

My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?

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[0 : 00] The Gospel according to Mark, chapter 15, reading at verse 34.

Mark's Gospel, chapter 15, verse 34. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which is being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

We come now to the fourth of the sayings that our Lord uttered on the cross.

The first was for forgiveness for his enemies. The second was when he opened the door of heaven to the converted murderer beside him.

The third was when he asked John to look after his mother, and when he assigned his mother to John.

[1 : 36] And the fourth is the cry, what has been referred to as the cry of the reliction, rather the cry of the forsaken one, Why hast thou forsaken me?

We read that our Lord was crucified about nine o'clock in the morning, and from about midday, from noon, to three o'clock in the afternoon for three hours, darkness hung over the cross, whether it was over the area surrounding the cross, or over the land of Palestine itself, or indeed over the whole world.

We are not told. But we do recognize that this was an unnatural phenomenon, unnatural for darkness to cover an area at midday.

And that darkness must have puzzled, if not terrified, the people who were around the cross.

It may be assumed, says someone, that by this weird phenomenon, the voices around the cross were in some degree hushed. At length, the silence is broken by Jesus himself with these words, Why hast thou forsaken me?

[3 : 13] And we recognize that during these three hours, our Lord suffered intense inner agonies of mind and of soul.

The psalm we sang here tonight bears testimony to these sufferings. It has been said that apart from Isaiah 53, it is doubtful if there is any clearer prediction and prophetic utterance of the sufferings of Christ than that psalm, part of which we sang here this evening.

And it is a cause for great interest and great study to think that when in the history of this world, men, martyrs, for example, have suffered great agonies in death and in these agonies there have been attributed to them ecstatic utterances, words of wonderful praise and confidence and hope and trust in God.

It is staggering to think that the Lord Jesus Christ in his agony uttered one word, my God, my God, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

That was an awful cry. Indeed, the darkness itself was awful. The silence within it was awful. but the most awful thing of all was that when Jesus cried to God in heaven, there was no answer.

[5 : 07] The silence of heaven in the experience of the Lord of glory as he hung on the cross is the most solemn and the most wonderful and the most awful consideration connected with the crucifixion at Calvary.

In the entire Bible it has been said no other words are so difficult to explain. The first thought is what a writer of the last century said and well he might have said it.

The first thought of the preacher in coming to these words is to find some excuse for passing by them and going on to something else.

And if he does look at them as we hope to look at them just now after doing his utmost to expound the words he will still confess that they are quite beyond them.

We can only as we are going to the shallows of this shore beyond our reach there is a vast and a great ocean.

[6 : 27] It is said that Martin Luther trying to understand these words preparing to speak on them pondered over them for day after day after day and then was heard to exclaim God he said forsaken of God who can understand it.

His words have to be qualified of course. It was God in our nature who was forsaken by God. We turn to them tonight in the hope that we may find something of benefit something maybe even of encouragement and of help here this evening.

I must confess this that I would like to look at these words and to speak from them if I could at all without raising my voice.

I would love to speak on them with bated breath if I could because here there is a mystery there is a depth which we can penetrate but very very little indeed.

In looking at these words and recognizing the great spiritual and theological depth and recognizing ourselves also the complexion of this congregation tonight I would like to look at them in a particular way and as I said I acknowledge that there is great theological depth in these words and it is not my intention even if I could take that line of approach to them here this evening.

[8 : 32] I would like to ask first of all the question that Jesus himself asks why was he forsaken by God on the cross?

Well there are one or two ways in which we can approach that question in seeking to answer it. We have to remember two things about the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

We have to remember first of all the term that we use the incarnation and then we have to remember the meaning of the term imputation. Now when we use these terms that's no excuse for people here at night to shut off and to think that there is nothing in this kind of approach that will appeal to them or that they themselves can understand.

You know what we mean by the incarnation. That was the act by which God became man. In the fullness of time God we read sent forth a son made of a woman made under the law.

In the history of this world God entered into it in our nature. This world in Bethlehem saw God the Holy One coming born into the world as a babe born in our nature.

[10 : 07] The term imputation means that that God who was born into this world who took our nature to himself the mystery of godliness God manifested in the flesh.

Imputation means that that God in our nature took our sins upon himself. And it was that act that made the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ inevitable.

His sufferings and his death weren't made inevitable by his taking our nature to himself. What made sufferings and death inevitable was that he took our sins upon himself in our nature.

So whatever else these words mean they are to be understood as being rooted in the sin of man.

And for that reason we have to go way back to what we had this morning to what happened in the history of this race when Adam sinned. What happened? What happened to Adam?

[11 : 28] And in Adam what has happened to every single individual since born of ordinary generation? What has happened to the human race because of the sin of Adam?

Well in its relation to God this has happened. The human race has been alienated from the life and from the favor and from the fellowship of God.

We saw that this morning. The human race has forsaken God and has been forsaken by God because of sin.

The human race has deserted God. It has rebelled against its authority. In Adam it became a fugitive, a rebel against authority, a ruin, and an outcast.

Since the sin of Adam, the human race in a state of nature knows nothing of the life of God, of the blessing of God, of the favor and of the fellowship of God.

[12 : 35] It is separated from God. That is what we call spiritual death. Now, of course, there are some people who raise an objection and who find fault and who say that this is one of the contradictions of the Bible, one of the mistakes of the Bible, when they go back to Genesis 2 and 3 and they say this, God said to Adam, the day thou eatest of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt die.

Now, they say, Adam ate the fruit of the tree and yet he didn't die. But you see, you have to remember what God means by death in that context.

Adam did die immediately the moment he rebelled against God and the moment he died spiritually. He didn't want God to come near him. That's spiritual death. And because of that death, because of sin, the sin that brought that spiritual death into the experience of man, man is also subject to

natural death.

Ever since the sin of Adam, all men die. We come into this world and we begin to die and to decay. [14:22] And then there is a third element in it. Together with spiritual death death, and together with natural death, we are heirs of eternal death, hell itself.

In hell, that person who is spiritually dead is totally and completely and forever more cut off from the life and the favor and the mercy and the love and the fellowship of God.

That is the final separation of man from God. So you see, this is the clear teaching of the Bible, if I may sum it up. Every unconverted sinner is spiritually dead, will inevitably die physically and will certainly end up in eternal domination cut off forever more from the overture of the grace of God. That is eternal death. That is what the Bible speaks of as desolation, darkness, loss, or the second death.

Now then, we're back to Jesus. Jesus Christ came into this world to save us from that death.

[16:03] And when we speak of the death of Jesus, don't just think in terms of the death of Jesus physically, naturally, literally, the severance of soul from body, he died that death.

When people say, Jesus died for me, you make sure that you're going further than asserting that he died for you physically, that he died for you literally.

You remember that there is far more to our death than physical death. There is something that reigns in you as an unconverted soul tonight and you're alive.

What reigns in you is spiritual death and if you are not delivered from that spiritual death when physical death comes you will be ushered certainly into that place of eternal death hell itself.

So Jesus came and he died our death. So now what do we mean by that our death? Not just death physically but death spiritually and death eternally.

[17:26] Death eternally. Where Jesus was on the cross and the three hour darkness on the cross at the end of which he cried why hast thou forsaken me?

That is exactly where Jesus was or to be more precise that is exactly where Jesus had been the place of the curse dying our death going where we were going to that place and into that experience where like us there was no knowledge and no sense and no awareness of the blessing and the favor and the land and the grace and the goodness of God that was the climax of Calvary the climax because it was at the very heart of the atoning work of Jesus and on the cross in the darkness

Jesus was truly and really forsaken by God you know the words of the apostles creed he descended into hell and that is where this cry came from my God my God why hast thou forsaken me you remember something I said earlier about Adam that Adam died spiritually before he died physically well do you see that the same thing happened in the experience of Jesus he died spiritually he tasted death eternally before he died physically because he came back from that deception he came back from that far off land from the land of the dead he came back from the land where he was an outcast from the land of outer darkness he came back from that place which was the essence of the curse of God upon the sin of man from that place where he was robbed of light at noon at noon from that place where night was created for him at high noon so that he might enter into the darkness of being cut off from an awareness of the presence and the blessing and the favour of God the darkness of the land the darkness which is associated with a place where there is no mercy no delight and no favour and no fellowship and no communion and no comfort a darkness unknown on earth because as he was crucified outside of Jerusalem outside the gate there is a real sense as someone has put it in which in the experience of dying the crucified one came to the gate of heaven and the gate of heaven was closed to him and when the gate of heaven is closed there is only one gate that remains open and that gate is the gate of hell and it was from it that he cried why hast thou forsaken and one other thing before we leave this let me remind you of the teaching of Jesus about hell there are some people who there are some people who don't accept the teaching of hell some time ago I visited a man in hospital a man I didn't know at all I was just going through a particular ward there in a particular hospital and I came to this man and he was quite an elderly man and I asked him when he came from he told me and I asked him if he belonged to any particular church and I told him that he did and I asked do you go oh no he says I don't go to church at all I don't oh he said I don't accept that teaching on hell makes me afraid he said makes me afraid so I don't accept it there was a man who was hiding behind his fear and because he was afraid of it to get rid of his fear he rejected it but there he was in a hospital bed and he was still afraid still afraid facing death

Jesus all the teachers this world has known no man talked more about hell than the Lord Jesus cursed and what did he tell us let me remind you of one of the passages which he speaks of Matthew 25 that's only one of them and remember what I said no person in the whole Bible spoke often about hell than Jesus so you better not reject the teachings of Jesus or the teaching of hell rather from the lips of Jesus because you do that you're picking and choosing what you want to believe and remind you what he said in Matthew 25 he says at the day of judgment those who are not mine those who don't belong to me those who weren't serving me in the world those who didn't love me in the world I will say to them depart from me ye shall enter into everlasting damnation that place prepared for the devil and for his angels and over and over again

[24 : 10] Jesus expounded this teaching about the suffering for the lost in hell and here he is now and no wonder I said that I would like to speak about this with bated breath and I forgot none around here he is now dare one said dare one said here he is now experiencing the teaching that he himself had expanded experiencing the reality the reality of crying and not being hurt pouring the ultimate pants for us and he was there alone he was the only one who could do it God demand satisfaction for his own justice and the only person who could offer that to God was God himself in our nature some people have said a few weeks ago some people say that's so moral it's no right that one man should stand for the rest my friend if it isn't right there is no salvation and what are you going to accuse

God of being wrong when he provided the remedy and when he decided to come and when he will come in our nature and when he in our nature went into that place from play paid the ultimate Christ for all the unfathomable darkness of the cross in the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ and as we think of that we cannot but and I know that this causes many problems as we think of that we cannot but ask if there any difference oh I hope that I would almost ask God he'd be switched off do you know that

I feel in the presence of such a great mystery here that I'm quite unable to the task let me ask you this quick if that was the experience of Christ on the cross in our name if he was dying our death in its spiritual nature and in its eternal aspect if he was what then is the difference of any and there must be between Christ as the Apostles Creed puts it descending into hell and the lost soul tonight in hell ah well there's the greatest difference in the world between Christ being in hell and the lost tonight in hell let me tell you something of the lost condition tonight in hell again from the word of God they hate God they are no desire for God they don't want God they don't ask for the favor of God you know that we sometimes in preaching tend to maybe use words ill advisedly such as if the lost in hell tonight that you opportunity or how they would make use of it they wouldn't they wouldn't want to have it and they wouldn't want to leave where they are hating God their own woe issuing out of their own booze hardened in sin turning away eternally from a God who is eternally there and that's the gnashing of teeth that Jesus speaks of that's the wailing and the weeping that he refers to a heart full of hatred for a person from whom they can never escape hardened in sin in hell you think of Jesus as he tasted that death for us the loss of what he had was awful to his own soul loss was awful to him as it is to no one else it was heart rending and heartbreaking for him to be in that place where he wasn't conscious of God being with him my God said the poet my God my life my love to thee to thee

I call I cannot live if thou remove for thou art all in all Jesus loved supremely this God who had forsaken him and Jesus desired passionately this God to whom he cried and something else you know that it isn't it isn't just strictly true to speak of those who will be lost in hell it is just as true to speak of them as the New Testament tells us as those who are lost right now if our gospel be hid said Paul it is hid to them who are lost and yet in a lost state in this world tonight without God without Christ and without hope in time and for eternity that is a good hope through grace yet in that state in that condition we read that the sun shines on the unjust as it does on the just but it didn't shine on him as covered the earth as he bore the wrath of

[31 : 18] God in all its fullness in all its infinite fullness in its own passion in our nature and there's something else about this this forsakenness was real you know there's a difference between being really forsaken and feeling forsaken it was real real I'm going to come to this before I close the people tonight may feel forsaken this was real it wasn't just that God was withholding from by his spirit the communication of his presence and of his favor and of his love from his soul it wasn't just that that was suspended for that period of darkness on the cross and that out of that suspension he cried why hast thou forsaken me it wasn't just that God withheld from him what he had had before

but there's a very real sense in which

God was releasing to him what had never been in his experience before we read that in Psalm 22 you know someone uses the illustration of the Christians in the first century when the Roman authorities used to lead them into the arena and let the wild beasts loose upon the Christians someone would open the gate to release them and to tear these Christians to pieces and there's a sense in which applying this illustration he says God can be seen in Psalm 22 like the judge present in the arena and there's his son in agony upon the cross but remember that the inner agony was far far greater than the external physical agony greater it was of the crucifixion itself there's God picture it there in Psalm 22 as though he were the judge opening these gates releasing the bulls the dogs the lions the unicorn upon his own son and it was in that experience of the awfulness of the curse and the anger of God against the sin which he was bearing in our name and in our place it is against that background that you can understand at least in a measure the crime why hast thou forsaken me and as they were released and this is what that psalm so wonderfully portrays as they were released as they were released so he cried but he was not heard I cried to thee

I groan I wail to thee that's the word and I am not heard by thee oh God my God why hast thou forsaken me may I just aside before I come to close this seeing it's crossed my mind say this I've said it before I make no apology for saying it again this psalm 22 it is one of the great messianic psalms in the psalter it isn't the only one it is one of the greatest one of the clearest and I'm told that we miss so much because we don't use items of materials of praise that speak of the cross and speak of Calvary and speak of Golgotha and the crown of thorns and so on and speak of the blood my friend I know of no composition in the history of the human race that portrays more clearly or with greater depth the sufferings of our

Lord and the cross than the 22nd psalm and the word of God knows no other why should we be ashamed to use it as one of our great materials of praise why be ashamed of what God has given can you offer me something better I can't offer it to you anyway this forsakenness was real it was real one other thing and this I think is one of the greatest things of all even in the forsakenness of the cross did our Lord lose his faith oh no my friend my God my God why has thou forsaken very often the sufferings of the best

[36 : 39] Christians are mingled with unbelief yes the sufferings of the best are mingled with unbelief there is no one here tonight no matter how strong his or her faith even in suffering who isn't subject to moments of unbelief not so our Lord he believed he clung he cried even in the reality of his forsakenness my God my God someone put it like this a hand was extended from hell and laid itself on the and laid hold on the steps of the altar of the throne and the throne was not polluted and this is the only cry in the history of the human race which was a cry of faith from the depths of hell itself my God my God there are many people crying in hell tonight all the lost in hell are crying and all the lost in hell will cry but they will never cry in faith to God but he did my God my God why hast thou forsaken no wonder someone said of Jesus experience he was a stranger in that place he did not belong to that place he was there as our surety and as our substitute but this is the glory of salvation he passed through that place he emerged from that place he came back from the far off land and he said before he died

I will declare thy name again in Psalm 22 unto my brethren I will testify of thy goodness to all those who fear thee and he bids you and me fear the Lord as well can we then apply this to ourselves tonight and I've just you know this I don't think I've ever in all my life taken a passage of scripture coming to the end of a service where I feel so ashamed of my efforts at expounding I don't think I've ever felt like I feel tonight in the presence of this vast vast ocean is there anything here that we can apply to ourselves well yes one or two things the first is this you remember that the agony of Jesus on the cross was beyond anything any one of us can ever experience in this world or in the nature it was infinite wrath born by an infinite person true enough for a finite period of time a period of two to three hours but let me remind you of this that day no darkness and no feeling of decision can ever plunge any one of us beyond the sympathy and the help of the Lord Jesus Christ he has gone into deeper and deeper regions of darkness than any one of us will ever go into here and if you feel forsaken tonight you look to the

Lord Jesus Christ if you're afraid that you will be forsaken you look to the Lord Jesus Christ as I said earlier there's no one who doesn't have from time to time feelings such as these feeling as though you had lost all that you have and afraid that you might lose all that you have ah my friend you look

away to the one who was really forsaken and the other application is this if he mourned over the loss of his father's comfort and if he preferred the presence and the love and the favor and the communion that he had with his

God above all else you be encouraged if you too mourn that loss you too mourn if you are distressed because you feel that you cannot bear the loss I'll tell you the story of a Puritan minister who visited one of his members on his deathbed this member had been in great spiritual darkness for 30 years and the minister was trying to console him as he often did but this time the man was on his deathbed and as the minister spoke to him the man interjected what can you say to a man who is dying and feels that God has forsaken and the minister answered him what became of that man he said who died that man whom

[43 : 26] God did really forsake where is he now and you know these were the words that enabled that dying man to catch to lay hold of the comfort that he needed and catching hold of that comfort he replied oh he said he's in glory and I shall be with him soon you see Christ came through that experience of forsaken and the promise of the Bible is this that even if you may feel forsaken he not only felt it but he was actually completely really forsaken by God that we might not be because the promise is I will never leave you nor forsake you and the final application

I want to make of it is this unfortunately there are some who are forsaken even in this church tonight there are some who are cut off from the life and the favour and the fellowship of God and there are some even here who care little about the condition that they are in away from God in that state where they are unconcerned strangers to God and to his grace without him and without hope and he is estranged from his land that is what I spoke of at the beginning of the service as spiritual death and may

I solemnly say this to you in that condition you are an heir of hell Christ went there for us and in it experienced the greatest soul agony that he ever had and in it cried why hast thou forsaken me but you remember this and this is the glory of the gospel he came back from hell came back from hell do you know that where was I talking about this I hope it wasn't here if it was forgive me for repeating it many years ago a film was being shown I remember it was 30 odd years ago a film being shown in Glasgow for all I know some of you may have seen it or I remember the title of it to hell and back well my friend only one person went there and came back and that is the Lord Jesus Christ do you know why he came back to become the saviour of those who deserve to go there but who by faith in him can be delivered from spiritual death and from eternal death and he speaks to you not from the cross tonight but from the crown from the throne where he is crowned king of kings and lord of lords a prince and a saviour to give repentance on the mission of sins to many and he bids you come that you might have life and become an heir of heaven will you come let us pray oh do thou give us thy mercy and make for thyself a place of habitation in our hearts take us we pray thee under thy protecting providing saving care that we may know the blessing and the blessedness of those who will never be forsaken by thyself we bless thee for the saviour of the lost who himself experienced loss we thank thee that he lives and we bless thee that he bids us live by faith in him all do thou constrain us to come for thy name sake amen psalm 94 and we'll sing from verse 11 to the tune torwood psalm 94 man's thoughts to be but vanity the lord doth well discern blessed is the man thou chastened lord and makes thy law to learn that thou mayst give him rest from days of sad adversity until the pit be digged for those that work iniquity for sure the lord will not cast off those that his people be neither his own inheritance could and forsake will he but judgment unto righteousness shall yet return again and all shall follow after it that are right-hearted men these verses in psalm 94 man's thought to be but vanity the lord doth well discern man's thought to be but vanity the lord doth well discern so he ten

And in love with me, for those that forgive me with tears, For sure the Lord will not cast on those that deceive me, Neither is all imperatives, with unforced safety, But such men turn to righteousness, And every time again,

[51 : 55] And all shall follow after me, As arise again.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with you all. Amen.