



Words from the Cross (part 3)

Matthew 27:45-50

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

<A sermon preached on Good Friday. No video or audio were recorded from this service.>

In recent weeks at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have been considering the last words of Jesus that he spoke from the cross. Almost two weeks ago, we looked at his words as recorded in the gospel of Luke: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). A word of forgiveness, displaying for us the heart of Jesus. "Today, you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). A word of salvation, providing hope to all who seek the Lord. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). A word of submission, demonstrating his commitment to God.

And last Sunday, we looked at the last words of Jesus from the cross as recorded in the gospel of John. "Woman, behold your son!" "Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27). A word of compassion, teaching us of the kindness of Jesus. "I thirst" (John 19:28). A word of suffering, exposing the suffering of Jesus. "It is finished" (John 19:30). A word of victory, giving us confidence in the work of Christ.

And now, this evening, we look at one last word of Jesus upon the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). This is a word of abandonment, showing us the depths of what happened on the cross.

Though these words occur both in Matthew and in Mark, we will be working through Matthew's passage. So, if you have your Bibles, I would encourage you to open them to the book of Matthew, and turn to the 27th chapter. I want to continue on with our reading this evening by reading verses 45-50.

Matthew 27:46-50

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 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?" And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 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. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

This is, perhaps the darkest hour of human history. When Jesus, the eternal son of God, was abandoned by his Father. The darkness that came upon the land at that time (in verse 45), is merely symbolic of the darkness of what was taking place upon the cross. as Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree. Some may try to explain the darkness that took place by natural causes, say, an eclipse. But this would have been impossible, as the Passover is always held during a full moon, which puts the moon on the opposite side of earth during the day, making it impossible for an eclipse to happen. Some say it may have been a sudden cloud cover, or some other natural occurrence.

I don't believe any of these things. I believe that it was something supernatural. It's was a physical illustration of what was taking place spiritually upon the cross. It was the darkest hour that the world had ever known. It was the moment when a holy God forsook his holy Son, in an act of gross injustice, as God was pouring out his wrath upon his Son, who didn't deserve it. Jesus was innocent. He had done nothing to forfeit the favor of God. And Jesus felt the wrath. It felt as if his Father was abandoning him! That's why he cried out, "Eli, Eli lema sabachthani?" which is the Hebrew of what Matthew translates for us, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

For thirty-three years of His life, Jesus had known intimacy with the Father. Jesus "came from the Father and ... into the world" (John 16:28). While in the world, Jesus said, "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). Jesus did the work that God the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4). This intimacy came down even to the words that Jesus spoke. He said, "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (John 14:10).

Further, God approved of the work of Jesus. Several times in his ministry, the voice of God came from the heavens, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus). Yet, at this moment, the Father abandoned the son.

If anybody ever walked with God, it was Jesus. Never was there a time in the entire life of Jesus in which He was apart from the presence of God, the Father, until this moment upon the cross. Suddenly, the Father was gone! Jesus no longer felt or experienced the presence of His heavenly Father. Jesus felt truly abandoned and alone for the first time in His life.

Jesus knew what it was to be abandoned by other people. During His life, there were many who were unfaithful to Him. Of the ten lepers that were healed, they all abandoned Him to pursue their own interests, except for one who came back to give thanks to Him (Luke 17:16). How many thousands did Jesus heal that left Him high and dry. Of the 5,000 that He fed, many went against His teaching (John 6:14). Many who heard Him gladly one day would leave Him the next due to His doctrine (John 6:60). Many who cried, "Hosanna" turned to cry out "Crucify Him" in less than a week. Then, there was Judas and the twelve, all of whom abandoned Him during His time of greatest need. So, Jesus knew what human abandonment was like.

Never did Jesus ever vocalize His own agony at those who left Him. When Judas betrayed Him, His words were only compassion, "would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). When Peter denied Him three times, it was only a look that Jesus gave to Peter (Luke 22:61).

But, this moment upon the cross was far different. It was far more difficult for Jesus. It caused Him to scream in agony, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (verse 49). These weren't words of gentle whisper. They were "cried out" with a "loud voice."

For the Father to abandon Jesus was necessary for God to judge Jesus Christ in our place. There was no way that God would be with Jesus and judge Jesus at the same time. There had to be this divine abandonment for Him to be judged.

So, when you hear Jesus cry out to His heavenly Father, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" listen to the answer that heaven calls down to Jesus, "So that I can save My people." Apart from the Father forsaking the Son, salvation would be impossible.

Think about how difficult this was for Jesus to bear. First of all, this was an entirely new experience for Him. He had never experienced alienation from His Father before. Second, His Father abandoned Him when He needed Him most. For all of the martyrs throughout the history of the church, this has not (and will not) be the case. In the hour of greatest need, God has always been faithful to sustain His people. God has promised, "I will never desert you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

When Joshua was soon to lead the people into the promised land, the Lord told him, "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you" (Josh. 1:5). When David faced His troubles, he rested confidently in the Lord's help: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1). Israel was told, "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Is. 41:10). We are promised that nothing can separate us from the love of God, "neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Yet at this moment, Jesus was abandoned! God left Jesus to his own strength. "He bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24) without the help of the Father, without the help of the Spirit. He did this all by Himself. This ought to give you an idea of how powerful Christ actually is.

Now Jesus knew that this abandonment was coming. It didn't blindsides Him. The words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" come from the first verse of Psalm 22, which is known as the crucifixion Psalm.

Consider the following verses from Psalm 22.

Psalm 22:7-8

All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
"He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!

This is exactly what those who looked upon Jesus as He was being crucified were saying to Him. In mockery, they were saying these things, just as Psalm 22 had prophesied.

Psalm 22:14-15

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

When Christ was upon the cross, it would have been easy for His shoulder to dislocate. Hanging in the hot sun as Jesus did, his throat would most certainly have been dry. John's gospel tells us that Jesus said, "I thirst" while upon the cross.

Psalm 22:16-17

For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;

These words are an amazingly accurate portrayal of what Jesus endured upon the cross. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he was nailed by His hands and His feet. When the soldiers came around to break the legs of Jesus to hasten His death, Jesus was already dead. And so, none of His bones were broken, in accordance with this prophesy found in Psalm 22.

Psalm 22:18

they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

This was done by the soldiers at the feet of Jesus.

As all of these things came to pass before the eyes of Jesus, I'm sure that His mind was drawn to the truth of Psalm 22. Perhaps He spent much of His time upon the cross meditating on its truths. As such, He knew that the time was coming when verse 1 would be fulfilled and His Father would abandon Him. Such anticipation surely added to His sufferings!

Those standing by sought to prolong the agony.

Matthew 27:47

And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah."

That's because he said, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (verse 46). It sounded like he was crying out for Elijah. (Perhaps this gives us a clue as to how clearly he spoke these things). He was dying and delirious and desperate. Perhaps they weren't so clear in the minds of other people. They thought he was crying out for Elijah. The response of the people comes in verses 48 and 49.

Matthew 27:48-49

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. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

The people were working to keep Jesus alive just a bit longer. However, it was too late.

Matthew 27:50

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

We looked at this final phrase last week, when Jesus said, "It is finished." When Jesus died, the payment for sins was finished! When Jesus died for our sins, God demonstrated himself just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26). Because Jesus took the penalty for our sins. To do so, the Father had to abandon the son!

This was the point of what Jesus said in the Lord's Supper. "This is my body for you!" Jesus gave his body in the place of our body. Hallelujah!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 7, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
