

Title: God, forsaken by God

Text: Matthew 27.45-46

Theme: The Cry of the Damned

Series: Living the Cross-Centered Life – pt.6 (chapter 8)

Prop. Stmt. The cross event reveals the love of God that wars against the legalism and condemnation and subjectivism of my own heart.

There is only one ceremony or ordinance that the church is commanded to repeat, and that is the ordinance of communion. Baptism represents our initiation into the body of Christ by the Spirit, but communion represents our need to stay near the cross. The cross is the heart of the gospel. You cannot become a follower of Christ, without coming to grips with and surrendering to the gospel. Which means, you have to wrestle with the message of and the implications of the cross event. The cross is the means by which we become followers of Christ. The cross is also the means by which we grow as followers of Christ. At the cross we are humbled to discover that we have nothing to offer for our own reward. We bring our sin to the table, and Christ brings his death and his righteousness. His death paid the penalty for our sin, which eliminates our spiritual debt and his righteousness credits our spiritual account with His merits, giving us a standing before the Father as if we had done all of things that Christ had done.

Those truths, rightfully understood and embraced are the foundation of our hope, our joy, our eternal lives. Our souls need to hear them again and again and be saturated with, and marinated in, so we are prepared to do battle with the enemies of our sanctification, namely subjectivism, legalism and condemnation.

In this series on Sunday night, that is precisely what we are attempting to do.

Read Text:

We are a nation of voyeurs. We find perverse delight in being given an inside look into the lives of people. TV shows that promise scintillating details are hardly novel. People put their honeymoons, parties, and private lives on Youtube and other sites for public viewing. Want to see the video of Brittany shaving her head or having a meltdown? People will watch it. The same thing is true about executions. Want to see Saddam hanged? Want to see fights and brutality? It's available. Violence has both a repulsive and attractive side to it. This is not new. Although the trial of Christ took place in the wee hours of the day, it did not take long for the word of his impending execution to spread through the city. People left their regular Passover traditions and schedules to see the spectacle. It was all the rage. But, even gore has a saturation point.

Mark's gospel is known as the gospel of action. His audience it seems is more Roman, people of verbs. It is interesting to note that Mark, like the other gospel writers do not provide too many details about the actual process of a crucifixion. Have you ever wondered why? Why does the Bible not say that much about death by crucifixion? It is certainly possible that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John could not conceive of a person being alive who was not aware of this incredibly horrible way to die and therefore saw no

point in providing the gory details. It is also possible that while the physical pain was intense beyond description, that the physical pain was not the worst part, at least for Christ.

We saw a glimpse of this last week in our study of Christ's pleading with the Father in the garden to take the cup of wrath from Christ. The intense agony that was experienced by Christ was not of a physical cause, although it certainly had a physical affect. He entered into a condition that he had never experienced before. He, God, was under the judgment of God. He, the innocent, was now counted as guilty. He, the pure, was now defiled, unclean, and viewed as perverse. That was the greatest sorrow of Christ, and I think the gospel writers captured that. They do not hone in on the details of a crucifixion. They only say, like Mark, "**Then they led him out to crucify him.**" (15.20b) A word, a single word to describe such a horrendous ordeal.

It was the third hour when they crucified him. (9am) At noon, darkness came over the entire land, until 3pm. Douglas Webster pointed out the irony. At midnight of his birth, the land basked in brilliant light as angels sang. At noon of his death, the sun refused to shine, and angels hid their horrified faces. No one ever died like this man, because no one lived like this man, because no one was born like this man.

Around 3pm, Christ cried out in a loud voice. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sbachthani – which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Apparently some of the Greek speaking audience misunderstood what he was saying. Christ was quoting Psalm 22.1 in the Aramaic language. Eloi, Eloi sounded like Elijah, so some assumed he was calling upon Elijah to come rescue him, since it was a common view that Elijah, the prophet would return to Israel as a forerunner to the Messiah. (Malachi 4.5) Earlier in his ministry Christ acknowledged this and pointed out that John the Baptist had fulfilled that prophecy. But, here on the cross, some thought that Christ was calling for Elijah.

Of the seven sayings by Christ on the cross that day, this is the one that has puzzled people the most. John Stott points out that there are basically 4 main ways that this cry is interpreted.

"First, some suggest that it was a cry of anger, unbelief or despair. [As if he is saying, this is so unfair, you didn't tell me that this was going to happen, you've sold me out!] Perhaps he had clung to the hope that even at the last moment the Father would send angels to rescue him, or at least that in the midst of his utter obedience to the Father's will he would continue to experience the comfort of the Father's presence. But, no, it was now clear to him that he had been abandoned, and he cried out with a heart-rendering 'why?' of dismay or defiance. His faith failed him.¹" Those who hold to this position are quick to point out that the Father did not in reality abandon Christ, had simply imagined it. We reject this explanation out of hand for it accuses Christ of the sin of unbelief.

¹ John Stott, The Cross of Christ. P.80 The material for these 4 points come from this source.

Another view holds that this was a cry of loneliness. “Jesus, it is now maintained, knew God’s promises never to fail or forsake his people. He knew the steadfastness of God’s covenant love. So, his ‘why?’ was not a complaint that God had actually forsaken him, but rather that he had allowed him to feel forsaken.” T.R. Glover wrote, “there never was an utterance that reveals more amazingly the distance between feeling and fact.” Instead of addressing God as ‘Father’, he could now call him only ‘my God’, which is indeed an affirmation of faith in his covenant faithfulness, but falls short of declaring his fatherly loving-kindness. In this case Jesus was neither mistaken, nor unbelieving, but experiencing what the saints have called the ‘dark night of the soul’, and indeed doing so deliberately out of solidarity with us. In this condition, as Thomas Crawford puts it the people of God ‘derive no conscious satisfaction from the joys of his favour and the comforts of his fellowship’. They are granted ‘no approving smile, no commending voiced, no inward manifestation of the divine favour.’

I like this view better than the first one and there is an emotional and experiential connection that we can easily make with it. But, I do not think that this is what Christ had in mind when he said this. This cry is more than a statement of what I am feeling at the moment, this is a cry of what I am truly experiencing. This cry was a reflection of reality, not just emotion.

The third view goes back to Psalm 22 and notes that Christ quoted from v.1, which means that he had to have known the entire Psalm and therefore knew that even though the Psalmist begins this Psalm by questioning God, the Psalm ends with the Psalmist making a strong declaration of hope and affirmation in the goodness and power and plan of God. Therefore, this cry was not a cry of despair, but was in reality a cry of victory. I know how the story ends. I know that it only appears that I am abandoned right now, but that this is part of your plan to rescue your people, and to set the stage for the kingdom of God on this earth.

This is an interesting view. I commend it for at least taking us back to OT and looking for the context of these words. But, I do not think that this view is valid, even though it is a bit ingenious. For one, no one who heard him would have understood that this is what he meant. They had enough difficulty as it was. Secondly, when the Psalmist (David) began the Psalm that way, it was not a cry of victory, but a cry of despair. Read the Psalm, David does not hide his anguish. Eventually, his hope and faith come back around, but he goes through some very deep waters before he gets there.

The fourth view takes these words in a very straightforward manner. What Christ cried out was an accurate reflection of reality. He was God, forsaken by God. His faith was not faltering. He was not experiencing a weakened moment of doubt. He was now forsaken, abandoned by God. Going back to last week, we saw that Christ trembled before accepting the cup of God’s wrath in the garden. He knew what that meant. But, once he accepted it, he accepted it and all that came with it. The accusations now that were made against him had a measure of truth to them. The Pharisees who jeered that he who trusted in God – so much, let’s see if God saves him now were saying that God couldn’t save him or wouldn’t save him. The truth is, God could not save him from this

death and save us from our sin. God had made the decision to save us by not sparing His Son. Christ made the decision to become sin for us, who knew no sin and to experience the wrath of God and the judgment of God for our sin.

In that sense Christ went through hell for us. Hell is a literal place of torment, but even worse than that, hell is a place of abandonment of the care of God. After Christ died, he did not go to hell in order to complete the suffering necessary for our sin. That payment was made in full and complete on the cross. But, Christ did experience that aspect of hell, in that he experienced the abandonment of the Father, (and I would suggest that of the Spirit as well). Could this be why My God is repeated? Is it more than just a statement for emphasis? This was more than just physical darkness. He was alone as no one has ever experienced aloneness on this earth. He was utterly forsaken by God. This was a torment of his soul that made the torment to his body pale in comparison.

Listen carefully to what John Calvin said. **“If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual.... Unless his soul shared in the punishment, he would have been the Redeemer of bodies alone.”** Both the Father and the Son had agreed to this. It was necessary because of how serious our sins are and how deep the Father’s love for us went in order to redeem us.

Now, hang with me for a minute, because this is important to understand. Even though Christ was God, forsaken by God, He never for a split second ceased being God, and because He has always been and forever will be God, the Trinity, never stopped being the Trinity. The Trinity stayed as the Trinity, but in the relationship that God enjoys as God, they experienced something that they had never experienced before and will never experience again. The 2nd Person of the Trinity, was under the condemnation of the Trinity. And because the Son was God, He had experienced a closeness and a unity that is unparalleled in its perfection and happiness and intensity, and security. The highest of relationships now experienced the deepest of estrangement. The brightest of unity, now experienced the darkest of abandonment. At that moment, God was damned by God.

As CJ put it, **“It is the monstrous sight of the unbounded totality of human sin resting upon one Man.”** When Christ looked into the cup in Gethsemane, this is what he saw, and this is what he wanted to avoid, but he didn’t and he died alone, abandoned and forsaken, so that you would never, ever be.

When Christ cried those words, was He looking for an answer? Was He questioning the just wrath of God that was being poured out upon His soul and body unto death? Was he confused and wondering why it had to be this way? No, Christ knew the answer to the question before he uttered it. So, why did He ask it? For one, it was an accurate reflection of the reality. But secondly, Christ was meditating on Psalm 22. He quoted the first verse because He was fulfilling the Psalm. He asked the question because that is how the Psalm is written.

The cup of wrath and the cry of the damned are eternally, all-powerful statements of the uncompromising commitment that God makes to His own. I do not always feel forgiven,

but my forgiveness is not hinged to my feelings. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.

When my own condemns me and wonders if God has not condemned me too, I go back to the cross and listen again to the cry of the cursed, and believe it again, it was for me. When legalistic voices and disapproving looks doubt my motives and sting me with sharpened accusations designed to cut my soul and bleed joy from my spirit, I look again and try to see how deep the Father's love is, how vast beyond all measure, and realize that I can't see that far down, and realize again – it is enough.

It was enough. The Father was satisfied and on the third day, He proved it to the entire world.

1. Sin is Serious

Sin demanded the highest price and Jesus paid the highest price because there is nothing more serious than sin. What is worse, sin or Satan? Sin! Do not wink at sin. Do not get used to it, coddle it, nor excuse it. Cry out to God for a heart that longs for purity. Greater love for God comes with a greater hatred of sin.

2. God's Wrath against sin is Serious

God's wrath against sin is truly full of awe. From the garden, to the trial, to the cross, to His death, Christ endured the boiling cauldron of the wrath of God. But, because Christ offered up a perfect life as the propitiation, the wrath of the Father was appeased. There was an end to his suffering. There was an end to his sacrifice. There was an end to the estrangement, and abandonment. But, that is the only way the Father's wrath against sin is appeased. God's wrath is not an unstable, unpredictable, moody and complicated element that gives us reason for pause and hesitation because we are unsure of how is going to react at any given moment. Not at all! God is very, very clear and upfront with who He is. His wrath is a settled disposition, and an uncompromising, unflinching response of His righteousness to the defaming of His honor and the integrity and reputation of His Son.

Consider this sobering truth. For those who reject this gracious and overwhelmingly merciful and loving God, they are left to face their Judge and Maker with no defense and no advocate. The sentence of their judgment is eternal. And while we may think of the horrors of hell in a physical way, I believe that like the cross, the even greater part of the picture is the suffering upon the soul, as the realization settles in, there is no escape, and there is no hope. We are all aware of the stories of people who without hope and with great guilt, or great pain took their own life. They viewed suicide as their only way out. There is no suicide in hell.

That is so difficult for us to grasp since we tend to start with man as the reference point instead of the holiness of God.

3. **God's Love is Serious.**

God does not hide from us the fact that He is holy and righteous and therefore, his judgments are just. God does not cover the fact that He is Sovereign, Eternal, and Mighty in Strength, Character and Deed. God repeatedly makes us aware that His holiness will not be defamed. But, while all of this is true, God loves to be known, worshiped, adored, magnified as the God of grace. God will act as Judge, but He absolutely loves to act as Savior.

What a Savior!