

Forsaken

We may be sure there was never a day in the history of the world quite like this day. In the first three hours the Lord Jesus Christ hung on the cross there had been general activity; a coming and going of soldiers, people and priests. In many respects Christ's crucifixion was an execution similar to many others, the soldiers gambled for the Lord's cloak, some people began to drift away.

There was a short communication between the Lord and the men with whom He was being crucified. Jesus had even been able to speak briefly to His mother and His disciple John in a tender moment of filial care and concern. But no one was prepared for what happened next.

Nature reacts

At noon, as the sun reached its peak its brightness suddenly dimmed, then darkened, then disappeared. The mocking cries of the Jews diminished with the light and were replaced with cries of fear and confusion. There was an earthquake, the ground moved, the rocks around about split and the graves of dead saints were opened and their decayed bodies exposed to the air.

The huge woven veil which hung in the temple separating the holy place from the holy of holies was ripped into two pieces from the top to the bottom just at the time when the daily sacrifice was being made. Imagine the consternation of those present as the holy of holies suddenly appeared to their view! In a beautiful type the Lord showed our access to God by a new and living way.

Back at Golgotha the centurion charged with putting Jesus to death found himself compelled to acknowledge Christ to be the Son of God. The mocking Jews who had come to see Christ crucified and killed smote their breasts and returned to the city ashamed and perplexed.

Suffering hid from sight

For three hours the supernatural darkness covered the whole land shielding the final stage of the Lord's suffering from the eyes of man. The Jews had betrayed their King, the Romans had crucified the God-man, now God's judgment against the iniquity of His elect people brought the full weight of divine wrath into the soul of the true offering for sin. Isaiah says, 'it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin'. Now the Saviour found Himself abandoned by God Himself.

Forsaken by all

As Jesus hung in the darkness He cried out the words, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This cry teaches us that judgment for sin involves being forsaken by God. Hell is being forsaken by God and separated from God, this is what Christ endured. It is notable that Jesus says, 'My God' rather than 'My Father'.

This distinction from the lips of the Saviour shows us how Christ suffered in His humanity as a man for mankind. Our Saviour and Representative prayed to God as 'my God'. The 'my' is important. In the depths of His suffering Jesus trusted and believed in God. By faith He claimed a personal interest with God. Yet, now our Lord Jesus Christ felt God had withdrawn His presence from Him.

Hope in suffering

The Lord's cry is an expression of Christ's hope and confidence in God despite having no sense of the favour and pleasure of God. Jesus was now bearing the whole burden of the sins of His people. He felt the grief of those sins, He felt the guilt of those sins, He felt the pain those sins merited, and until the cup of suffering for those sins was completely drained He felt deprived of the presence of His Father.

Watch and wonder

This moment in time is unique and unrepeatably. Our finite minds cannot explain the mystery of this divine transaction and interaction between the Holy Lord God and the Man Christ Jesus. For example, while the Saviour felt the loss of

God's presence His experience of being forsaken cannot mean the union of God and man in the Person of Jesus Christ was ever broken or divided.

God's love for the Lord Jesus was neither diminished nor withheld. Nor was God's pleasure in the obedience of His Son affected. God does not change. But what we may say is that at least for a time, in the depths of His suffering for sin, our Lord Jesus Christ lost the comfort and awareness of His Father's love and pleasure.

Christ's work finished

As light returned the Lord cried out again with a loud voice declaring, 'It is finished' (John 19:30) and 'Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit' (Luke 23:46). Then, says Mark, He 'gave up the ghost' and dismissed His Spirit. By this we learn the Saviour died freely and voluntarily and not through force or physical necessity. He laid down His life.

Christ's work of redemption and atonement was complete and His job was done. He paid the debt for the sins of His people and ransomed our lives with His own precious blood, making atonement for us. Christ's suffering was over and His reverting to calling God 'Father' speaks of restored and renewed awareness of the divine love and pleasure as He commended His Spirit into His Father's hands.

Amen

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