

Forsaken, For Us
Good Friday Meditation
April 2, 2010

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? These are the last words from Jesus that Mark records for us. As a prelude to the words, and as an omen of the depths of despair into which Jesus had fallen, we are told that there was a three hour period of darkness over all the land. Darkness shrouded the land, even as Jesus experienced the darkest moment of his soul.

The creation was cast in darkness, even as its Creator passed into the darkest depths.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Truly, there are no words to describe what Jesus experienced. We can try, but all our attempts will ultimately fall short.

Agony.

Anguish.

Abandonment.

Desolation.

Despair.

Heartbreak.

Betrayal.

Powerful words. Words that give us a hint of what Jesus experienced on the cross. But still, I think they are words that fail to capture the full essence of what Jesus experienced.

Whatever it was, it was something awful, something dreadful.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The words themselves are not original to Jesus. He is quoting Psalm 22, a psalm that was quickly seen to be not merely a psalm of David, but truly a psalm of the cross.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer.”

They are words that capture what is perhaps the greatest fear of people who love God – the thought that the God they love and in whom they trust would one day forget them, abandon them, turn his back to them in their time of greatest need.

“Cast me not away from your presence, O Lord, nor take your Holy Spirit from me.”

Of all the things that the people of God could possibly suffer, nothing was as dreadful as the thought of losing God, of seeing God turn his back on his people.

And that is precisely the experience of Jesus on the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The cup which the night before Jesus had asked to be taken from him – Jesus was on the cross drinking fully from that same cup.

And he was left utterly alone as he drank from the cup.

All his life, Jesus had walked in the presence of God, faithfully abiding in God; all his life, Jesus had experienced the fellowship of the living God. On the cross, there was a time when Jesus cries to the heavens, and his cries were not heard, for his Father had withdrawn from his presence.

At that moment, God was there for Jesus no more. God had turned his back on Jesus, walked away from Jesus. Physical death would have been merciful at that moment.

The cross is the culmination of Jesus' ministry. That's what today is all about. On more than one occasion Jesus said that he must be handed over and must suffer many things and must be killed. When he entered Jerusalem just a few days prior, Jesus knew that it wasn't so that he could be hailed as King; he knew that the real reason for his entry was to draw one step closer to the cross.

The cross is the culmination of Jesus' ministry. It is why Jesus came.

The irony of today's observance is that the very same God-forsakenness that made Jesus cry out this word from the cross is the exact purpose toward which Jesus had so steadfastly walked. Think about it for a minute: Jesus had lived for this moment in which he experienced the utter abandonment of his Father. The cross, which was the cause of his suffering and abandonment, was also the reason – it was the answer to the *Why? Why have you forsaken me?*

Why did God abandon Jesus? Why did God forsake his only-begotten Son? For me, one of the most revealing verses in the New Testament gives an answer that says that God abandoned Jesus both *because of us*, and *for us*. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that God made Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

On the cross, Jesus was the lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of the world. On the cross, the One who was without sin had the sins of the world placed upon him. Not only were our sins placed upon him, but the scripture says that Jesus *was sin*; at that moment, Jesus, who himself was sinless, became the essence of sin as he hung on the cross. That is an incredible thought.

And it is one of the more simple and straightforward teachings of scripture that God cannot be in the presence of sin. When on the cross Jesus intersected with the sin of the world, God withdrew.

Why have you forsaken me?

I can think of few thoughts more sobering than that you and I are the reason that Jesus passed through that darkest hour – you, and I, and all of humanity with us. It was our sin that made God forsake his Son.

Jesus went through the agony of the cross *because of us*.

But he also went through the agony of the cross *for us*. *For our sake*. That's the second half of the scripture from 2 Corinthians: God made Christ, who had no sin to be sin *for us*, that in Christ *we* might become the righteousness of God.

Christ suffered the agony of the cross so we wouldn't have to. He took the place on the cross that was rightly reserved for us. Christ drank from the cup of abandonment by God so that we would never have to drink from that cup.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As we survey the wondrous cross, let us remember that God forsook Jesus because of us, because of our sinfulness.

But let us also remember that God forsook Jesus because God loves us with a love too strong to let us go. God withdrew from Jesus so that he wouldn't have to withdraw from us.

It is God's separation from Jesus that draws us near to him.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...

Thank you, God, for the agony of Jesus. Amen.