

Forsaken by God

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Date: 08 April 2012

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Father, we thank you that you have drawn near to us and call us by name.

We turn to your word now. We pray that we would hear you, that we would answer and draw near to you. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, Dan was right about the sugar high at the 9 o'clock service. And while the kids came out the front, there was a buzz.

And when they went downstairs, they were very loud until about halfway through the service. So the sugar high had a corresponding low. When you see, if you're a parent, you see your Sunday school teacher after class today, say thank you to them, won't you?

Well, now here we are. We join with millions of people today around the world who say that in the horror of a crucifixion, we find life, salvation, hope, purpose.

[1 : 15] As we look at that man on the cross, we find redemption and we find God. And the question is, are they, are we deluded?

And how would you know? Today we want to go to the source. We want to go to Jesus himself. And it's interesting in the reading that Sophie read from Mark's gospel, this eyewitness account, Jesus says only one thing from the cross.

And it's so important. Mark tells it to us in the original and then he translates it. At 3pm, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Or why have you completely abandoned me? I understand most victims of crucifixion, as they're dying, they call out curses on their enemies and vengeance to come down on those who put them there.

What does Jesus do? He doesn't call for vengeance. He says, God, you've forsaken me. And it looks on the surface as though he's losing it.

[2 : 25] He's losing his faith. He's in despair. But we need to look a little bit deeper. And as the readings were put together, I hope you could see Jesus is deliberately quoting from Psalm 22.

He's quoting verbatim Psalm 22. It's as though Jesus reaches back a thousand years to words written by King David in this Psalm and he says, these are mine.

And if you want to understand my death, there it is in Psalm 22. He's not quoting it because, you know, it's like a Shakespeare thing on the mind. It's not just a nice, appropriate thing.

He's quoting it. He's quoting the whole Psalm. He wants us to see the whole Psalm and saying, if you want to understand my motivation and what's going on and why I'm doing this, what's really happening, we have to put aside your opinion and you've got to listen to me, he says.

We've got to go where he points to Psalm 22. So we're going to turn to Psalm 22 this morning and ask the questions, what's happening in the crucifixion? Why is it happening?

[3 : 31] And you don't need to turn it up. If you'd like to, you can. It's on page 457 and 458. I'll read most of the verses.

It's always good when a preacher says, don't turn open the Bible. You should turn open the Bible because they're probably cheating. However, you're most welcome to, but you don't have to.

I'll do a lot of the reading. Just one more thing before we dive into it. King David, who wrote this Psalm, was writing way above his pay grade. There's nothing remotely close to his experience in this Psalm.

It's not about difficulty and suffering and getting better. This is a Psalm about being completely forsaken by God and executed. And Jesus takes this Psalm and he says, the Holy Spirit was predicting, David was prophesying of my suffering and of my subsequent glory.

And there are two halves in the Psalm. And the question over the first half is this, what is going on on the cross? What is Jesus really suffering? And as you heard it read, it's a Psalm of great extremes, isn't it?

[4 : 44] It's an uncensored, an unvarnished view of the depth of the horror that Jesus experiences on the cross. And the core of his suffering is that God seems absent and God seems silent.

He says in the first verse, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? Now, there are a lot of commentators who this is all too much for.

They have a sentimental view of Jesus. And they say, well, Jesus only appears to be suffering. He's not really in despair here.

He would rise above this. Others say, oh, he's just, he actually believes that God has forsaken him, but he was mistaken. But I don't think we have that option.

This is real. Here is Jesus, the healer, the teacher. This is the Jesus who never lies. He is in unutterable pain and sorrow and grief.

[5 : 52] He is a savior without salvation. He's a deliverer who will not be delivered himself. And what makes it excruciatingly personal for the son of God is the absence of God and the silence of God.

This is Jesus' experience on the cross. That's why he's taken us there. It's a massive privilege we have today, I think. We're not looking at the cross from the outside. We're actually taken inside Jesus' own experience.

And what he does is from the inside, he expresses the different layers of suffering. So he begins with the physical suffering. They have pierced my hands and my feet.

I can count my bones. I'm poured out like water, verse 14, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart's like wax, melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a pot's urn, like a piece of clay that's been burned, blasted in a kiln.

There's not a particle of fluid in it. My tongue sticks to my jaws. I'm in such pain I can't even express it. Now it's this element of physical suffering that the movies always focus on, don't they?

[7 : 05] But the Gospels don't focus on it because it's nowhere near the most important part. It's not where the real suffering takes place. See, what's worse than the physical suffering is the mockery and the rejection and the isolation.

And as it was read, you hear, he says, I feel like I'm surrounded by bulls who are going to gore me and lions who are going to tear me to pieces and dogs who are going to finish me up. Quote, I'm scorned by mankind, despised by the people.

They mock me. All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me. They wag their heads. Verse 8. He trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him.

If he delights in him, they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots.

There's a tremendous cruelty in this mocking. It's not just that they're enjoying his agony.

It's that there's a venom that's very cleverly disguised. They say, okay, since you have such good faith in God, if you really are the Son of God, if you really are close to God, come on down from the cross.

[8 : 18] You know, if God is real, he's not going to let this happen to you if he really delights in you. And I think what makes that taunting so bitter and harsh is there's a hint of truth in it.

But it's here where we begin to see that Psalm 22 is unique. In other Psalms of lament, where people are crying out to God for help, they always show a sense of their own sin.

There's a confession of sin somewhere in the Psalm. They'll say, Lord, I've done something wrong.

Please forgive me. Now come to my rescue. But in Psalm 22, there's not a single word of confession because they're the words of Christ, who has no sin, who always obey the Father.

And we know from the rest of the Bible that the only thing that can cause separation between humans and God is our rebellion and our disobedience and our sin. But Jesus was without sin.

So that when we look at the cross, what we are looking at is the result of our sin. And this is what hurts Jesus so deeply. He's not a plastic Superman.

[9 : 28] It doesn't just flow off his back. The taunts hit their mark. And what makes it even worse, I think, is that God had been present in the past.

God had always listened to his prayers. He'd always answered his prayers. And it's the very closeness and the dearness of their connection together which is the source of pain. And I think

more remarkable for us, at least, is that Jesus chose to go to the cross.

There was no need for him to die. He'd broken no laws. He'd done no wrong. There was no cause in Jesus for suffering. Again and again, Pilate is at pains to say, there's no guilt in this man.

Jesus is only on the cross because he chooses to be there. And I don't know if you've ever thought about that. I mean, here is the one with the words of God who heals the sick, who raises the dead. He chooses to die.

And if you're new to Christianity, one of the first things you notice about Christianity is that the Gospels, the eyewitness accounts of Jesus, are completely lopsided. They don't give us even historical coverage, two chapters for one year, two chapters for the second year, etc.

[10 : 41] Between a half, a third to a half of all the Gospels concerns the last 24 hours of Jesus' life. They are dominated by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And Jesus himself in Mark's Gospel explains, This is the reason I have come to serve and to give my life as a ransom payment on behalf of many.

This is at the heart of what is happening in the crucifixion. I don't think Jesus has lost his faith. He's still crying out, My God, my God. But the separation between him and God the Father was very real.

The abandonment and the painfulness was more real precisely because of his faith. And I think it's here that we enter into the true horror of the crucifixion, the true cost of Jesus' death.

He gives his life as a payment, as a punishment. He suffers the condemnation that we deserve. There could be nothing more painful than the Son of God.

[11 : 49] He doesn't deserve to be cast out of the presence of God. But as he dies on the cross, somehow he is cast out. He is forsaken. He is abandoned. He is punished in our place.

And that is why Jesus calls out this verse, My God, my God. So that's what's happening on the cross. And perhaps more importantly, why is he doing it?

And I want to ask why for the last half of the psalm. Because in verse 22, there's a sudden change. I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation.

In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him.

We move from horror to hope. We move from desperation to delight. We move from the sufferings of the Messiah to his glories. And in these verses I just read to you, why does Jesus go through his sufferings?

[12 : 54] It's for us. It's to create a fellowship, a family of brothers and sisters, of men and women and boys and girls, who will join him in praising God.

And he describes them as those he's proud to call his brothers and his sisters. Just think about this. The reason that Jesus goes to the cross, the reason he remains on the cross, is his delight in his brothers and sisters, his delight in you and me.

See, in the midst of the excruciating agony and pain and horror, there's also joy for Jesus. His thoughts are toward the benefits that his death is going to win for us.

And the picture here is of a great feast of enjoyment and celebration in the presence of God. That's what Jesus was thinking on the cross. He was anticipating your happiness and mine and the gift that he could give us.

That we would never need to face the condemnation of God. We would never need to be forsaken by God. It was the thought of our joy and God's joy that kept him there.

[14 : 07] See, the point of the Christian faith is not to make the world a better place, even though it will. That'll be one of the byproducts. It's not to take nasty people and make them nicer.

Oh, and nice people and make them even nicer. Even though it'll have that byproduct as well, at least with some of us. The purpose is to bring us back to God.

Jesus' purpose is nothing short to bring us back to glory. And this is a word we've come across again and again in the last year, isn't it? When we talk about glory, it's one of the most crucial things the Bible says about you and about me and about God.

In some ways, the whole story of the Bible can be summarized by glory. If God's motivation towards us is love, his purpose for us, his goal for us, his glory, his presence.

It's amazing, isn't it? We pick up this book and hear these words written 3,000 years ago. They speak to us and they say, God has a destiny and a purpose for us. You were made for glory.

[15:11] We were made for glory. That's why we work so hard for it. We sometimes get glimpses of it. But we are made for more than just achieving and succeeding and raising a family or buying houses which are good.

We were made for God's presence. And it doesn't matter how much we work or how much good we do, we cannot achieve that glory. It has to be given to us.

It's the gift of God. That's why you see people are ambivalent about Jesus on a cross because the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus challenges us with our need for glory and with the gift of glory.

There's a famous philosopher from the last century, C.M. Jode. He was the professor of philosophy at London University. Very popular BBC interviewer, columnist, author, speech maker.

Called himself a vocal and militant agnostic. He was absolutely top of the tree. You couldn't have a London soiree without having Jode come and speak at it.

[16:20] And he used to poo-poo a lot of the laws in England, particularly travelling on the underground. And late in his career, he was convicted of travelling on the underground without paying his fare.

And he was fined two pounds. And he was dismissed from the BBC. And he suffered public humiliation, which put him into a period of deep reflection. And he came to the conclusion that he was deeply and profoundly morally flawed in a way that he'd never realised before.

That he'd been a victim of, and I quote, a shallow optimism about human nature. And his awareness of what he lacked led him to look to Christ and to place his faith in Christ.

Because that's the only source of true glory. You see, before Jesus came into the world in the Old Testament, we had glimpses of glory on Sinai and in the desert and on the temple.

When Jesus comes, we see the face of God fully in the person of Jesus Christ. So that when, here in Psalm 22, Jesus calls on us to give glory, to glorify God, he's not calling us to give affirmation to a God who's insecure and got a negative self-image.

[17:35] He's calling on us for our good because we were made for this. He's calling us to share, to enjoy, and to participate in the life of God.

That's why he suffered. That's why he went to the cross. He overcame all the barriers that we've put up to glory. God's not willing to allow us to continue rebelling against his glory.

He wants us to share his glory and Jesus Christ came from heaven and died on the throne to bring us to glory, to share his glory with us and that's what we celebrate today. It's way bigger than me.

It's way bigger than you. It's bigger than our lives or any of our personal needs. This is the glory of God and creation and humanity and a completely fresh beginning. You say, what has it got to do with me?

It sounds good. How do I get it? How do I participate in it? And it's here we see how Psalm 22 reaches way out beyond David.

[18:40] It reaches geographically all around the globe and historically right throughout time. In verse 27 we read, all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nation shall worship before you.

The fruit of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus overflows the banks of history. This is way beyond any earthly king or empire could ever imagine.

It's transcendent. It's global. And the suffering of Jesus and the glory of Jesus, this Psalm says, will cover the earth as all the families of the earth are called to bow before him.

But it doesn't just transcend geography, it transcends time. In verse 24 it speaks about those who have already gone down to the dust who couldn't keep themselves alive. It's a reference to the resurrection.

Those who have died in Christ, they'll be brought to glory. And in the future, what about us? Verse 30, posterity shall serve him.

[19:46] It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn that he has done it.

And that's what we're doing today. And I know sometimes it feels as though it's there but it's not there. But this picture that we're given here is of a great feast, a feast where we're finally satisfied. A feast made up of those who seek Jesus and find him worshipping and bowing, shining with the glory of God. And the reminder to us today is it's ready.

Christ has done everything to prepare the feast. And our task now is to draw near to God through Jesus Christ. That's the point of being here today. See, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus has that in mind. He has us in mind. He's cast out so that we can draw near. And if you understand this and you can hear God speaking to you about this, you have to deal with God in your own heart.

[20 : 54] You have to draw near to God by faith. In just a moment we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper, the communion. There's a great meal that Jesus gave us the night before his crucifixion as a picture of the feast that we're going to have.

As you come forward, the bread is a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. And the wine is a symbol of his blood that's poured out for us. And when we come forward and take the bread and drink the wine, we look back to what he did on the cross and we look forward to the great feast and we eat and are satisfied and we participate in Jesus.

Of course, it's possible to go through the actions without having your heart in play. I want to invite you this year, Easter 2012, to deal with God. If God is speaking to you, answer him in your heart. As you come forward, go out in your heart to him and take hold of the gift of grace and glory. Draw near to him by faith and eat and be satisfied.

In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please kneel for prayer.

[22 : 30] Father, we thank you for the misery of Good Friday. We thank you for the tears that come when we read the accounts of Jesus on the cross.

Part of this, for some of us, is of course that we see ourselves mirrored in that record. I know that I would have been one of those who said, yo, Jesus, you saved others.

How'd that go down? Where'd that get you? I'm so desperately sorry. Others among us may identify with those who denied knowing Jesus and left him alone to die.

And some may know that they would have gathered together at the outskirts of the crowd crying and wailing as one of their best friends suffered and was humiliated.

All of us would have abandoned you. Not one of us would have still believed. Father, thank you for not ending history that good Friday almost 2,000 years ago.

[23 : 50] Lord, in your mercy. Lord Jesus Christ, we flat out honor you. We honor you for your courage, for your obedience to your Father's big picture plan of redemption.

and through going through what you went through, the cruelty, the separation from your holy, holy Father, for being forsaken by him and for taking upon yourself all the dirt and mess of this world, past, present, and future.

Each one of us should shout out our thanks for enduring God's just punishment on us for our sins that you took upon yourself that day.

But we thank you as well for the hope of resurrection. Thank you for conquering death so that we live now and forever. Lord, in your mercy.

Father, what a difference three days make. Thank you for the glory of the day. Thank you for restoring Jesus to his rightful place beside you.

[25 : 19] Thank you for the difference today makes in the history of the world because we now have hope. And for those of us who follow you, there is profound joy.

It's easy to get caught up with the magnificence of today. But today is also about tomorrow, and tomorrow the trumpets won't be sounding, and the shouts of Christ is risen will be a memory.

Lord Jesus, when we go out into that world, give us your courage so that we can say again, Christ is risen, and then go on to add, and this is what it means.

Lord Jesus, give us your love so that we really care that others understand the secret of Christmas, that only in you, the resurrected you, can they live life to its fullest and suck the very marrow out of it.

Father, glorify ourselves, yourself in our lives, so that we show you to the world. Father, thank you for Easter and everything it stands for.

[26 : 42] Praise and honor to you, our heavenly Father, for your redemptive imagination. Praise and honor to you, our precious Lord Jesus, for your love and courage praise and honor to you, our Holy Spirit, for your love and transforming power.

May we be worthy, Lord, in your mercy. Amen.