



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

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

Matthew 27:46

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:35**...And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, **"This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."** ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, **"You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."** ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² **"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"** ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, **"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"** that is, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, **"This man is calling Elijah."** ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ 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!"**

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

Deserted, abandoned, forsaken...they're all similar words with similar nuances. And because they are they all evoke similar emotions...emotions that run the gamut from disappointment to sadness. And yet because each of those words...deserted, abandoned, forsaken...is an adjective...each word is dependent on the noun it modifies to make its meaning clear. For example, if I were to say to you that a story takes place in a deserted, old farmhouse a visual image...a picture...a picture will pop in your mind. You might see siding whose paint was chipped or faded, or you might even see broken windows or missing shingles or an unkempt and overgrown yard.

And no doubt such a mental image is a bit sad...sad but not tragic. It's sad not because of what it is but because of what it could be. It sad because all that that deserted farmhouse needs is for a family to move in and some apply some hard work and some paint and then everything or most everything could be put right.

On the other hand, if I say to you that the police found a deserted newborn baby wrapped in a trash bag and placed in a dumpster behind a seedy apartment building...a different kind of image or picture will pop into your mind. And it's not that the image of the abandoned baby is all that much clearer mentally than

that of the farmhouse but it is an image that stirs emotions. It is not that you can see the baby in your mind any better than you can see the farmhouse but the idea of a baby being deserted or abandoned is infinitely more tragic than a farmhouse being deserted or abandoned because it is so unnatural. No mother should ever abandon or forsake their child. It is an image that causes one's heart to sting with sadness. And yet in some ways the case of the abandoned baby is like that of the abandoned farmhouse. All that little baby needs is for some young woman to mother it, to love it, to caress it, to play with it, to invest time and energy and affection and then everything or most everything could be put right.

And then there is a third kind of abandonment that is much harder to put right.

When I describe it to you you know the kind I mean.

If I were to describe a family where a father abandoned his children or a mother deserted her babies and the husband of her youth or a son or a daughter deserted an elderly parent in need an altogether different kind of image or picture will pop into your mind...an image infinitely sadder...infinitely more tragic than the other kinds I have mentioned. There is something just so awful about that kind of abandonment...that kind of desertion.

It is different because the nature of the relationship prior to the desertion was different.

When I was in high school I had an English teacher...an old maid named Miss Amos. She was my favorite teacher...my favorite teacher ever...and I loved what she taught me about literature and writing. She had a sardonic wit and

sometimes a caustic sense of humor and she could and often would put students in their place if they needed it. I both loved her and feared her. At times she seemed wonderfully compassionate and other times she seemed hard as nails and then one day I learned that when she had been a young woman...a beautiful young woman...her fiancé deserted her at the altar. He actually deserted her and left her standing at the church abandoned and alone and then you know everything sort of made sense. I began to think to myself...you know she's never gotten over that day. And then as I grew older I began to realize that no one ever gets over that sort of thing. When a relationship has been established...when a measure of trust has been granted...when time has built trust...when words have been spoken and promises have been made and an expectation of faithfulness has been earned and then one person deserts, abandons or forsakes another it is devastating...it is like a death only worse. A death can be forgiven. Eventually our heart comes to the place where it can wrap itself around the truth that the person we loved didn't mean to die, didn't want to leave, didn't intend to forsake us.

But it's different when promises have been spoken in the moonlight. It is different when intimacies have been shared. It is different when a child has sat on his father's knee or leaned back against its mother's bosom and really, really believed it is loved. It is different when trust has been granted. It's different because in those moments there is a sort of covenant established...a union is made. A union that says, "As God grants me strength, I will never leave you or desert you." As so when someone does break that bond...when someone does violence to that sort of covenant, it is especially tragic.

I remember Miss Amos one time saying there was a tree in a meadow where she had grown up with a heart carved on its trunk and in the heart there were two sets of initials and that as long as she lived she would never forget that the heart carved on that trunk with the initials inside was a lie.

Now I wanted to make these distinctions this morning because of our subject. Our subject this morning is Jesus' fourth word from the cross, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."**

They are the most painful words you will ever read.

Now you already know or ought to know that during the six hours our Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He spoke or cried out audibly seven different times. Those seven words or seven sayings have come to be known by all that love Him as the **"Seven Sayings of Our Savior from the Cross."**

Now none of the four gospel accounts contain all seven of the seven words or sayings of our Savior from the cross. The reason for that is because the individual gospel writers were moved to include or omit different words or deeds of our Lord according to the literary or spiritual purpose of their works. Because each writer was moved by the Spirit of God to their own particular literary or theological intention it makes perfect sense that their accounts would differ in regard to which details they chose to include.

Now the Gospels of Mark and Matthew are the closest to being parallel. They both contain only one of the seven sayings and it is the same saying. Matthew

and Mark both contain the fourth or middle saying of our Lord from His cross,
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And yet even what Matthew and Mark contain are a bit different.

If you look at Matthew 27:46, you will notice that the quoted phrase starts off with the word ‘eli’ while in Mark it is ‘eloi.’

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:46**...And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

^{ESV} **Mark 15:34**...And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew is almost certainly quoting Jesus speaking Hebrew while Mark is almost certainly quoting Jesus speaking Aramaic. And that makes sense, I think, since Matthew seems to be written for Jewish readers familiar with the Hebrew Bible while Mark seems to be written for Gentiles familiar with Aramaic.

But there are other differences. Matthew changes the word order of the Hebrew/Aramaic phrase when he translates it into Greek. Matthew takes the word “me” in Greek and moves it further forward in the sentence thus emphasizing it. Matthew reads as if Jesus is saying, “Me...why are you abandoning me.”¹

Now what I want to do this morning and I hope this not too ambitious is to work our way through the text and have you come to understand that this fourth

saying of our Lord Jesus from the cross is at the same time both the saddest and most wonderful of all the things our Lord spoke while on the cross. I want you to understand that the Lord Jesus was guilty of no crime whatsoever and yet was actually, really and truly forsaken by His Father. I want you to see...to feel the extraordinary sadness of the moment while at the same time I want you to realize that had he not been forsaken by the Father, that had our sin and its punishment not been imputed to him, our great salvation would have never been obtained.

Now the first thing I want you to notice the mockery and contempt our Lord Jesus faces in Matthew 27:35-44 and as you do I want you to notice that it was prophesied long before he was ever born in Psalm 22. I think you will find it helpful to have both passages at your fingertips. So keep one finger at Matthew 27 and another at Psalm 22.

Psalm 22, a Psalm of David, a Messianic Psalm, anticipates in a very specific manner, the suffering of our Lord. It was written a thousand years or so before the Lord Jesus was born and yet it describes...it prophesies his crucifixion, his death, his abandonment almost perfectly. It is quoted directly and it is alluded to in Matthew 27 over and over. Let's read again the first nine verses of our passage starting Matthew 27:35 and note then how they are echoes of Psalm 22.

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:35**...And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "**You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down**

from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² **"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"** ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Now notice how verse 35 is a direct echo of Psalm 22:17-18. Matthew 27:35 reads:

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:35**...And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.

Psalm 22:17-18 reads:

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:17**...I can count all my bones-- they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

You see how one thing anticipates the other. The reason they stared and gloated over him is because our Lord was stripped naked. He was left naked and humiliated. His clothes...his precious garments became pay for the soldiers assigned execution detail. You see how Psalm 22:17 anticipates Matthew 27:35.

And Matthew 27:38-40 has much the same kind of relationship to Psalm 22:6-7. Note the words "derided and wagging" as I read verses 38-40 and how they are anticipated in Psalm 22.

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:38**...Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, **"You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."**

Now look at Psalm 22:6-7 and notice how the words “derided and wagging” are anticipated in the words “scorned, despised, mock and wag.”

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:6**...But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

You see the crucifixion took place at a busy intersection outside the gate of the city of Jerusalem. Because it was Passover multitudes would have been entering the city and as they did they shook their heads in mockery of the Lord Jesus.

And you have the same sort disbelief and mockery coming from the mouths of the religious leaders of the nation. You can see that in Matthew 27:41 in the words “deliver and desires.”

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:41**...So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² **"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"** ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Now if you will look at Psalm 22:8 you see those two words “delivers and desires” are anticipated a 1,000 years earlier in the words “delivers and delights.”

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:8**...“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

You see the religious leaders wind up being the same mockers described in Psalm 22. What they do and how they behave was no surprise to the Father...it

was no surprise to the Son. It was anticipated; it was prophesied. It was ordained. We can see that, I think, in the allusions. But even if we could not, we can see it in the direct quote of Psalm 22:1 that is found in Matthew 27:46. Not only is it a direct quote, Matthew actually gives the very words that were spoken by the Lord Jesus as the exact Hebrew words found in Psalm 22. Notice it with me in this second section of our passage starting in Matthew 27:45 where we see the dark desertion of the Son.

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:45**...Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "**Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?**" that is, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**"

Now look at Psalm 22:1. You will see it is the exact same language. In Hebrew, the phrase is exactly as it is given in Matthew.

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:1**...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

It seems to me that Matthew is saying this thing that he is describing is that very thing that was prophesied. Now these words that are spoken by the Lord Jesus are made all the more striking by the cosmic sign of darkness. You see verse 45 tells us that the whole land became dark...and it became dark for some three hours.

The Lord Jesus was crucified at 9:00 o'clock in the morning...the third hour after sunrise. It had started off a normal day with a normal sunrise...but at noon or about the sixth hour after sunrise the sky went dark. Now some have speculated that the darkness was caused by an eclipse but there are two reasons why that

cannot be. First of all the crucifixion occurred at Passover which meant there was a full moon. You can't have an eclipse when there is a full moon.² The moon is in exactly the wrong position for an eclipse. Secondly, eclipses last minutes not hours. No the darkness that fell on the land was supernatural. Now darkness may have fallen in order to fulfill the word spoken by the psalmist in Psalm 22 when he says:

^{ESV} **Psalm 22:2**...O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

Or it may have fallen in order to heighten the judgment pronounced on the sin of mankind. It may have fallen as if to announce the moving up of the Passover. You see just prior to the passing over of the death angel in Egypt when God killed the firstborn sons of Egypt in judgment the whole land was pitch black for three days. Here before God pours out the full measure of his wrath on the firstborn of all creation the land becomes pitch black for three hours. It may have become dark for any of those reasons or it may have become dark simply because our heavenly Father simply wanted to draw the shade on the suffering of His beloved son.

And so the Lord Jesus hung suspended between earth and heaven in the dark from noon till three and in that time God poured out the full measure of his wrath on the sinless Son of God. And then right before the end, the Father turned His face away from the Lord Jesus.

You see God's divine justice required that He do just that as he dealt with our sin. And so He poured out the full extent of His wrath and when he did He

withdrew the light of His presence from the Son for the first and only time in eternity. You see that was the thing that the Lord Jesus had dreaded in Gethsemane. That was thing that he had never ever experienced before. And it was a real abandonment. That is why the Lord Jesus cried out the way He did. Notice he did not use the familiar form of expression "Father" attached to "why have you forsaken me?" Nor did he use the distant "God, why have you forsaken me?" Instead he uses the phrase from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The son never forsook the Father. He never stopped trusting in Him. The Father forsook the Son only as a part of his judgment against our sin imputed to Him. He forsook Him in judgment that He might not have to forsake us that would eventually come into union with Him.

R.C. Sproul writes this:

Others have noticed that the words are a quotation from Psalm 22. They say that Jesus was identifying himself with the Suffering Servant of Psalm 22, and is therefore reciting poetry on his deathbed.

Others suggest that Jesus, in his humanity, felt forsaken on the cross, but he was not really forsaken.

If Jesus was not truly forsaken on the cross, however, we are still in our sins. We have no redemption, because the whole point of the cross was that Jesus bore our sins and the sanctions of the covenant.³

But, of course, the crowd standing by in the darkness misunderstood what Jesus meant. They took his cry "Eli, eli, lema sabachthani" to be some sort of plea to Elijah to come and rescue Him. Look at verse 47.

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:47**...And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "**This man is calling Elijah.**" ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

But, of course, Jesus cry was not a plea to Elijah at all. It was the proof to us that He bore our sin in His own body on the tree in order to satisfy the divine justice of God. That is why the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:21 are so helpful.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:21**...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

You see I don't want you to misunderstand as those surrounding the cross did what the nature of Jesus death accomplished. He bore the full brunt of the white hot wrath of Almighty God that we might not have to. God poured out on Him the judgment we deserved and because he did there is no wrath for us left to bear. God turned His face away from Jesus in judgment against our sin and because He has done that He will never turn His face away from us. We have no need to gain His favor...we already have His favor because of what Christ has done for us. But because that is true...Jesus can rightly promise that He will never leave us or forsake us.

I want you to believe that...to feel that...to know that that is true deep down in your souls. I won't have you ignorant of all you possess in Christ.

Thomas Carlyle had married his secretary, whom he dearly loved, but he was thoughtless and absorbed in his own interests and activities, treating his wife as if she were still his employee. Stricken with cancer she was confined to bed for a long time before she died. After her funeral, Carlyle went back to his empty house. Disconsolate and grieving deeply, he wandered around aimlessly

downstairs, engrossed in thinking about the woman he had loved. After a while he went upstairs to her room and sat down in the chair beside the bed on which she had been lying for months. He realized with painful regret that he had not sat there very often during her long illness. He noticed her diary. While she was alive, he never would have read it, but now that she was gone he felt free to pick it up and thumb through its pages. One entry caught his eye: **“Yesterday he spent an hour with me. And it was like being in heaven. I love him so much.”** He turned a few more pages and read, **“I listened all day to hear his steps in the hallway. And now its late. I guess he won’t come to see me.”** Carlyle read a few more entries and then threw the book on the floor and ran out into the rain back to the cemetery. He fell on his wife’s grave in the mud, sobbing, **“If only I had known...if only I had known.”**⁴

You see now you do know. You know that you will never be forsaken because the Lord Jesus has born that for you already. Lift up your hearts...lift up your voices...your sin not in part but the whole was nailed to the cross and you bear it no more...Praise the Lord, praise the Lord...oh, my soul.

Let’s pray.

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: Volume 2 The Churchbook Matthew 13-28* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 1049. He writes, “Matthew heightens this word (“Me”) in his Greek translation by reversing the word order found in the Greek Psalm and Mark (cf. Gund., 573). It is as if Jesus says, “I know Father, that you will not strive forever with a man’s spirit, that you finally leave to themselves those who abandon you. But why did you abandon me? I have been as faithful to you as I know how and I know you do not abandon the faithful. Why did you abandon me?”

² Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew: Volume 2 Chapters 14-28* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), 501. He writes: The darkness had to be supernatural in origin, not from a storm (no one mentions one) or an eclipse. The darkness of an eclipse is measured in minutes not hours. Besides, it was a Passover. Passover occurs near a full moon and there cannot be an eclipse at full moon.

³ R.C. Sproul, *Mighty Christ: Touching Glory*, (Rosshire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1995, 121-2.

⁴ Clarence Macartney, *Macartney’s Illustrations*.