

## A Word of Anguish

Matthew 27:46

*Jesus' Prayers From the Cross #2*

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**W**e turn to the fourth word of our Lord from the cross this evening, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34)

This is a word of anguish. But immediately we had a problem. Brothers and sisters, a sermon, an explanation can hardly do this word justice. As C.H. Spurgeon said, “we should never preach it.” We should read it, meditate on it, give a little of the sense, but in the end recognize that here is the lowest depths of our Lord’s sufferings for us that we have no idea of; here is the full weight of God’s justice, which we have no understanding of. Who are we to take up these words? It’s like a man saying he understands what his pregnant and laboring wife is going through. It’s like a rich man in a penthouse apartment saying he knows what the common man is suffering down below. And so I want to be brief. I want to be reverent. And I want the words to speak for themselves to strike us to our core tonight: “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”

1. *A Mysterious Word*
2. *A Merciful Word*

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord’s Solemn Enquiry.” Sermon 3507.

## **A Mysterious Word**

**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** Here is *a mysterious word*. The eternal Son of God is made the son of Mary and of humanity. He who is not only man but also God cries out, **“My God, my God.”** The Son who was eternally nestled in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18) is forsaken. The Son who existed in glory with the Father before the world even existed (John 17:5) now experiences the ultimate humility. The Son who is the source of humanity’s blessing undergoes the Father’s cursing. Shall I continue?

Here is the mystery and wonder of the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son who with the Father and Holy Spirit has the same divinity, same glory, and same eternal majesty (Athanasian Creed) takes to himself a true human nature from his mother Mary and a pure human nature by the working of the Holy Spirit conceiving him without the means of a man. And so he is, as the ancient Definition of Chalcedon says, “consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood...begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood.” This is why we speak of him being one person in two natures—divine and human. But how do we understand this? Like a sketch artist draws a portrait of a suspect by taking away things—“No, he doesn’t look like that; no, he doesn’t look like that”—in the same way we can speak of Christ’s two natures negatively. They are not confused together into a third thing. These two natures did not

change when they were united. These two natures are not divided. These two natures are not separated.

So here is the incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus crying out, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” What we can know is that this is a cry of physical, emotional, and spiritual anguish from a depths of Jesus. Why does he cry this? He does so in fulfillment of David’s words in Psalm 22. But even more so, he cries out because the meaning of these words is that he is **forsaken** or accursed of God for the sins of the world as the Father “removed all sweet manifestations of his favour and love for a time.”<sup>2</sup> He cries out of his depths as he experiences the depths of hell. “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” is Jesus’ anguish in the first person, which we attribute to him in the third person, “He descended into hell” (Apostles’ Creed). As the Heidelberg Catechism explains this depth of anguish:

That in my greatest temptations I may be assured that Christ my Lord, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, and terrors, which He suffered in His soul on the cross and before, has redeemed me from the anguish and torment of hell. (Q&A 44)

But here is where the mystery lies. This is the incarnate Son saying these words. He exists in the eternal present as the Son of the Father whom the Father loves and who loves the Father. He does not nor cannot cease to be God. Yet he cries out. Yet he experiences something we cannot fully understand with our minds or comprehend with out experience as he experiences the pain of God’s

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<sup>2</sup> John Flavel, *Works*, 1:408.

wrath and the pain of the withdrawal of his favor. All we can do is stand in awe and then appropriate it for ourselves.

## **A Merciful Word**

And this is why, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” is also a *merciful word*. The sinless Son was forsaken by God that I might become his son or daughter and never be abandoned, forgotten, or left behind by my God. Did you notice how Jesus cried out: “**My God, my God?**” Even when being forsaken he did not forsake. As he was being forsaken, he cries out in double-trust, “**My God, my God?**” In Jules Verne’s, *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*, Harry Lawson takes a wrong turn and winds up abandoned and without light somewhere in the earth. For days he despairs and gives himself up for dead. But he never completely gives up hope and eventually the echo of his voice makes its way all the way to where Professor Harwigg and Hans are, who eventually find him. Even in our lowest despair, there is hope with God. As Peter says, Jesus’ experience instructs us:

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:21–25).

What mercy! The sinless one “bore our sins” so “that we might die” not *in* our sins according to God’s justice but “die *to* sin and live to righteousness.” What mercy! “By his wounds” on his head, in his hands, in his feet, and in his side, but especially in his soul, your diseased and dying soul has “been healed.”

The great English preacher and poet, John Donne, described the crucifixion and its benefits like this:

Whose creature Fate is, now prescribe a Fate,  
Measuring self-life’s infinity to a span,  
Nay to an inch. Lo, where condemned he  
Bears his own cross, with pain, yet by and by  
When it bears Him, He must bear more and die.  
Now Thou art lifted up, draw me to Thee,  
And at Thy death giving such liberal dole,  
*Moist, with one drop of Thy blood, my dry soul.*<sup>3</sup>

What a merciful word this is from the lips of our Savior! And in response, our lips sing:

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?<sup>4</sup>

Was it for crimes that I have done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity, grace unknown,  
And love beyond degree!<sup>5</sup>

What language shall I borrow  
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,

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<sup>3</sup> John Donne, “Crucifying,” in *Poems* (1931; repr., London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1947), 246–247.

<sup>4</sup> From the hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

<sup>5</sup> From the hymn, “Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed.”

For this Thy dying sorrow,  
Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever;  
And should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never  
Outlive my love to Thee.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” A word of anguish. A words “able to rend the hardest heart in the world.”<sup>7</sup> A “heaven-rending” and “heart-melting” word.<sup>8</sup> Our words can hardly explain this word. I pray you will just be in reverential awe tonight. I pray you will just embrace them by faith tonight. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> From the hymn, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.”

<sup>7</sup> Flavel, *Works*, 1:406.

<sup>8</sup> Flavel, *Works*, 1:406.