maybe that we're surrounded by opposition, that the final word lies with God.
[27:25] And the cry of dereliction is in one sense the price of our reconciliation. Because He was forsaken, we shall never be. Because the face of God was turned from Him, it has turned towards us in everlasting mercy and love.

And this is the gospel in its, perhaps in its starkest and yet most glorious form. The cross is not merely an example of love. It's not just a demonstration of God's hatred against sin.
It's the place where God's justice and mercy have met. Where the sinless one was treated as a sinner, that the sinner might be treated as the Son.
And so, from our crucified, risen Savior, there flows to us forgiveness and cleansing, mercy and love, righteousness and acceptance with God.
I wonder if you can see that tonight. All of those wonderful blessings that flow to us because of the one who suffered and poured out his soul to death.
[28:39] Because of the one who chose to be numbered amongst the transgressors. Because of the one who bore the sin of many. Because of the one who was forsaken on the cross.

And of course, this is why we have this table. These elements of bread and wine. Christ has given us this meal so that we will never forget the cost of our salvation.
Here at the Lord's Supper, God is making us to understand it.

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And helping us to take it in. We used to sing an old hymn in Sunday school. An old Victorian hymn. There is a green hill far away.
Perhaps some of you of a certain vintage might remember it. It has this verse. We may not know. We cannot tell.
[29:39] What pains he had to bear. But we believe it was for us. He hung and suffered there.

Do you believe that tonight? C.H. Spurgeon once said that his whole theology could be summed up in four words. Jesus died for me.
By God's grace, as we come to the table tonight, may each one of us be able to say the same. Let's pray together.
God, our Father, we ask that you would impress these realities upon our hearts and our minds. Lord, we ask that we may indeed reflect on what it means for the Son of God to have loved us and given himself for us.
[30:54] Lord help us to appreciate and rejoice in all that he has accomplished help us to turn away from sin and self and the many idols of our culture and to rest in our crucified and risen Savior for we pray these things in his name and for your glory. Amen.

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