

Matthew 27:45-50

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? – v. 46

When Moses approached the burning bush and discovered in that bush a revelation of God's glory, he was instructed to remove the sandals from his feet because he was standing on holy ground. There are verses in the Bible that call for the same kind of increase in our reverence. The text before us is a case in point.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? These are words that go quite beyond our comprehension and should move us to bow in deep reverence and humility. They reveal to us the crowning penal affliction of Christ's sufferings and the nature of this crowning affliction is such that a curtain of darkness must be drawn across the scene and we can only hear these words from the other side of that veil.

The dread of the cross for Christ did not lie so much in the physical pain He suffered or in the emotional pain of being rejected and condemned by sinners. Those afflictions brought no cry or complaint from His lips. His silence in the midst of those afflictions was such that it caused Pilate to marvel at Him. But now in the 9th hour there does come a cry from our Savior. And I'm inclined to think that this cry carried the same volume as His last cry. We read of this cry in v. 46 that it was with a loud voice. And we read a few verses later in v. 50 that *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the Ghost.*

Mark's gospel provides an interesting point regarding the loudness of that final cry. We're told in Mk. 15:39 that *when the centurion, who stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.* It wasn't so much what Christ cried out but the loudness with which He cried out that convinced this centurion that Christ was the Son of God. The victims of crucifixion, you see, did not cry out with loud voices at the points of their deaths. They died overborne by their sufferings. They died by being deprived the strength to take another breath. The loudness of our Savior's cry bears clear testimony to the fact that His death was a supernatural death and that no man took His life from Him.

The loudness of His cry, in v. 46, however, also indicates to us, not only that this man was the Son of God but that He had reached the crowning point of His penal afflictions. Here was the dread of the cross for our Savior – not that He had nails driven into His hands and feet – not that He hung suspended in agony and shame between heaven and earth but in the fact that His Father had forsaken Him – that His Father would not in that instant support Him. It's as if the powers of earth and hell were already against Him and now the power of heaven joins in that conspiracy and turns against Him too.

These are tremendous words for us to contemplate in preparing to remember Christ. For here is the epitome of justice, of condemnation, as well as mercy, grace, and love. Let's remove the sandals from our feet spiritually speaking this morning as we endeavor to contemplate something of the meaning of these words:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Consider first of all what this statement tells us about:

I. Christ's Claim to His Father

My God, my God – our text reads. And in these words we discover a claim that no one else but Christ could make. God was His Father. The Father was His God. The doubling of the statement emphasizes the certainty of the claim as well as the preciousness of such a claim to Christ. You can't help but feel the emotion behind this claim. Only the hardest of hearts could fail to perceive the depth from which this cry comes forth from Christ.

Before the world or the stars were ever brought into existence there had been the strongest of love bonds between the Father and the Son. Creation did not fill a void in God's heart. It was not out of a sense of lack that God made man in His own image. And it was not in order to pursue something that might be lacking that He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins.

It was, rather, to the praise of the glory of His grace. God had always been happy. He had always been fulfilled. He had always known the fullness of joy and satisfaction within the bonds of the triune God. Before creation God could say of His Son *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. And there was nothing done by Christ throughout the course of His earthly ministry to change that. Upon His baptism, when He formally entered into His mediatorial ministry the Father would testify that He was pleased with His Son. Close to 3 years later following many trials and temptations, in the mount of transfiguration, God would bear the same testimony again. *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him* (Mt. 17:5).

This claim to God, therefore, is a clear declaration of Christ's personal obedience. He was obedient unto death. His obedient life did more than just qualify Him for His death. It is true that had our Savior stumbled so as to sin He could not have qualified to represent us. But His obedience to His Father did more. It supplied the righteousness of obedience that we've failed to supply for ourselves.

M'Cheyne makes the observation that *the Lord Jesus came to be a doing as well as a dying Savior – not only to suffer all that we should have suffered, but to obey all that we should have obeyed – not only to suffer the curse of the law, but to obey the commands of the law*.

He then elaborates on Christ's obedience: *When the thing was proposed to him in heaven, he said: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God! – "Yea, thy law is within my heart." Now, then, look at him as a man obeying his God. See how perfectly he did it – even to the last! God says: Be about my business – he obeys: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" God says: Speak to sinners for me – he obeys: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of; my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." God says: Die in the room of sinners – wade through a sea of my wrath for the*

sake of enemies – hang on a cross, and bleed and die for them – he obeys: “No man taketh my life from me.” The night before he said: “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” But perhaps he will shrink back when he comes to the cross? No; for three hours the darkness has been over him, yet still he says: “My God, my God.” The great command laid upon him was to die for sinners. Behold how fully he obeys!

His claim to God, then, is a just claim. God was truly His God. There is sad irony in our Savior’s words when you consider that God is supposed to be our God. We were created so that we could call on God as our God. We are commanded in the first commandment to have no other gods save the true and living God. How tragic that rather than claim God as our own we have instead claimed our own way. And so we read earlier from Isa. 53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.*

While we turn to our own ways, then, Christ submits to His Father. While we buy the devil’s lie that we shall be as gods – Christ who could count it not robbery to be equal with God makes Himself of no reputation and takes upon Him the form of a servant and is made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2).

Most gladly, then, do we remember Christ’s claim upon God. Because Christ could say *My God, my God* – we are able to say today *Our Father which art in heaven*. Because Christ obeyed unto death – we have gained eternal life. Because Christ’s obedience encompassed His life and His death – we are able to say *our sins are blotted out and we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ*.

We must go deeper, however, into this claim of Christ. We must allow our hearts to be humbled by the tragic irony that while Christ could lay claim to God as being His God – we also find in our text:

II. The Father Forsaking His Son – *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

The word *forsake* conveys the idea of being abandoned or deserted. *To leave in straits, to leave helpless* one Greek lexicon reads. Here, then, is where sin and grace are both magnified. The fact that our sins were imputed to Him accounts for His Father forsaking Him – the fact that it was *in our placed condemned He stood* magnifies the grace of the Father and the Son.

If I could borrow again from M’Cheyne who notes: Christ suffered much from His enemies. He suffered in all parts of His body – His cheeks, His face, His shoulders which bore His cross, His back, His hands and feet as well as His side which suffered the thrust of the Roman soldier’s spear. He suffered in all His offices. As a prophet: *They smote him on the face and said, Prophecy who smote thee*. As a priest – they mocked him when offering up that one offering for sins. *If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross*. As a king, when they bowed the knee, and jesting said *Hail! King of the Jews.*”

He suffered much from those he afterwards saved. How bitter would be the scoffing of the thief who that day was to be forgiven and accepted! How bitter the cries of the three

thousand who were as soon brought to know him whom they crucified! He suffered from his own disciples. They all forsook him and fled. John, the beloved, stood afar off, and Peter denied him. But worst of all – and this is where the dread of the cross is to be found – He suffered from His Father. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Other sufferings were finite – this alone was an infinite suffering. It was little to be bruised by the heel of men or devils; but, ah! to be trodden by the heel of God: *It pleased the Father to bruise him.*

M'Cheyne then notes 3 things that show the infinity of His sufferings:

1. *Who it was the forsook him* – Not his people Israel – not Judas the betrayer – not Peter his denier – not John that lay in his bosom – he could have borne all this; but ah! It was his Father and his God. Other things little affected him compared with that. The passers by wagged their heads – he spoke not. The chief priests mocked him – he murmured not. The thieves cast it in his teeth – he was as a deaf man who heareth not. God brought a three hours' darkness over him – the outward darkness being an image of the darkness over his soul – Ah! this was infinite agony: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*
2. *Who it was that was forsaken* – why hast thou forsaken *me*? Here was one infinitely dear to God. Here was the one God loved before the foundation of the world, one who basked in the beams of God's love, yet *thou hast forsaken me*. Think about it – in forsaking His Son, God was forsaking not only One who shared in His love but He was also forsaking One who shared in His hatred for sin. We can understand God forsaking sinners who love their sin but in forsaking His Son He forsakes One who hates sin – One who had never sinned. How dreadful to an innocent man to be thrust into the cell of a condemned criminal! But ah! how much more dreadful to Christ, who had an infinite hatred of sin, to be regarded by God as a sinner.
3. *What God did to him* – *forsook him*. In that forsaking Christ was without any comforts of God – no feeling that God loved him – no feeling that God pitied him – no feeling that God supported him. God was his sunlight before – but now that sun became all darkness. Not a smile from His Father – not a kind look – not a kind word. He was without a God, he was as if he had not God. All that God had been to him before was taken from him now. He was Godless – deprived of his God. He was left, instead, with the feeling of the condemned, when the Judge says *Depart from me, ye cursed – who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*. He felt that God said the same to him. Ah! This is the hell which Christ suffered.

Sometimes the greatest of God's saints become faint and in the time of trial they can harbor the notion that God has forsaken them. Job had such a feeling. *Oh that I knew where I might find him* Job cries out in Job 23:3. And yet Job's sense of being forsaken was but an allusion. God had not forsaken him. God was near enough to him to hear and record every word that Job spake – every complaint that Job uttered. Christ's cry,

however, was no allusion. It was not merely a sense of being forsaken, in Christ's case – it was the actual turning of His Father from Him.

These things, then, are what make the suffering of Christ being forsaken unfathomable. Words really do fail even the greatest of preachers throughout the ages when it comes to trying to penetrate such a deep and dark abyss. We are called upon, however, in the simplicity of these elements of bread and the cup to remember our Savior's cry – *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

We see, then, in this text – the claim that Christ possessed on His Father. He was *My God, my God*. We see that in spite of such a claim Christ must suffer being forsaken by His Father. It remains for us to endeavor in some manner to think on:

III. The Reasons Why – *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

This will undoubtedly be a question that we'll spend all of eternity endeavoring to probe. Why would God forsake His Son for the sake of rebellious sinners? Why would the just die for the unjust? Why would God forsake the One who loved Him with a perfect love in order to spare those who hated Him and spent their lives pursuing sin? We can do little more than skim the surface of such a question this morning as we prepare ourselves to remember Christ.

We can answer the question, first of all, by noting that this forsaking of Christ by His Father was something that was planned from eternity. It was in the Covenant of Redemption that Christ agreed with His Father that He would suffer in the place of sinners. *Every curse* Christ said in effect *every curse that should fall on them, let it fall on me*.

We're able to say, then, that this forsaking of Christ by His Father was no accident much less an alternate plan to Christ being rejected by the Jews. This cry comes forth from Christ's lips for our sakes – not for the sake of Christ wanting to know something He didn't already know. He knew that He had covenanted with His Father for this very thing.

It's certainly worth remembering that Christ was always aware of that hour to come. The moment He left heaven's glory to come into this world He did so knowing that He was born to die and that His death must encompass being forsaken by His Father. Indeed when you recognize that the essence of death is being separated from God then you realize that for Christ's death to be a real death there must be this time of being forsaken by His Father.

And not only was Christ aware of this – but He was resolutely determined to go through with it nevertheless. And so we read in Lk. 9:51 *And it came to pass, that when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem*. There was no balking or hesitation on Christ's part. He knew what awaited Him. He explained it to His disciples although it was so far beyond them that they couldn't comprehend it.

And any attempt on the disciples part to hinder Christ from this dreadful work was treated by Christ as the work of the devil. *Get thee behind me, Satan*, Christ would say to

Peter thou art an offence to me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Why hast thou forsaken me? Christ would ask – and the answer would be in part *Because thou didst covenant to stand in the room of sinners.*

M'Cheyne adds another answer to this question *why?* He notes that God and Christ knew that either Christ must suffer or the whole world must suffer. It was his pity for the world that made him undertake to be a Savior. *He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness it sustained him.*

Why? Why must Christ be forsaken? Because it was either Christ or us – hell for Him or hell for us. And so we find ourselves humbled at the answers to the question *Why hast thou forsaken me?* We humbly and reverently bow with grateful hearts before our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

M'Cheyne concludes with the exhortation: *Admire the love of Jesus. Oh, what a sea of wrath did he lie under for you! Oh, what hidings did he bear for you, vile, ungrateful soul! The broken bread and poured out wine are a picture of his love. Oh, when you look on them, may your heart break for longing toward such toward such a Savior!*

We would say to all who close with Jesus Christ, He was forsaken in the room of sinners. If you close with him as your surety, you will never be forsaken. From the broken bread and poured out wine seem to rise the cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” To which we answer: For me – it was for me that Christ was forsaken.

May our time around the Lord's table seal that very truth to our hearts this day.