

My God My God Why Have You Forsaken Me?

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[0 : 00] Can we open our Bibles please? Mark chapter 15, the passage we read. Reading at verse 34. We'll read it at 33.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabathani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. Have you ever noticed some changes in atmosphere?

You're walking along and all of a sudden, the sky changes color. There is a whole change in a whole natural ambience. There's a darkness comes over and a strange color and a hue appears. There's almost sometimes another worldly feel about it, that you're in a strange and almost unnatural environment. Can you imagine for a moment in your minds to the scene at the cross of Calvary?

[1 : 37] It's a very noisy scene. There is a hill. It's not a huge hill, but there are lots of people, hundreds of people gathered around three men who are being crucified. And all of a sudden, there's a change in the atmosphere.

It becomes dark. Now, we don't know that the darkness come upon them very suddenly or was it very gradual. But it was a very noisy place.

You can imagine the mocking of all the people round about, the swearing of the soldiers. They're cussing and they're saying all manner of things. There's a mob there and maybe there's the weeping of the women as they're sobbing as one that they loved is being there crucified.

Picture also maybe some dogs in the background. Dogs always get excited, don't they? And they're barking away there. And then there's all this noise. And in the middle of the noise, don't forget that the cries of the agonized men as they are being crucified, as the nails are perhaps touching their nerves.

And they're crying out in absolute agony at this painful crucifixion situation. So it's very noisy.

[2 : 56] It's very animated. There's lots of things going on. There are smells. There's really a very gruesome sight. And then all of a sudden, there's a stillness.

There's not a good stillness. There's a good stillness and there's a bad stillness. In the midst of all this calmer, there's all of a sudden quiet.

The crucifixion had been going on for three hours. And all of a sudden, there's darkness. It's midday and it's pitch dark.

And how dark was it? Well, we can speculate. But I think it was absolutely pitch dark. I don't think there was a single glimmer of light there.

That it was as dark as it could ever be. Why do we come to that conclusion? Why am I just speculating that it was absolute darkness?

[4 : 08] No. I think there are probably two reasons for that. One is that the subject matter demands that. This was the Lord Jesus Christ, as we'll see in a minute, going through hell on earth.

And hell, of course, is the absence of the loving presence of God. And there's no sense of light at all. Light is a good thing. It comes by common grace to us all, and we enjoy light.

But at Calvary, all of that was removed, and there is this hellish darkness. But also when God brought another darkness in Exodus chapter 10. If you read Exodus chapter 10, remember during the plagues on Egypt, the Bible, as NIV anyway, describes it in these words, quote, a darkness to be felt.

So it was so dark that you could almost feel it. In other words, it was so dark that nobody saw anybody else.

So you've got the situation. There's this stillness. And the quietness comes. All of a sudden, it's dark. And then out of that darkness, there comes a loud cry as the figure on the middle of the crucified men cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[5 : 43] I wouldn't shout it. It would disturb us. It may blow the sound system, but it was a very, very loud voice. As we look at this passage, I want us to notice three things.

Very simple things. It's certainly not rocket science. The first thing we notice here is the darkness. And I want to ask us the significance of that darkness.

Remember what we're saying. It's absolute pitch, velvet, black. black. Why? Well, there are a variety of reasons. I think I want to extract two.

The most obvious one is that it was a darkness of judgment. And this is certainly the wider significance of darkness in the Bible.

The Bible speaks of hell. Now, whenever we speak of hell, we think of a place of fire. And fire obviously produces light. Of course, fire is a metaphor. Of the pain of hell.

[6 : 47] Hell is everlasting torment. It is a place of eternal punishment. And the idea of flames is a figure. Just as streets of gold in heaven is a figure of speech, so the reality of flames in hell is a figure of speech.

But hell is described perhaps as graphically as a place of outer darkness. outer darkness. Now, that's where Jesus is.

And that's where Jesus is going. He's going into that place of outer darkness. Now, what is hell? Is God present in hell?

Well, God is present everywhere, isn't he? There's no place where God is not present. Is God present in hell? Absolutely he is present in hell. But he is present in hell without grace.

He is present in hell without light. He is present in hell without his goodness. So hell is the presence of God with his goodness with hell. Presence is, hell is the presence of God with his light with hell.

[7 : 59] So that's why it's a place of utter darkness, isn't it? When the grace of God is removed. And so, you imagine the scene here that Calvary is a place where it's absolutely dark.

And of course, it's a place of bitter cold. It's very, very cold because the sun has not been shining for three hours. And remember, these three crucified men are naked.

So the punishment is abject. It's absolute. And it's experienced by all of these men. I wonder, did the soldier, remember who had gambled the cloak of Jesus?

I wonder, did he put it on? Because it was so cold, he had to put on an extra garment. We touched on this irony, didn't we, the other day, that here we have this soldier clothing himself with the outer garment while the Son of God is dying on the cross of Christ.

So what happened here was that hell came to earth for a full three hours. And this was only the, what I call the aura of punishment.

[9 : 20] You know what I mean by the aura. It's the outer manifestation of something. It's just the suburbs of hell, the suburbs of punishment.

the intensity of what Jesus Christ was going through is so huge, so ugly, that the Bible, first of all, does not reveal it to us.

And secondly, we couldn't really take it in, just as we can scarce take in the love of God. So it is absolutely beyond our ken, beyond our imagination, beyond our capabilities, to even consider the punishment that Jesus Christ was going through.

We would not, we could not understand, can you imagine, even, even my sins, even your sins, bearing these sins, all the sins that we have ever committed, the punishment, meted out by God the Father, and yet Jesus Christ is experiencing all the sins that all the people of God have ever committed in their entire lives.

Can you imagine the ugliness? Can you imagine the horror? Can you imagine the sheer hellishness of it? It's hell and concentrated power. No wonder the place is plunged into utter, absolute darkness.

[10 : 54] So that's the first significance of the darkness, isn't it? There's a darkness which shows punishment. But I think secondly, there's a darkness which shows sympathy because other things were happening.

It's as if nature's lights were switched off, not that nature is a force in itself, it's controlled by God, but the lights of nature were being switched off.

Remember, other things were happening. The earth shook, the rocks split. As the creator of the universe is being crucified and as he's dying, his own creation is disintegrating and crumbling and straining.

It's in mourning, isn't it? It's in sympathy with the creator. And the whole of the universe is almost in deep mourning and it's falling to bits, it's feeling the intensity of this moment.

This was the murder of the creator of the universe and it's like cosmic protest, isn't it? And the sheer injustice of it all. Here is the one who spoke.

[12 : 13] Here is the one who placed the stars in their position and he is cruelly and malignantly being crucified on the cross.

So it's an ugly scene. I don't know what you feel about putting these pictures up in your wall, maybe a picture of the crucifixion scene.

Well, imagine a picture of Auschwitz or the gas chamber or just the sheer horror of it.

And when you walk through Auschwitz, don't you walk through in silence, you walk through just thinking of the inhumanity of man. I'm sure you've seen it, you've seen the piles of hair, you've seen the shoes there, haven't you, and the gas chambers, just the absolute ugliness of it.

Well, that's the darkness. So it was a darkness, first of all, of judgment, it was a darkness, secondly, of sympathy. But the core of what we're going to look at upon this morning is, yes, we've seen the first element, which is the darkness, but the second element is the cry itself.

[13 : 26] And this will take the major part of what we're saying today. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Well, what does that mean?

There's a famous story, every sermon in this verse has a story. Martin Luther, of course, sitting at his desk, and he's at his desk for four, five, six, seven hours, and folk are wondering what's going on.

And all of a sudden, they hear Martin Luther at his desk saying these words, God forsaken by God, who can understand it? And here we have it, it's a conundrum, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Remember that the psalmist said, I have never seen the righteous forsaken. This was unusual. David the psalmist had never seen the righteous forsaken. We very often have it in our own lives, don't we?

The comforting part in the back is he will never leave you nor forsake you. He will be with you always, even though you go through the fire. He will be there when you pass through the water.

[14 : 33] You are mine. We've all been comforted by that. In the very worst of affliction, we've always had the promise of the presence of God. Whatever we are, we throw our arms around our afflicted friends and we assure them of the presence of God.

But on that day, no. nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. What is it saying? Well, let's dismantle it.

Let's look at it bit by bit. Let's notice some things about the content. Let's notice, first of all, that word forsaken. It's an unusual word, isn't it? Why have you forsaken?

It's not, why have you left me? It's not, why have you gone away? It's forsaken. Why have you forsaken me? I was thinking about that word this week.

What does it mean? What's a parallel in our own culture? What's a parallel in our own society? And then I thought about the Chernobyl disaster.

[15 : 42] Remember when the nuclear power station blew up there in the Ukraine? I went on Google and I Googled Chernobyl. I wondered what's happening there.

I mean, are there people living there? It's extraordinary. There's a little dormitory town beside Chernobyl and there's a whole series of photographs of that abandoned forsaken city.

It's a forsaken city. Nobody goes there anymore. There is an ugliness, there is a curse, folk have not just been evacuated, they've forsaken it.

There are trees growing within the houses, the school rooms are left just as they were when the children fled, forsaken all alone. Think of who we have here.

The father and the son. you think of other father and son pictures in the Bible, don't you? Abraham and Isaac walking up Mount Moriah together. That always gets me.

[16 : 53] It always gets you, the father and son walking up the mountain, the chat. Dad, we're going to do the sacrifice. The wood is here, but where is the sacrifice?

Here we have a father and son. No one has ever bonded like this father and son. They've been together since, well, they've always been together.

Eternity has no beginning and no end. They expressed love for one another when the son was baptized, the voice came from heaven. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Before the very foundation of the earth and the realms of glory, the father, son, and holy spirit were there. There was this interconnection between each member of the trinity.

They were involved in one another's lives. They just loved one another. It's a perfect model of fatherhood. When we think of the fatherhood of God, we project human fatherhood up into divine fatherhood, but it's the other way around.

[18:05] It's divine fatherhood. It really almost seems crass to say that they had a deep personal relationship. The theologians use the word perichoresis.

They were intertwined in one another's lives. lives. They were so involved in one another's lives. Now, gone.

Forsaken. The son on the cross forsaken by the father. the barrack room theologians said, he wasn't really forsaken.

Read your Bible. He was forsaken. That's the point. That's the horror of it.

What else does it say? Not just forsaken, but it says, my God, my God. That's a conundrum, isn't it?

[19:17] Normally, he has called him father. Remember the other sayings of the cross. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they believe.

Remember, he said to the dying thief, today you will be with me in paradise. And then we saw it yesterday, behold your son, behold your mother.

He spoke as an insider there, didn't he? He spoke in the first three things of Christ on the cross. He spoke as one having influence. He spoke as an insider. He spoke as one of the trinity being able to do things.

He was able to forgive people. He was able to admit the dying thief into paradise. He was able to commit his mother to the love of his beloved disciple.

He's, as it were, one of the in-members of the trinity. He still is, of course, I'm not denying that for a moment. But no longer it's Father, forgive them.

[20:21] It's now my God, my God. Something wrong. wrong. I'm not saying wrong in an ethical sense, of course, because Jesus Christ could do no wrong.

I don't mean it in that sense. But there's something I miss. There's something unusual, shall we say, that's a better expression. There's something unusual going on here when he says, my God.

I always think in prayer, it's whatever you, some people like praying, using thee or thou, some folk pray like using you, it's really irrelevant, what we do.

But some folk, have you ever noticed, some folk pray speaking in the third personal all the time.

They never either use thee or thou or you. Something wrong there.

Something wrong. My God, my God. It's natural to call God Father.

[21:31] I became a member of our denomination, Free Church of Scotland, when I was 15. I remember being asked to pray at a prayer meeting and praying, calling God Father.

I remember an elder pulling me aside and giving me a row. And he said this, don't let me ever hear you calling God Father.

Two things struck me. Number one, I wasn't praying to him. And number two, rightly or wrongly, as a young believer, it was the most natural thing on earth to call him Father.

Because he had come into my life and he had changed me and he had made me a new creation.

He had given his son to die for me on the cross.

He loved me with an eternal love which I had never experienced before. And I was going through things in my life at that time which were, gave me every sense that the fatherhood of this world was not reliable.

[22:55] And I found the fatherhood of God. And it welled up from within me with words of rejoicing and freedom. It came within me as natural as I knew this God and I wanted to call him Father.

Because that's who he was. And this guy said, it's wrong. the Lord Jesus Christ, how much more in the very agony of his life, who enjoyed a relationship with his father, how much more he knew the will of God perfectly.

Now he is not saying father, he is saying, my God. How natural it would have been to call him father.

we've seen forsaken, we've seen my God.

It's a double-edged sword, isn't it? My God because he's still God and he's still his God but something's in perception has changed anyway.

[24 : 34] And then there's a question, why? Why have you forsaken me?

God now, consider this. He's the son of God. He's God in the flesh.

He's very God of very God. He knew the thoughts of men's hearts. He knows my hearts. He knows my secret love for him.

He knows my secret sins. Nothing ever caught Jesus by surprise. He was all-knowing, omniscient, omnipotent. Theologians say what is predicated of the father is predicated of the son.

God is all-knowing, the son. God the father is all-knowing, the son is all-knowing. God the father is all-powerful, God the son is all-powerful. But yet he says, why?

[25 : 36] Why? Now, I'm paddling in the shadows, in the shadows this morning. I'm really in the paddling pool, theologically, because I really don't know if I'm equipped to swim in this water.

I don't know if any of us are. Why have you forsaken me? What was going on? Well, a very simple thing was going on.

He was bearing sin. He was bearing sin. One thing about Calvary is that there's an honesty in Calvary, isn't there?

The thing about sin is sin is a master of disguise. Sin always is gift wrapped, isn't it? It looks nice. It looks nice. Otherwise, I wouldn't sin. It comes nicely presented. But at Calvary, no, there's no holds barred here.

[26 : 48] There's an honesty. There's the ugliness of sin. Sin is unmasked. No longer the sweet temptation. No longer the words of the forbidden fruit.

You will be as God. there's the stink, there's the smell, there's the darkness, there's the agony, there's the ugliness, there's the whole depravity and the nature of sin is stripped, there is base, lawless sin.

It is screaming there in Calvary. And we see what it does. It brings death and it brings loss.

sin do. Sin ejects us from the presence of God. Sin makes you want to hide. Sin no longer makes you want to walk with God in the cool of the day.

It makes you want to cover yourselves with fig leaves. But here the sin bearer has no place to go. No place to go.

[27 : 57] He has no savior. the savior without the savior. He is the bridge but he can't see the other side.

He's in this place of abandonment. sin no why? We keep coming back to this. Why? Why have you forsaken me?

The key is what we call penal substitution. He took the penalty for our sin. But you see, the death of Christ on the cross was more than death.

It was penal death. physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. We know that, that whenever we die, our souls and bodies are immediately severed.

Physical death is the separation of the soul from body, but penal death is the separation of the soul from God. God is receiving the wages of sin.

[29 : 15] Not his, but ours. The question is, and people have asked this for hours, and maybe this will go the rounds tonight yet, was he really abandoned?

Of course he was. You cannot take the consequences of sin without taking the penalty of sin.

Is someone saying that Christ did not really take the penalty of sin? What did Christ get at Calvary? Christ got the law, the sour, law of God. There was the sweet gospel, but he got all the law, we got all the gospel.

The sweet and sour, isn't there? Christ said, I will take all the sour, all of it, and you will get all the sweet.

[30 : 34] Under the desertion of God. He cried. Father, is there not a word? Is there not a look? Is there not a token of affection?

No. Law, law, law. Penalty, penalty, penalty. Curse, curse, curse. Death, death, death.

The lot of it poured in him. nothing. What did he get out of Calvary? Nothing. What did we get out of Calvary?

Everything. Everything. I can call him father. And I will call him father.

And so will you. Because he couldn't. I will enjoy life because he experienced death.

[31 : 39] There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because he received all the condemnation of God. Was he really forsaken?

Consider who God is. He's so holy he cannot even look on sin. His father's face turned he looked and it wasn't there.

He asked the question why? No one could answer that question but the question is answered and it's answered in Psalm 22 verse 3.

Why? But you are holy. A holy character was judging sin. Now all this was new to him.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken him? It was all new. He had suffered from Satan, hadn't he? He had 40 days in the wilderness. He'd suffered from Satan all his life from fleeing into Egypt from the you remember there that you're not the sons of Abram but you're the sons of the devil.

[33 : 10] He'd suffered through the 40 days of temptation. He'd suffered from Satan. He'd suffered from man. The crowds abused him, crucify him. The crowds were mocking him.

But now it's his new territory. He was suffering at the hands of the father. And he's all alone in the storm.

Why him? Why the son? Was this not abuse? why Jesus?

Jesus? Remember at school, the school assembly, I used to sing all these songs, kumbaya my lord, kumbaya, and that stuff.

But remember that hymn that I certainly sang at school assemblies? it really does say all, there was none other good enough to pay the price of sin.

[34 : 21] He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let his in. Why? Why me? He said. He was the only one. And he did it for us.

Folks, this is the gospel. gospel. I know hardly any of you here, I don't know if there are some of you who are here and you're unconverted, this is the gospel.

This is, God gave his everything that we might have eternal life. the blood was shed for us, but the blood was also shed for God.

That's what propitiation means. The blood was shed and God's justice was satisfied. But the Passover, when he sees the blood, he will pass over.

And does all of this make sense to you? Well, academic theologians will work on this for hours.

How could God be separated from God and folk talk about, you know, are you really saying that his two natures are broken?

[35 : 38] That's impossible. The union between the divine and the human cannot be broken. But how is he saying it?

Guys, figure it out, but I can tell you, you can be at this till the end of time and you wouldn't figure it out. But instead of trying to figure it out, you see here the answer to our greatest problem.

I don't know how many of you have done Christianity Explored. We've done it so many times. It's smith now 10, 15 times. Remember, if you use the video, Rico Tice speaks of, take a note of your sin and put a post-it note on the wall of a room.

Maybe try and do that. Every time you sin, put a post-it note up on the wall. You wouldn't have a decoration problem for a few years because the room will fill.

That's just the sins you know about. There's a million more that we don't know about. In the day when we become a Christian, we just wake up and we look around and we see all these post-it notes.

[36 : 51] We see our sin. And I think, this sin is stopping me from knowing God. What love.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken God? What incredible love. Think about his love this morning. Let me give you another picture. can you imagine there's this lady, she's a very, very feminine lady.

Immaculate dress, lovely dress, nice hair, well-spoken. She's a beautiful woman, elegant, serene. Expensive dress, nice shoes, nice heels, very expensive perfume, immaculately applied, makeup, just a picture of feminine serenity.

Impeccable language, never swears, lovely intonation, lovely articulation of words, just a really nice lady.

[38 : 04] have you heard of the Bangkok Hilton? It's not a hotel, it's a prison. Can you imagine that that lady, elegant lady, one day finds herself in that appalling prison person, with all the smell, whatever's in the prison, and all the degradation, and all the language, and all the coarseness?

Can you imagine how she would feel? She just wouldn't fit in. She's so this and that, so that. Well, that is a poor illustration, but it gives us something into what Jesus Christ suffered.

the one who was immaculate in terms of holiness, the one who knew no sin, the one who loathed sin, yet here he is in the jaws.

This morning we come round the Lord's table. Here is love, vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood, when the prince of life, our ransom, shed for us his precious blood.

On the mount of crucifixion, fountains opened deep and wide, through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast, a gracious tide.

[39 : 50] Grace and love like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above. Heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

peace and we've seen the darkness, we've seen the cry and our time has gone just a few seconds on the third thing, the reaction.

Behold, he's calling Elijah. they don't get it. They just don't get it. And so it is today.

you know what it's like, you go for a haircut and the hairdressers and Lewis are no different to anyone else.

You go on the Monday, what do you do at the weekend? Oh, most of us will be perhaps too embarrassed to say where we were at the weekend, but imagine that you've got this conversation, what do you do at the weekend?

[41 : 11] Oh, I was at Tennis Street Sunday morning. Oh, oh, yeah, there was this guy talking about Jesus Christ and his death and Calvary.

Oh, where are you going for holiday this year? They don't get it. Beloved, here we are, celebrating, the greatest act of love ever.

And we are recipients of it. And the world just don't get it. He's calling for Elijah. Sometimes the church doesn't get it.

This is core. This is simple. He was forsaken by God in order that we will never know forsakenness. I don't know how you walk out of church, but this morning, it would be no scandal if you skipped it.

[42 : 36] because you will never be forsaken. Beloved, there is no privilege like that of being a Christian.

forsaken that we would never be forsaken. Stand before God as we pray.

Dear Lord, we thank you this morning for the great themes of the scripture today, the theme of abandonment, the theme of atonement, the theme of love, and the great idea that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed from all sin.

May we revel in Calvary today. May we rejoice at that amazing grace. Forgive us now our many sins.

Amen.