

“Forsaken by God?”—Matthew 27:45-46

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Forsaken by God?”, is Matthew 27:45-46 → *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?”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

“Why?” There have been times when I’ve referred to this question as “the million dollar question which receives a two cent answer.” A little child may ask his mother or father a question and constantly reply to their answer with, “Why? . . . Why? . . . Why?” . . . to the point of even getting on their nerves. A teenager may counter every statement placed before him by his parents with “Why?” because no answer is ever good enough when he wants his own way. A person experiencing what she considers an insurmountable, even hopeless situation may ask God “Why?” only to hear a silence from God in the midst of the pain and the rumblings of people around her.

“*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” Jesus’ question placed before His heavenly Father also left a silence from God in the midst of the pain and the rumblings of people around him. According to prior protocol, this is not like God. At the baptism of Jesus God’s voice rang through loud and clear: *This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased* (cf. Matthew 4:17). His Father spoke in the same manner at His transfiguration (cf. Matthew 17:5) and even responded to His prayer at one point during His teaching so the crowds actually heard God’s voice (cf. John 12:28). And now, silence from God? Nothing?

The feelings which an individual experiences when forsaken, rejected or even abandoned by a parent is traumatic because it hits to the depths of one’s very identity. It feels, looks, sounds and even tastes like judgment, or better yet, like Judgment Day. The suffering can be so intense that one could actually long to have been abused physically instead. It is truly a different kind of suffering with a different kind of depth. It can leave the abandoned wondering, “Why? What did I do that was so bad to be forsaken?”

Even in the midst of His immense physical suffering, the suffering of Jesus’ soul by His Father forsaking Him was the most difficult. As He had said only hours earlier in the Garden of Gethsemane: *My soul is very sorrowful, even to death* (cf. Matthew 26:38). Jesus willingly suffered a death to the depth of His soul as a result of God’s final judgment on our

sin.

Living this side of Christ's cross and resurrection, we may think of judgment as something which will happen only on the Last Day when Jesus returns in glory and *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil* (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10). However, you would not be able to *appear before the judgment seat of Christ* on the Last Day confidently if He had not taken "the judgment seat" of the cross for you.

God sees judgment in Christ as something which is a present reality because of your sin and the sin of every human being in the world. The people present at His crucifixion experienced a visual evidence of God's judgment according to verse 45 of our text: *From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.* This unusual time for darkness—from noon to 3 PM—brings the prophecy from Amos 8:9 to mind: *"On that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."* While everyone present experienced the evidence of God's judgment in that darkness only Jesus experience *the **power** of darkness* (cf. Luke 22:53).

That power was Jesus being forsaken by God because the sin of the whole world was laid upon Him and God will not tolerate sin in His presence. The judgment which should rightly fall on us because of our

sin is transferred to the sinless Son of God so that we can be saved from God's wrath and eternal judgment to hell. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: *For our sake God made Him to be sin Who knew no sin.* It was at this moment Jesus experienced hell for us on the cross, eternal separation from God, taking the guilt, the curse and the judgment for our sin upon Himself.

We could easily ask "Why?" as well. Why would Jesus **willingly** take all our sin upon Himself, suffering eternal separation from God (i.e. hell or eternal death), only to experience His Father turning away from Him at His greatest hour of need? Fortunately, this "Why?" question does receive an answer for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 sums it up: *For our sake God made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, **so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*** He did this so that you can stand before God by faith in Him on Judgment Day forgiven, blameless, righteous in His sight, ready to receive God's pronouncement on you of "Not guilty!" and never be forsaken in your sin.

Because of Jesus' taking your judgment to hell upon Himself, you don't have to fear God's ever forsaking you because in Christ He is ever-present with His love and Spirit's guidance. There are those times in your life when you may feel forsaken by God whether it be because of guilt over your sin or some kind of suffering in your life. At such times the temptation to blame God or disown Him may be very strong and real.

You hear the confession of Psalm 46:1 → *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*, and may find it hard to see the reality of this promise of God's Word when the suffering grows more and more intense.

Even in the midst of the intense eternal suffering of His soul, Jesus was obedient for you while on the cross. Notice that even though Jesus was forsaken by God He still referred to Him as ***My*** God. He clung to God's claim upon Him throughout His earthly ministry as His *beloved Son*. At those times when you feel forsaken you look to Jesus on the cross by faith in His being forsaken **for you** to know you are never forsaken by God (cf. Hebrews 12:1-2).

You also look to God's claim on you by faith in Jesus as His beloved "son," a term used in a covenant manner in Scripture. Galatians 3:26-27 says: *In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. Know the certainty of your Father in heaven's constant presence by the power of His Holy Spirit. *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear*, such as the fear of being forsaken by God. *But you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by Whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God* (cf. Romans 8:15-16), even in the midst of our weaknesses (cf. Romans 8:26-27).

Thus, we can truly call God *our Father* as we do whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer saying, *Our Father who art in heaven*. What does this mean? "With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." (Luther, Martin. Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, © 2017. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, MO. p. 19-20) You can come to God in faith and reverent fear. Why? Because Jesus has made atonement for your sins, that is, turned aside God's wrath on you by His being forsaken, suffering, dying and rising to bring you life eternal with your heavenly Father. In the sacrifice of Jesus God looks at you and says, "You are My beloved son! Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you!" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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