

My God, my God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?

Matt. 27:46

New International Version of the Holy Bible

O Lord Jesus, Who for our sins was pleased to be forsaken of God: Grant us grace never to forsake thee, but to cleave to thee with unflinching love. In our darkness and distress support us with thy very present help, and at our last hour take us to be with The Father and with thee; through thy mercy and for thy merit, O Lord, our Savior. Amen.

A child is killed by a car. A soldier dies on the battle field. A young man dies after a lingering sickness. Death comes suddenly and snatches a loved one away never again to see them again in this life. *"Why?"*

A man hangs on a cross writhing in agony. And he too asks the disturbing question: *"Why? Why hast thou forsaken me?"* We are somewhat shocked to hear these words from Jesus' lips. The only comforting thing is that this is the fourth word from the cross. If Jesus had begun his suffering with such a cry, we would wonder. If he had ended his life with such a despairing question, we too would despair.

But since this is the fourth word, the middle word of the seven, we can consider it and evaluate it and partially understand it.

Actually this fourth word from the cross has a familiar ring to it. Jesus is really quoting from Psalm 22, where David expressed the agony of his soul. Moreover, the Bible is filled with statements of others who asked God in one way or another, the same question: why something had happened. There was Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, who asked to be called Mara or "bitter" because **"the Almighty has dealt very bitter with me" (Ruth 1:20)**. There was Elijah, who was ready to die in the desert because he thought all his efforts for God had resulted in failure. There was Jeremiah in a pit, and Mary and Martha who had lost their brother Lazarus, and a host of others who had experienced misfortune in one way or another. All of these expressed the same thought as Jesus spoke from the cross. *"Why? Why?"* This is the question that never dies.

Whenever men have had to face the ugliness that sin has brought on this earth, they have cried out in despair. There is probably not a man or woman that professes the Christian faith who hasn't felt at some time or another like Jesus on the cross -- forsaken by God. *"Why me Lord?"* A book about Job has the interesting title: MORE THAN A MAN CAN TAKE. That's what happens to us at times. We face things that seem more than we can take. We look around us in the world today and say: *"What a lot of misery there is in this world."* How true, and when we experience that misery or sometimes even when we just

witness it, we are moved to cry out, to utter the question that never dies: *"Why?"*

While we would not wish our Lord one moment of agony, there is a certain comfort for us in hearing these words from the lips of Jesus. When he feels forsaken, when he asks why, we feel he is truly one of us. Our Savior is no plaster saint, no aristocrat, no spiritual super-man shielded from the problems of life. This is a man who has suffered, who has felt man's common problems, who has experienced what we must experience. He was in all manner tempted like as we are, the Bible tells us.

Moreover, these words remove our guilty feelings about despair. Somehow, we have gotten it into our heads that a true Christian meets all the problems of life with a stoic calm. Man is supposed to trust and never question. *"Stiff upper lip"* we say, as though this were a heavenly command. But there is nothing in the Bible that demands such an inhuman attitude. After all, Job longed for the day of his death. Jeremiah cried out in despair to God. And Jesus on the cross voiced the same attitude: *"My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"*

I'm not saying that a Christian should rave against God or curse him when things happen that he cannot understand. After all, Jesus cried to God for help, he did not turn his back on his Father. But grief and woe can break the heart of a believer too, so he should not be condemned because he voices his despair. Christianity demands no superhuman effort, it is a religion of being flesh and blood that can be

hurt and distressed, and who may be moved to ask the question that never dies: *"Why?"*

Writing about some of his pastoral experiences, a pastor tells about a member who had been ill for time and then when it seemed he was getting better, suddenly died. His wife, because she had loved her husband, was overcome with grief, even though she should have known what was going to happen. She grieved and the family became increasingly irritated because she was so upset. They felt her attitude was sinful and unchristian. Finally the pastor had to tell them: *"Leave her alone, her faith will pull her through but you can't expect more than a questioning "why" from her right now."* She did emerge from that experience stronger in her faith than before, but it was wrong to expect her to shake off her grief and come up smiling the next day.

Let us not forget that our Lord cried out in pain and agony. He voiced the question that is common to all men, the question that never dies. We can be thankful that the fourth word from the cross was recorded so that we can understand what God expects of man, and so that we can realize that we are not lost souls when we cry out: *"Why?"*

But we must take note of the fact that it was our Lord that spoke these words. And that fact forces us to define and redefine our problem. We cannot forget that this agonizing despairing of Christ is also the one who had declared: *"I and the Father are one."* We cannot overlook the fact that this same Jesus also spoke with authority to a thief on the cross next to him at Calvary and insisted: *"Today you will*

be with me in Paradise." This fourth word from the cross may be a question common to all mankind, but what disturbs us here is the uncommon cry from the lips of Jesus.

Of course we can never know the complete story. The relationship between Jesus and the Father is a mystery to us. Here we truly see through a glass darkly. But it is obvious that something strange, mysterious and disturbing happened at Calvary when the fourth word was uttered. The sun had hidden its light at high noon. From that unnatural darkness a cry was heard and when that cry came, it welled up out of indescribable agony. Jesus cried with a loud voice.

What was the burden upon that great soul which brought forth such a cry? Was it sheer physical suffering? Certainly, the cry was more than that! The New Testament tells us that God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf. It reminds us that God laid on him the iniquity of us all. Is this the spot where God was letting his Son bear the sins of all mankind? Jesus' suffering came to a climax as he uttered the fourth word. God was in all of this. His Son was drinking the bitter cup. As the hymn writer puts it:

*But the deepest stroke to wound him
Was the stroke God's justice gave.*

This is not common suffering. This is not the common cry of man. This is the uncommon cry of God's Son, voicing through an age-old question a deeper agony, a deeper cry. These words bring tears to the eyes and terror to the heart when uttered by Jesus. Here is one who is

suffering the very pains of hell itself, for that is what hell is, being cut off from God. No wonder Jesus prayed in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. No wonder he trembled at the thought of drinking such a cup of bitterness.

And yet, despite our sorrow as we listen to this terrible cry, it also brings us a great sense of relief that the Son of God does not suffer like this willingly unless he is moved by an overwhelming love. Calvary is not the story of a lynching but of a sacrifice. This is a conspiracy, a conspiracy of love. You cannot argue with a man who suffers like this for you. You cannot say, *“God, do you love me”* after witnessing God’s Son taking the penalty of your sins on the cross.

And right here is the connection between the common cry of men and the uncommon cry of Jesus. Men will always be moved to cry: *“Why, God, Why??”* And in this life we will not be able to find any answer to that query, still the question that never dies. But one thing we know - God loves us. After Calvary, after the fourth word from the cross, there should be no doubt of that. We may not be able to explain why a boy dies from leukemia; we may not know why God permits a father’s only son to be killed in a war or why God allows a child to run under a car when his father is backing out of a driveway. But in the face of every trouble we can cling to one truth: God loves man.

Just as a young man can be upset by something his girl friend may have said or done, he can console himself with the knowledge of her declared love - so also the Christian is unable to grasp all the

meanings of life, can console himself with his realization of God's love. This fourth word from the cross may seem the most mysterious statement ever made by Jesus yet it holds the clue to all other mysteries, to all questions that perplex and beset us in time of trouble. God loves. God loves me. The fourth word changes in translation from speaker to hearer. When it leaves Jesus' lips the cry is *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* When it reaches our ears it says: *"I love you and will never leave you nor forsake you!"*