

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

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* What words of anguish we hear in our Lord Jesus' cry on the cross! *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Surely our mind is filled with questions when we consider this cry of our Lord. For this very word forsaken is a word full of woe. The word forsaken is defined as "To leave altogether; to desert; to abandon; to depart or withdraw from". Why would God forsake his loving, faithful, and righteous son? Why would God abandon the one who has been most faithful to Him? Surely, we could understand if God forsook the wicked, but why the Christ? What is the answer to Jesus' question? Why is God forsaking him?

And why does Jesus ask this question? Does he not know why he has come to the cross? Jesus, throughout his earthly ministry boldly went from town to town declaring the word of God, confidently assure of his father's will. But now, on the cross, he cries out *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Does Jesus not know why he is enduring such suffering?

Far be it! Jesus has come to the cross, knowing he would be forsaken by God. And Jesus has done this for our sake. We, his people, are the wicked ones! We deserve to be forsaken! But he has been forsaken in our place!

Why then, if Jesus is confident of his mission and purpose, does he make this cry, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* What does this cry mean? To answer these questions, we must consider Psalm 22, which is a Messianic Psalm. You may have noticed that this cry, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,* is a quote from Psalm 22:1. But there is more. This entire passage in Matthew is full of allusions from Psalm 22. Many of these allusions are recorded in other areas of the New Testament as being a specific reference to Christ. The other allusions will become clear upon contrasting Matthew 27 with Psalm 22. Let's take a closer look.

In verse 35 of our text we read that Jesus was crucified, and in Psalm 22:16 it says "they have pierced my hands and feet".

Also in verse 35 of our text in Matthew we read that Jesus' clothes were divided up by casting lots, and in Psalm 22:18 it says "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

In verse 39 in Matthew we read that the people hurled insults at Jesus and shook their heads, and in Psalm 22:7 it says "All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;"

In verse 43 in Matthew we read the mockers say, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'", and in Psalm 22:8 we read what the mockers say, "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

And in verse 46 in Matthew we read the cry of Jesus, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me", which as mentioned is a direct quote of Psalm 22:1.

So we see that Psalm 22 is clearly alluded to throughout our passage in Matthew, culminating in Jesus' cry on the cross. So, to understand this cry of Jesus, we must see it in light of Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 is a psalm of David, where David seeks justice from God, on the basis of God's covenantal promise not to forsake his people. The exact time when David wrote this Psalm is not known, but it is generally believed to recount the trials David endured under Saul prior to becoming King. Though the descriptions of David's sufferings in this Psalm are likely metaphoric, they do account for real trials and affliction that David was undergoing. At first glance at this Psalm one might think that David is complaining to God of his various sufferings. One might even question the faith of David, who accused in verse 1 of this psalm, "Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning". However, this is not the case. David clearly makes known his faith and trust in God, for he proceeds his questioning with a twice call to God as "My God". David also ends this psalm with a confident statement of faith in the Lord's righteousness and enduring dominion. David is not in doubt of God or his faithfulness.

Rather, this psalm of David is a petition to God to respond in covenant faithfulness. David in Psalm 22, is claiming God's promise that he will never forsake his chosen people, asserting that David *has* remained faithful to God's covenant. David was appealing back to Deuteronomy 31 (6, 8) where God promises to never leave or forsake his people. In this Psalm, David is petitioning God, basically saying, "Lord, I'm striving to keep your laws and yet I feel forsaken, because I am being oppressed by my enemies." David cries out for God's presence in his life, that he would have victory and relief over his sufferings.

And yet as David appeals to God's promise in Deuteronomy to not forsake his chosen people, we see a limitation in the Old Covenant. You see in the Mosaic covenant, God's promise to not forsake the nation of Israel was conditional. In Deuteronomy 28, the Lord described through Moses all the blessing and curses of the law under the Mosaic covenant. If the nation of Israel was faithful in keeping the law, then they would be abundantly blessed in the Promised Land. However, if Israel did not keep the law, then God would curse the people, ultimately resulting in their removal from the Promised Land. In other words, God would forsake the people if they broke the covenant.

And then in Deuteronomy chapter 31, verse 16, God foresaw that Israel would actually break the covenant and incur these curses, saying to Moses, "These people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them and they will be destroyed." This is prophecy. God is predicting that the people would eventually break the covenant, and in turn suffer the consequences. They will be forsaken by God, which will ultimately result in their exile. They would be conquered as a nation, enslaved and removed from the Promised Land.

So, God promises under the Mosaic covenant, to not forsake Israel as a nation, but only on the condition of obedience. This promise by God to not forsake Israel is conditional. God is only obligated to not forsake Israel, if Israel does not forsake God. Israel is responsible to fulfill all the terms of the Mosaic covenant, to follow all the laws set forth by God unto the people of Israel.

Why then did God make this promise through Moses to not forsake his people, if it was conditional on Israel's ability to keep the law? God knew that Israel was unable to measure up to the standards of the law. God even acknowledged this when he prophesied in Deuteronomy 31 that the people would break the covenant and be forsaken by God! Israel, like *all humanity*, has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Each of us are by nature, dead in our sins and trespasses. We are not able to keep from breaking God's law, nor giving God the honor and praise due

his name. Our hearts are deceitful and beyond all cure (Jer 17:9). God cannot bless people who are by nature sinful, as his character will not allow it. God is just, and his justice means that he cannot let iniquity go unpunished, let alone bless it. Such sin deserves not only the abandonment of God's good favor, but the eternal wrath and punishment of God. *Why then* did God make this promise to not forsake his people? The answer is Christ.

You see, Christ is the fulfillment of the Mosaic promise that God will not forsake his people. In God's graciousness to his chosen people he gave his only son to die for them. God's plan was that he would fulfill the obligations of the law through the sacrifice of his son Jesus. All of God's people deserve to be forsaken by God because of their sin. But praise be to God for he has not left us alone in our sin to die. He has not left us to be forsaken. No, he has sent his son, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, to be the propitiation for our sins. By Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, he bears the wrath of God for us.

For the prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus in Isaiah 53:4-5, describing him as bearing the sins of God's people, saying: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed."

Here, in Isaiah 53, Isaiah makes clear that the Messiah is to bear the sins of God's people. All the promises of God are reliant on this mission of the Christ, to serve as a ransom for many. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). God could not fulfill his promises to bless his people as long as we were sinful, but when Christ bore our sins on the cross, our sins were removed from us, and we were clothed with righteousness. Christ bore the curses of the Mosaic covenant on our behalf! And God desired that Christ might not only pay for the sins of the people but also satisfy the righteous demands of the law, earning even the blessings of the covenant for us. *This is the answer to Jesus' question on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"? Because of our sin.* Let me say it again; the answer to Jesus question: "why have you forsaken me" is our sin.

And so our text today accounts this very mystery. In our text we see the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, bearing our sin, suffering for our sake. Surely all the creation groaned under the weight of God's wrath upon Jesus, as even the sky grew dark. But what suffering this atoning sacrifice was for Jesus, that it made him cry out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"! For Jesus, who had fellowship with the father before all eternity, was now forsaken by the father! What *sorrow* and *agony* must have filled the soul of Jesus on the cross under the mighty forsaking wrath of his God and Father!

For this breaking of fellowship between the Father and the Son cannot be done justice with words. In the garden, we, through our parents Adam and Eve, enjoyed for a time fellowship and communion with God before we became slaves to sin, and separated from God. Yet, as wonderful as *this* fellowship in the garden was, how could it compare to the deep, deep, deep, fellowship that God the Son had with God the Father for all eternity? In John 1:1, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". This Word, which the scripture makes clear to us is Jesus, was *already with* God in the beginning. Scripture tells us that no man has seen God, except the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (John 1:18; 6:46). What great fellowship the Son of God has with his Father! What amazing joy and delight it must be for the Son to commune with the Father! Who can comprehend the depth of the love between the Father and

the Son? Before this suffering on the cross, Jesus had said that his father hears him always, and is always with him (John 11:42). Now the Son cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"? What a dreadful thing it would be for any of us to be forsaken by God, but no matter how awful and unbearable that would be for us, surely it would be an even greater suffering for the Christ. For until then, Jesus knew of nothing but the sweet and all-wonderful fellowship of God, but now he cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"! Oh the depths of our sin that required this forsaking!

But even amidst this suffering of sufferings, Jesus stood steadfast in his mission. His cry on the cross was not a cry of confusion. Nor had Jesus suddenly encountered on the cross what he had not expected. For just a short while before, he took Peter, James, and John to Gethsemane to pray, and said to them "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mt. 26:30), and scripture says that "being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus was prepared for this suffering. He was expecting it. Jesus knew exactly why he was suffering as he was, and why God should forsake him. For in I Peter 2:23, it says regarding Christ's sufferings: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he *entrusted* himself to him who judges justly." So, Jesus entrusted himself to the father, on the cross. Even in the midst of suffering, Christ's faith held strong.

This cry then is not a cry of confusion or bewilderment. Jesus knew all along why he must suffer. No, this cry is much grander than *just* a cry of anguish. Yes, Christ was in anguish, but there is more! If Jesus just wanted to make a complaint to God, he could have just thought in his mind such a prayer. But instead, recall what Jesus said when he raised Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus prayed to God, asking for Lazarus to be raised, he said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." (John 11:41-42). This same Jesus did not need to verbally utter this cry to God. Rather, here, as always, even amidst his suffering, Christ is preaching to us! Remember, Jesus is quoting scripture! This is not some mindless utterance. He is opening the Word of God, even during the *depths* of his suffering, and declaring to us "Behold! I am the Messiah", "I am the fulfillment of all the scriptures!", "I am the answer to David's petition in Psalm 22", "I am being forsaken, so that you will never be forsaken"! Here he answers his mockers. To those who said: "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God", he is saying that it is precisely because he *is* the Son of God that he remains on the cross, not to save himself, but to save his people! He is the true temple, and in three days he will raise himself up again! He has the power to lay down his life and the power to take it up again! Oh what a great, and awesome, and merciful Lord we have! Even here, he is doing his Father's work. Even here, he is reaping a harvest. Even here he loves his lost sheep as he lays down his life for them.

And as Jesus breathed his final breath on the cross and gave up his spirit, God the Father, also answered him. God spoke in the miracles that immediately followed Jesus' death. The curtain of the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, and many holy people were raised to life.

Let us not miss the significance of the temple curtain being torn in two! This curtain was like the mighty cherubim who guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden, not allowing sinful humans to return to the place where man dwelt with God. Likewise, this temple curtain served as a constant reminder to the people of God that they were separated from God. This curtain was the curtain that separated the

people of God from the Holy of Holies, the place where God himself dwelt in the temple. But now with the sacrifice of Jesus, the temple curtain has been torn in two! We no longer stand separated from God but now have access as priests to worship God. This access is no longer veiled, but is through the new temple, Jesus Christ. As Jesus was forsaken, the temple curtain was torn in two, demonstrating that we are no longer forsaken! In Jesus' being forsaken, we have been restored! What great blessing we have that the Son of God should suffer so much for us and in our place! And how great is the restoration that Jesus obtained for us! Our fellowship with God has been restored! Praise be to God that he did not leave any doubt as to the *significance* of Christ's suffering on the cross!

Rather, here, with the curtain tearing, the earthquake, and the people being raised to life, the allusions of Psalm 22 return! As Psalm 22 ends with a declaration by David of the Lord's dominion and majesty, so our passage in Matthew declares the victory of the Lord! As David in Psalm 22:31 says, speaking of God, "they will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn -- for he has done it", so we see the result of God's mighty response: "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 said, "Truly this was the Son of God!".

Though the sufferings of Christ on the cross were of gravest consideration, God the Father clearly vindicated his Son's name here with this response. Where were the mockers now? Who dared hurl an insult now? No, this was a time of adoration; this was a time where some even came to faith in the Christ. But God's response did not end here. For on the third day, our Lord was raised again to life, claiming victory over death! And after appearing to the apostles and many witnesses, he ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Saints of God, Rejoice!! Rejoice in this victory! Rejoice in this fellowship Christ has earned on our behalf! God, in Christ, has promised that he will never forsake us! Rather, the curtain of the temple was torn in two! Our fellowship with the father has now been restored! Let us now approach the throne of grace with confidence, worshipping in spirit and in truth. Let us have all the more faith that our worship is heard, because Christ was forsaken! Whenever we think of our Lord's cry on the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*", may we think also of the temple curtain being torn in two, and rejoice that his forsaking is our restoration!

And may we never take for granted this cry of Jesus! Jesus was forsaken of God because of our sin! Knowing the depth of suffering that Jesus endured because of our sin, may we never cherish sin, but rather loathe and detest it. Let us flee from all sin and ungodliness and cling to the righteousness of Christ. We have been bought with a price!

And yet on the other hand, may we not do injustice to our Lord's sufferings on the cross by thinking that we are not forgiven of our sins. Do not think that your sins are too big to be forgiven. As big as your sins may be, as wicked and ugly as they may be, Christ's sufferings on the cross were bigger! Christ has been forsaken by God because of your sin, and his atonement is sufficient!

But for those of you who are not in Christ, those of you who have not confessed that Jesus is Lord and believed that God raised him from the dead -- I implore you on Christ's behalf, Repent! Can you bear your sin? Are you able to stand up under the mighty forsaking wrath of God as he unleashes his righteous judgement upon you? No! None of us can. Even today, Jesus' cry on the cross calls you to turn to him in faith! I beg you, do not turn a deaf ear. Come to Christ, our only hope in this life and in the life to come!

Finally brothers and sisters, rejoice that we are restored! Rejoice that we have been forgiven of our sins in Christ. Rejoice that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Consider what we now have! If Christ identified with us in our sin, to the point of being forsaken, are we not also identified with him in his resurrection? Yes, we are! And if Christ is no longer forsaken by God, but restored and exalted, sitting at the right hand of the father, are we not also sharers in this as adopted sons of God, co-heirs with Christ! Yes, we are!

Yes, Christ was forsaken that we would never be forsaken. And so may we no longer forsake *him*, but seek to glorify him and enjoy him forever. Amen.

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