

# Forsaken

For a day called Good Friday there are many dreadful words associated with it: betrayal, flogging, crown of thorns, crucifixion, mocking. But is there a more desolate and emotive word than “forsaken”? It speaks of more than being alone or isolated which are bad enough, it speaks of ruptured relationships, of hopes dashed, of separation from a beloved, of real raw emotional pain.

And it is this experience of being forsaken which finally causes Jesus to cry out. He who had suffered so much degradation and abuse, so much physical suffering and yet like a sheep before her shearers was silent, finally cries out not in pain but in abandonment, in dereliction.

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.”

These words were so striking, so painful, so real that the gospel writer has left them in their original tongue, Aramaic, so that may hear the very voice of the man Jesus and his pain.

Is there a more scarring sentence in human history than this? Spurgeon wrote of this cry “I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish.”

In fact the more we look at the sentence the more painful it is. Jesus has been forsaken by many, by the crowds, by his people, by Judas, by Peter, but now he is experiencing abandonment by God. No longer “Abba, Father” but “God”. The change in words is very poignant. He does cry out “My God” rather than “O God”. He still claims this God as his own, the God of his trust, but this surely makes the separation worse.

“Forsaken Me” “Me” “I who am your beloved Son in whom you are well pleased” “I who have always shared perfect communion with you.” “I who have done your will.” “You have forsaken ME”

Jesus is experiencing the full devastation of being abandoned by God, the pain is unspeakable, the despair unfathomable.

And over it all hangs the question “Why?”, “Why God?”, “Why forsaken?”, “Why me?”

We could and perhaps should meditate long and hard on this cry but three ideas particularly come to mind.

## **MY GOD, MY GOD: JESUS THE FAITHFUL ONE**

In this cry of abandonment we paradoxically see the faith of Jesus. He continues in face of pain and bewilderment to call out to “My God, My God.” Jesus is not only portrayed in Scripture as the divine Son of God, but also as the man of faith. The mockers said “He trusts in God, let God deliver him if he wants him” (Matt 27:43) yet Jesus continued to trust in God despite the hopelessness of the situation.

This is underlined as he is this cry is a quote from Psalm 22 which speaks of the faithful one being tormented but his faith is eventually vindicated.

In the midst of his pain Jesus does what we should all do turn to God. There is nothing unfaithful about asking God why?

More comforting to us is that as we come to Jesus in our own pain and despair when such times come we know that he understand more than we can ever know how we feel.

### **WHY: OUR SIN**

Secondly we do know the answer to the question of why in part. Jesus in Matthew's Gospel has spoken of giving his life as a ransom for many (20:28), of how his body and blood are to be for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is experiencing separation from God to pay the price for our sin, literally going through hell so that we won't have to. Peter later would write "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1Peter 2:24)

As we hear this cry of Jesus and the pain we understand the seriousness of sin. Whenever we are tempted to trivialise our transgressions against God hear this cry "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why? We may never fully understand, and the question remains but we understand that it was because of us. We cannot truly hear Jesus horror of abandonment without realise that is our fate without forgiveness and the he is taking our place. How can we not hear this cry and not face up to our own sinfulness and repent and give thanks for our forgiveness that was won at such a cost.

### **WHY: GOD'S LOVE**

This leads us finally to love, for in this event we see God's way of bringing salvation to the world and reconciling all things to himself. It is God's will that Jesus suffer but this does not mean that the Father also did not suffer. This rupture in the relationship of Father and Son would have hurt the Father as much as the Son yet they were both willing to go through this for our sake.

Paul prays in Ephesians that we may have power together with all of God's people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

Hearing this cry and considering its implications may start to give us the merest glimpse of the depth of God's love for us. It is this love that gives us our security. For if the Father and Son were willing to go through the pain of this separation for us how can they let us go. This is why the Apostle Paul can say "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation (to which we can add flood, earthquakes, tsunami or radiation) will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

The more we understand the depth of pain in Jesus abandonment by God the more fully we will grasp that we never will be.

The one whose last word before he dies were "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" after his resurrection as his final words to his disciples says "I am with you always to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

Ultimately Jesus is forsaken so that we would know that we never will be. That is why this God forsaken day will forever be known as Good Friday.

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