

# ***“My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”***

SEVEN STATEMENTS FROM THE CROSS (#4)

Mark 15:33-36

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## **Introduction:**

If you have been with us over the past several weeks (or if you have been following along online), then you know that we have been looking together at the seven statements that Jesus made while hanging on the cross. We started three weeks ago by considering the fact that as the Lord was being nailed to the cross and as He hung there, He continued to say, ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,”*** and we learned that that prayer was answered seven weeks later on the Day of Pentecost as 3,000 people had a change of heart and were immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins.

Two weeks ago, we considered the fact that Jesus was crucified between two thieves, and early on in the day, we learn from the Scriptures that both thieves were hurling insults at the Lord. However, as the morning wore on, we find that one thief has a change of heart, he rebukes the other thief, and then he addresses the Lord by saying, ***“Remember me when You come in Your kingdom.”*** It took a lot of faith for this man to put his faith in a king who was nailed to a cross, and so the Lord spoke up for the second time that day and said, ***“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”***

And then last week we looked together at the soldiers dividing up the Lord’s clothing, and we learned that when they got to that seamless inner garment, a garment most likely made by Mary when the Lord was old enough to leave home, when they start handling that garment, the Lord looks at His mother and says, ***“Woman, behold your son.”*** He then turns to the apostle John and says, ***“Behold your mother.”*** And with that very simple exchange, the Lord made plans for the care of His mother and set an example for children everywhere.

As we piece together the parallel accounts of the Lord’s suffering on the cross, we discover that the Lord’s first three statements were made sometime between 9 a.m. and noon. At noon, however, the situation changes, and we find that darkness covered the land (the song after this lesson and our closing song both mention the darkness). This was not an eclipse, this was not a dust storm, but literally (according

to the word used in Luke's account) the sun was **"failing."** In fact, it might be accurate to say that midnight came at mid-day. In my own mind, at least, I envision this darkness as being one of those situations where you cannot see your hand in front of your face. The light was completely gone, as if the Light of the World had gone out. For those who knew the Old Testament, the darkness should have been expected. In the words of the prophet Amos in **Amos 8:9-10**, ***"It will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, 'That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight. Then I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth on everyone's loins and baldness on every head. And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son, and the end of it will be like a bitter day.'"*** Nevertheless, we find from the Scriptures that this supernatural darkness lasted from noon until 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

I don't know if we can even imagine what that would have been like. Think about the chaos of the crucifixion scene, thousands of visitors in town for the Passover, Roman soldiers everywhere, the crowds of people insulting the Lord, the pain of those who were dying...and then suddenly the sun stops shining. I can imagine how quiet it must have been. I can imagine the Roman soldiers scrambling to find a torch, struggling to see what was going on. The darkness continues for three hours, and then suddenly, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon (the hour, by the way, that the Passover Lamb was slaughtered), at that moment, a loud voice pierces the darkness, and Jesus speaks up for the fourth time. If you will, please look with me at Mark's account—**Mark 15:33-36**, the fourth statement from the cross. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1591**. **Mark 15:33-36**...

***<sup>33</sup> When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup> At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" <sup>35</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." <sup>36</sup> Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down."***

Of all the words that Jesus spoke from the cross, certainly these are the most difficult to understand. In fact, it has been said that Martin Luther once vowed to wrestle with this text until he could explain it—no matter how long it took. Well, history tells us that he focused on this passage for several days, going without food or sleep. Finally, though, he stood up and said, **"God forsaking God! Who can understand that?"** And with that, he gave up. And even with all of the Bible study that has been done since the days of Martin Luther, many people continue to struggle with this fourth statement from the cross.

As you noticed from our Scripture reading this morning, and as you might have noticed in a footnote, the Lord was quoting directly from the **22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm**. With this in mind, there are two major schools of thought out there. First of all, some have suggested that Jesus was not really forsaken by the Father, but that He simply

thought He was forsaken, that He was using a figure of speech, that He was simply quoting **Psalm 22** in order to get people to think about the fact that He was the fulfillment of those prophecies. The obvious weakness here, though, is that the Lord does, in fact, refer to being ***“forsaken.”***

And so secondly, others have suggested that Jesus was forsaken, that God the Father turned away, that God could have absolutely nothing to do with His own Son, because His Son was bearing the sins of the world. And yet the weakness here is that Jesus Himself very clearly said that He and the Father are one (**John 10:30**). How can ***“one”*** be separated?

And so, as you can see, we are dealing with some deep issues here this morning, and yet in spite of the difficulty, this is a passage that can teach some incredibly valuable lessons. As we ponder what it meant for Jesus to question God in such a powerful way, I would like for us to try to back up and absorb what those words really mean for those of us gathered here this morning.

**I. And as we think about this fourth statement from the cross, one of the first things we need to consider is the HIGH COST OF SIN.**

Often, when we think about the death of Jesus on the cross, we think about the physical aspect of the suffering—the scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails, and so on—but this morning we focus on the spiritual and the emotional aspect of it—the fact that Jesus in some way and for some reason was ***“forsaken”*** by God. As you might imagine, the word ***“forsaken”*** refers to being abandoned, to losing someone’s friendship, protection, or support. It refers to separation by choice.

As we have, perhaps some of you have also had the experience of taking one of your kids to the hospital—maybe for stitches, or maybe for some other kind of medical procedure, and you know that it needs to be done, you know it is necessary, but in the middle of it, our kids are crying out for us. I remember taking our daughter to UW Hospital in the middle of the night when she was only 6 weeks old. The student doctors were so eager to learn—they were almost fighting over the chance to give our little girl a spinal tap—raising their hands, ***“Let me do it! Let me do it!”*** They were jockeying for the opportunity to hold her down. And everything in me as a father wanted to hurt those people, to protect my little girl from what they wanted to do. And so perhaps technically we have all ***“forsaken”*** our children in those moments, and everything inside us wants to save them from the needle (or whatever it is), but we allow the ***“bad”*** thing to happen, knowing that it is for the greater good, knowing that it is part of a larger plan. Now, I realize this is not a perfect illustration, but perhaps in some way it allows us just a brief opening into a small part of what God the Father was allowing His Son to endure on the cross.

I say this because the Lord was bearing the sins of the world. He was the sacrificial Lamb. And we know how God looks at sin. We know that God hates sin, that God cannot stand to be near sin. You may remember what happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned in **Genesis 3**. God dealt with that sin by driving

them out of the Garden. We think about what happened in **Genesis 6** as God saw sin all over the face of the earth and so He saved Noah from that situation and flooded the entire world to destroy the sinful influence. And then, once the Law of Moses came on the scene, we realize that God established a system of sacrifices, and then we realize that the Jewish people had been sacrificing perfect little lambs for 1500 years to prepare them to be able to understand what was happening here with Jesus on the cross. As Paul would go on to explain in **Galatians 3:24**, “...*the Law [of Moses] has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.*”

Because He was the perfect sacrifice, like a perfect Lamb, Jesus was taking on the sins of the people. Jesus was our substitute on the cross. As Paul explained it in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, “[God the Father] *made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” Or, as Peter explained in **1 Peter 2:24**, “...*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*” It all goes back to our Scripture reading several weeks ago from **Isaiah 53:4-6**, a prophecy from more than 700 years before the time of Christ, “*Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*” My understanding of all of this is that as Jesus carried the sins of the world, God the Father had to at least briefly look away. There was a separation so that the crushing weight of sin would be carried by Jesus alone, without the comfort and aid of His Father in Heaven. And so God the Father had to look away in order to let the sacrifice take place. He allowed it to happen so that our sins could be covered by the blood of Jesus—as Paul said, “...*so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*”

At this point, we start to see how terrible sin really is. Every sin ever committed fell on the Lord as that perfect sacrifice. Every lie ever told, all pride, all selfishness, all of the lust that has ever been committed, every murder, every act of adultery, all of the materialism, every act of hatred and racism, all of the drunkenness and drug abuse, every sinful thought, every cutting remark, all the times that wicked parents abused their children, all of the times when children disobeyed their parents, all of the rebellions and unjust wars that have ever taken place, every act of genocide, the massacres of innocent people, every abortion, every act of violence that the strong have carried out against the weak, all of the gossip and slander—it all fell on Jesus as He was hanging there on the cross. The Lord took on every sin, He accepted and absorbed the wrath of God (almost like a lightning rod)—He took it all on so that we would have the chance of avoiding God’s wrath ourselves. He took our place. He died *for us*. And under the crushing weight of every sin ever committed, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.*”

That statement reminds us of how serious sin really is. It reminds us of the high cost of sin. In spite of the fact that sin is acceptable and no big deal to many people in the world around us, sin is truly serious and brought about the death of Jesus on the cross. Now, with this knowledge, we can ignore how bad sin really is (we can try to overlook it), or we can do something about it. I am reminded of a desert nomad who woke up hungry in the middle of the night, so he lit a candle and started eating figs from the bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one and found a worm in it, so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into a second and found another worm, so he threw that one out also. Worried that he wouldn't have enough figs if he continued, he blew out the candle and quickly ate the rest. You see, there are some people who prefer not to know how bad sin is, but now that we know, we do need to deal with it. Those who are not yet Christians need to obey the good news, and those of us who are Christians need to keep on turning away from sin—knowing that our sin caused Jesus to be forsaken by the Father. This, I believe, is the most important lesson we can learn from this, the fourth statement of Jesus from the cross.

## **II. There is another valuable truth we can learn, though, and it comes in the form of a reminder that GOD IS LOVE.**

And by “**God**,” I am referring to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in every possible way, God is love. And specifically, the love of God was demonstrated through the cross. In His own words, Jesus himself knew why He was here, and He expressed it clearly in **Matthew 20:28** where He said that, ***“...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*** In other words, Jesus knew that His mission in life was to give His life as a ransom, to purchase our freedom from sin.

In full agreement with each part of the Godhead, Jesus was willing to go to the cross for us. Jesus, at least for a brief moment, gave up His eternal and intimate relationship with His Father so that we could be born into God's family. He did it for us. As Paul said in **Romans 5:6-10**, ***“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”*** The amazing love of God! Or, as Jesus Himself said in **John 15:13-14**, ***“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.”*** And so we are reminded this morning of what God did for us, that He loves us enough to send His own Son to die in our place as a sacrifice for our sins.

**III. Before we close, there is at least one more lesson for us to consider, and that is: This fourth statement from the cross gives us AN EXAMPLE FOR HOW TO DEAL WITH SUFFERING AND REJECTION IN OUR OWN LIVES.**

Here we have God the Son in some way forsaken by God the Father, and what does God the Son do? He quotes Scripture as He goes to His Father in prayer! He cries out, ***“My God, My God!”*** He turns His attention to the Father and opens His heart in prayer! He does not lash out at the soldiers or the people, but He cries out to God. We now understand what Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:21-23**, ***“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”***

When we feel lonely or abandoned, Jesus understands. He knows what we are going through. In the words of **Hebrews 4:15-16**, ***“...we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** In other words, Jesus knows what we are going through, and for that reason, no matter what happens, we can approach the throne of God with confidence. Even when we are confused and do not understand what we are going through, we can take it to God. Crying out to God is not a sin. Asking God ***“Why?”*** is not a sin. Jesus asked, ***“Why?”*** It is okay to feel abandoned from time to time, but when we do, let us take that concern to God.

I am reminded of a young Jewish girl who lived in the Warsaw ghetto during World War II. She hid from the Nazis in a cave, and as she hid, this is what she wrote on the wall of that cave, ***“I believe in the sun even though it is not shining. I believe in love even when feeling it or not. I believe in God even when He is silent.”*** And perhaps in a similar way, even when left alone for that brief moment, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”***

**Conclusion:**

Most of us have probably heard of the Mennonite family who were among the 11 killed this past Friday in an accident in Kentucky. In the aftermath of that horrific crash, a member of their home congregation made an interesting statement. This comes from Kai Steinmann, 25 years old, she said, ***“It’s a little like a tapestry. If you focus on one piece, it looks black and bad, but it has to be a part of a bigger whole.”*** In a similar way, this morning we have focused in on what is perhaps the worst and most horrific part of the crucifixion—this moment when Jesus took on the sins of the world, and this moment when the Lord quoted from **Psalms 22:1**. I know in our Scripture reading this morning, we looked at several verses from

**Psalm 22**, but as we end, I would invite you to turn with us as we consider the last few verses of **Psalm 22**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 875**. The Psalm began with a statement of despair (as brother Michael read it in our Scripture reading this morning), but let us please now consider how it ends—**Psalm 22** (picking up where brother Michael left off), starting in **verse 22**...

- 22 I will tell of Your name to my brethren;  
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.*
- 23 You who fear the LORD, praise Him;  
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,  
And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.*
- 24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;  
Nor has He hidden His face from him;  
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.*
- 25 From You comes my praise in the great assembly;  
I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.*
- 26 The afflicted will eat and be satisfied;  
Those who seek Him will praise the LORD.  
Let your heart live forever!*
- 27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,  
And all the families of the nations will worship before You.*
- 28 For the kingdom is the LORD'S And He rules over the nations.*
- 29 All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship,  
All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him,  
Even he who cannot keep his soul alive.*
- 30 Posterity will serve Him;  
It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation.*
- 31 They will come and will declare His righteousness  
To a people who will be born, that He has performed it.*

And so, as we can see, that question about being forsaken might have been how David started his prayer, but it was not how King David ended his prayer, and as we will see over the next few weeks, that is not how Jesus ended His prayer, either. The rest of the story is that Jesus was not abandoned on the cross, but it is truly an amazing story (as King David said in **verse 27**) that, ***“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before [Him].”*** If everything goes as planned, James will be preaching for us next Sunday, but then in two weeks I would like for us to start looking at the final three statements that Jesus made from the cross.

Many people today believe that everybody will be saved by the sacrifice of Christ, but that is not true at all. In fact, God has been merciful, God has demonstrated His love for us, but as individuals we need to respond to that love—we need to accept the offer of salvation on God's terms. In fact, it is possible to be lost in spite of the rescue mission that has been launched on our behalf. Perhaps you can remember what happened just a few years ago with the 11-year old boy who was lost for three days in the mountains of northeastern Utah. Apparently, the young man wandered away from a Boy Scout camp, and once rescuers were called in, the young man

remembered that his parents had told him to stay away from strangers, and so whenever he saw a rescuer, he would hide! The young man did not realize that the strangers were there to bring him home! Perhaps in a similar way, millions of people today have no idea that they are lost and have no idea about the great sacrifice that God has made to bring them home.

If you are in that category, we would invite you to come home this morning. The Bible teaches that we must turn away from sin and that we must be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you have done this but have wandered off again, we would invite you back—we would invite you to let us pray about it as a congregation. But if you are ready to accept God's offer on His terms this morning, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)