

Reading: Matthew 27:45-60

Theme: God Forsaken Of God!

Jesus' 4th saying from the cross in v46 is a surprise, a shocker and causes us to consider what really went on there at the cross. Some say it takes us into holy ground, to glimpse things that went on within the holy place of scripture. It's a saying that has overwhelmed great men of God and a lot of us lesser ones too, for it causes the people of God to wonder. Martin Luther shut himself in his room to think over this verse. After much prayer, fasting and meditation he was heard walking up and down in his room saying "*God forsaken of God! Who can understand it?*" I cannot, but I'd like to share some thoughts to help us at least grasp a bit more of what it says. I find it is useful to ask questions of verses – 5 questions:

1. When Was It Spoken?

We are left in no doubt as to the timing of these words. They occur at the 9th hour. The Jewish day started at 6am and the 9th hour is 3pm. It's also at the end of the 3 hours of darkness. As far as the Roman execution squad was concerned the events of that day had gone on routinely. The prisoners had been crucified at the 3rd hour (Mark 15:25) i.e. 9am. By the 6th hour Jesus has already cried out His prayer of forgiveness, had spoken to the dying thief and spoken to His mother Mary and His disciple John.

Until then there had been mocking - by the crowds, the passers-by, and the religious rulers and even initially by the two thieves. For some 3 hours the Lord Jesus had hung there, had been mocked and taunted. The sun was reaching its highest and hottest - midday (6th hour) and there was darkness over all the land. It was not just an eclipse (*as it was full moon at Passover and therefore an eclipse was not possible*), nor a sandstorm or a thunderstorm, but a supernatural, a divine, a God made darkness over **all** the land. I imagine the people were silenced, no mocking of the ones on the crosses, the people are caught unaware - no streetlamps, no torches etc. Lights went on in the city and people groped their way back there. Yet what was this

darkness? It wasn't darkness for darkness' sake; nor was it, I feel, as Isaac Watts poetically puts it: *"Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut His glories in, when God, the mighty Maker, died for man, the creature's sin"*

We need to go scripture to see what this darkness portrays. Looking at the Bible, we see that darkness in Scripture often symbolises, pictures God's anger and judgement; pictures being away from or separated from God. The day of judgement in the OT is that of anger and darkness; hell is a place of not only torment, but darkness. A judgement God is often to darken people's understanding and leave them without light. Here this supernatural darkness falls to show supernatural judgement is being worked out; a great and awful judgement was being carried out and that a divine separation was occurring.

Divine judgement was being carried out under the cover of the very darkness which symbolised it. Hidden from sight was a supernatural judgement and separation. Something went on there on the cross which those around were not only unaware of, but were not permitted to view. It's as if a curtain was drawn across events during those 3 hours, to prevent anyone looking upon most holy things; things too wondrous, awesome and sacred for human eyes.

In OT in the Tabernacle and later the Temple there was a veil, a curtain cutting off the holy of holies from the holy place - the rest of the sanctuary. No one could enter there except the high priest and he only did that once a year and then to make atonement for himself and the people. There was no one else in the sanctuary as he completed the act of atonement using the blood of bulls and goats and all was hidden out of sight behind the curtain.

Jesus is our Great High Priest and He made atonement for His people. He did so alone and behind the veil, the curtain of darkness. At the moment of His death, the curtain of the earthly temple was

torn in two - from top to the bottom to signify the way to God was open. These words were said at the end of the 3 hours of darkness and so give us a clue as to their meaning:

2. Who Was Speaking to Whom?

This seems so obvious, it was Jesus calling out to God, but we need to pause and consider who each is to the other. Six hours earlier Jesus had said "*Father forgive them...*" He called God "*Father*" and the NT shows us that Jesus often called God "*Father*"; that Jesus was truly God, termed God the Son, the second person of the Godhead. He is wholly and totally God and yet at the same time He had a true human body. As God from all eternity, Jesus ever had the Father's delight and love; He equally possessed the Father's dwelling place, glory and power. There was a perfect delight one in the other, no division or argument between the members of the Godhead. Even as the Son took humanity upon Himself, there was, on the divine part, an unbroken communion with the Father; never a moment out of His conscious presence or delight; no interruption of the relationship with the Father or the Holy Spirit.

Yet there in the darkness came the point when God the Son, was abandoned, forsaken by God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. None of all the creatures God has ever created has been or will ever be less prepared for such an experience than the only begotten and now incarnate Son of God. He was the least prepared for this horror of horrors. No one in hell will ever suffer as He did, for they have never been in the eternal heights of a such blissful glorious love relationship and then cast into the depths of such an agonising abandonment. Here is the beloved Son of God, calling out to His Father. Can you see why we are on holy ground? This points us on to the question:

3. What Are They Really Saying?

Many have said strange things about this saying - Jesus realised God had finished with Him; His usefulness was finished; Jesus was

despairing for He realised He would die; He was angry because after all He had tried to teach and do, yet He was being left to die! Yet they are not the real meaning of these words. These are **words of enlightenment** - they enlighten our eyes and understanding. We have noted the events on the cross were obscured by the darkness. The Lord Jesus was silent in all that darkness. Indeed He had been silent throughout His sufferings - like a lamb led to the slaughter.

We never would have known anything of what He went through unless He gave us an indication, a clue as to what went on there in the darkness - given us by this cry of dereliction. Here Jesus deliberately quotes Psalm 22:1, but He doesn't use the Hebrew, but His everyday language of Aramaic. This was really true of His own experience and yet it fulfilled Scripture prophecy. Jesus was not despairing, or panicking, or angry, or bitter when He cried these words. He cried out what He was and had been experiencing in the darkness - forsaken by God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He really was alone and separated from the felt love and presence of the other two fellows of the Godhead. It was a real, an objective reality and not a subjective experience. We ask with Martin Luther "*God forsaken of God! Who can understand it?*"

There in the darkness, for the first time ever, the Lord Jesus experienced an alienation, a forsaking by the Father and the Holy Spirit. Yet Jesus was going the way of the Father, was walking according to the plan the Triune God had agreed in eternity past. He was forsaken, He felt it and knew it in all its horrors. Realise that the Father never stopped loving the Son, nor the Son the Father. It was love and obedience to the loving will of God, that catalysed, brought about this forsaking. The Son was still one with the Father and Holy Spirit, was still loved and yet amazingly was forsaken! Let us see:

4. Why Did Jesus Say These Words?

We need to realise that Jesus had no reason to cry out these words. He, as God the Son, knew why He had been forsaken by the Father

and Holy Spirit. He had known of that time since the plan of salvation, was entered into in eternity before time began. The knowledge of such forsaking caused such a reaction in Him in the garden of Gethsemane. We are to realise that this is not a "Why?" of doubt, or complaining, or of ignorance or questioning. It is the **why of reason** - so **we** could hear, know, learn and understand something of the why and wherefore of the cross. **There was a reason** for Christ going to the cross. It wasn't a mishap of history, a dreadful mistake. There was no reason in Him as to why He should be forsaken - He was the Father's chief delight, the sinless, spotless, perfect Son of God. If you want to know the reason why Christ was forsaken then look at the preacher and I will look at you, then look in a mirror - we are the reason Christ was forsaken.

Christ was in our place there on the cross. *"Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood; sealed my pardon with His blood: Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"* He was there in my place, your place. There on the cross Jesus became sin - took my sin, your sin, He became **as** the worst of sinners, but not a sinner and yet He was made sin. God cannot tolerate sin, so the Father and the Holy Spirit have to turn from their fellow now made sin. God has an infinite hatred for sin - this is seen here as even His beloved Son is forsaken when He is made sin. Have we considered that Jesus, as God the Son, also hated, detested sin, but now that is laid upon Him and He is made sin? That which would be totally against His divine nature, which would bring forth His wrath, was then laid upon Him and this being made sin cut Him off from the felt love and presence of the Father, from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is now, for the first time in all eternity, forsaken and alone.

Yet there is something even worse, something unbelievably worse that is going on there. The Lord Jesus was made sin. God is holy and His holy justice is inflexible. God has declared that sin has to be punished on whom it is found. Sin demands, provokes God's just and holy anger, wrath and punishment. Sin is so awful, so serious it

demands this from this holy God. Sin is so serious that punishment has to be meted out, even when that sin is laid on His beloved Son. Divine punishment must fall there in the hours of darkness and fall on the one made sin - this is what went on in the darkness.

Ultimately God's punishment and anger on sin is hell and all the horrors that it involves. Our sin was transferred to the Lord Jesus, so too was our deserved punishment. The Lord Jesus, the infinite Son of God, made sin, took our infinite punishment on His own body there on the tree. The punishment that we deserved fell on Him. He really and truly swapped with us! God's inflexible justice drew forth the sword of His holy and just judgement and wrath; it fell stroke after stroke upon His Son. The full extent of His wrath was poured out on the Lord Jesus, nothing was held back. Divine wrath, judgement and punishment were going on, out of sight, hidden from view in the darkness until divine justice was fully satisfied – *“heaven's peace and perfect justice, kissed a guilty world in love”*.

Jesus could have cried this out all through the hours of darkness, but He didn't – as a lamb led to the slaughter, He is silent. Only as it ends, He call out to give us an insight as to what went on there, as to what caused Him to thirst as He did. When we consider the cross, do we only consider the physical, mental sufferings and horrors? If we do, then we miss out on what really went on there. It involved the Lord Jesus taking the punishment of hell we deserved and earned; He was separated to its guilt, penalty and being truly separated from His Father and the Holy Spirit to its judgement and punishment.

Yet realise that as God's wrath fell to its uttermost extent on the Lord Jesus, so the Father's love reached explosive proportions towards Him; for He was glorifying the Father; the will and the purposes of God were being fulfilled; His Father loved Him because He laid down His life for the sheep and He did so for the glory of God. We may hear all this and think *“So what?”* Now see:

5. How Do These Words Relate to Us?

Do not just see the inflexible justice of God, or only see the seriousness of our sin that deserved such punishment; but see them in the context of the love of God to us. Romans 5:8 *"But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* The Lord Jesus took upon Himself God's wrath, endured such forsaking to bring **us** to God. We deserve nothing from God, we have ignored God, trampled His laws and His holiness underfoot. Jesus became sin and bore our punishment to bring us to God. The Lord Jesus came to save His people from their sins - His chief and primary work. It was not to sort out our problems, make us happy, complete or successful - yes there are many benefits to having our sins dealt with, but foremost it is dealing with our sins, our guilt and deserved condemnation.

Jesus' cry of dereliction comes through the ages to us. What will we do in the light of them? Can we go on our way as if nothing has been done? Can we treat Jesus as if He is a nobody or nothing? Is it nothing to you that God the Son was forsaken and punished in such a way? Someone may be here and you've seen things you never realised before. You may know you're not ready to meet this God's holy justice. Maybe you are staggered, amazed at what Jesus went through there on the cross for someone like you and me. If the Lord Jesus did all necessary for us to be right with and at peace with God, then we should own our guilt and sin, trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour for He's done all needed for us to have peace with God and have eternal life – we are all royally invited and welcome to do so.

The cross declares God delights to forgive all the sin of people like us. We who are Christians know such, I pray I have presented something of the amazing cost of salvation our Saviour paid for us - for He loved us and gave Himself for us. Seeing such has implications for the way we live for and love this Saviour. We cannot live carelessly as if all His suffering on our behalf was something small and insignificant. All He endured there makes us still debtors

to God - not now to His holiness, but debtors to mercy alone - for this great salvation is ours at the expense of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

The Son of God was forsaken so that we who are sons of Adam can be accepted, we can be made the sons of God, heirs of salvation and joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. As such our heavenly Father will never leave us or forsake us. No child of God will ever be forsaken and yet that was secured when heaven's best, God's one and only begotten Son **was truly** forsaken for us. Spurgeon wrote "*If you are Christ's let me advise you to do four things. **You belong to Jesus**-obey him; let his word be your law; let his wish be your will. **You belong to the Beloved**, then love him; let your heart embrace him; let your whole soul be filled with him. **You belong to the Son of God**, then trust him; rest nowhere but on him. **You belong to the King of kings**, then be decided for him. Thus, without your being branded upon the brow, all will know to whom you belong.*"

Such a Saviour is worth loving and living for - even in our ups and downs in our lives! Yet there will come a time when we will see Him in all His glory, join with the heavenly choir in praising the Lamb that was slain to redeem us and do so with love and amazement. We can practice now and part of our praise and love is to include the question "*Why?*" - "*Why O Lord such love to me?*" To Him and to Him alone, is to be all the praise and the glory.