

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46
Good Friday 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's "Unhappy Hour" at the "Why Me?" Bar and Grill. Two young men can be heard sharing their troubles — commiserating — at the end of the bar. They both, it turns out, have the same complaint, but their situations really could not be more different.

The first man is complaining about how his parents have cut him off. Not only will they not send him money, but they aren't even interested in talking to him. He says he feels abandoned, and says, "Hey, your parents are supposed to love and accept you no matter what, right? Why have they left me alone like this? It's not fair! Why are they treating me this way? I don't get it!" But his parents' behavior is not as much of a mystery as he makes it out to be. You see, the last time he was home, he took and sold his mother's jewelry, stole his father's car, and topped it all off with a note saying, "I'm just taking what I'm owed. I hate you, and want nothing more to do with you, ever."

Now, the other young man says his parents have cut him off, too. No contact or communication of any kind — no comfort, no support, no love. They won't even answer his calls. And he, too, asks why he's being treated so unfairly — "Why have they left me alone? Why are they treating me this way?" But in his case, there is no easy explanation, because he was always the perfect son. He always did the right things, always showed them love and respect, and did whatever pleased them. He only left home because they sent him away, and now he's all alone. He doesn't understand it. It's not like them to treat anyone this way, and it's not fair. And so he asks, "Why me?"

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46 Good Friday 2024

As he hung on the cross, suffering and dying, Jesus was like one of these two young men. Guess which one. OK, I know it's not too hard to figure that out, but the contrast is helpful — it's helpful to understand that when Jesus asked, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" his question was completely unlike any "Why me?" any other person has ever asked at any time before. Oh, sure, sometimes we have pretty good reasons for asking God "why?" — it's not always our fault, and it's not always "fair" — you know, "Why did I have this accident? Why did I get laid off? Why did my girlfriend leave me? Why did my spouse have to die?" Still, if we think about it, we recognize that there is always some kind of reason for all the unhappy and unfair things that happen in our lives.

But humanly speaking, there was no good reason for Jesus to be suffering and asking "Why?" Because he had done everything right. He deserved nothing but the best from his Father, and yet here on the cross he was getting the worst. He had been abandoned. Cut off. Left alone. Left to suffer. Left to die. Forsaken.

And you have to admit: that doesn't make much sense to us. It's a hard truth to wrap our minds around — that God the Father would, or could, leave God the Son alone. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is an amazing question.

In the first place you might say it's amazing that Jesus would be asking God any question — I mean, Jesus, as God, would know what God knows, right? But here Jesus was speaking from his human nature and in his state of humiliation, in which he voluntarily set aside his divine powers and privileges, and so there were things hidden from his sight and comfort that was withheld from his heart.

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46 Good Friday 2024

But Jesus' "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is even more amazing because of what his asking it signified. You see, it meant that he really was abandoned. Not just that he felt like he was all alone in the world — he really was. And he wasn't just borrowing a verse from Psalm 22 that seemed to sum up what he was going through — no, Psalm 22 was the perfect summary of what he was going through because it, like our reading from Isaiah 53, was a perfect prophecy of what was actually happening to Jesus on the cross.

And so, with his question, Jesus reveals exactly what he was enduring as he hung there in the dark. He was suffering separation from God. He had been forsaken by his heavenly Father, and that abandonment is the essence of the punishment of hell. You know many people, in the midst of their sufferings, big or small, have said, "I'm going through hell right now." But when Jesus said this, he really was.

Which leads us back again to the question: Why? Why would a loving and perfect Father forsake his loving and perfect Son? Why would he put him through all the torments of hell? You know what? The answer is even more amazing than the question.

The web site howstuffworks.com has an interesting explanation of how and why lightning strikes. As storms build, an electrical charge is built up in the clouds, with a strong negative charge forming at their bottom. Those clouds in turn create an opposite, positive charge on the ground immediately beneath them. The charges build up, and the situation can't continue indefinitely — the system's out of balance — eventually something's got to give — the tremendous force that's built up needs to be discharged.

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46
Good Friday 2024

But we know that all that energy isn't simultaneously passed to or through every molecule that has picked up a charge — instead we see it focused and discharged at just one particular point, most often whatever stands out most and stands tallest from the ground. And that's lightning — ZAP! — a tremendous burst of electric current passing from the cloud to the ground that creates a heat actually hotter than the sun and actually makes the air explode. You don't want to be on the receiving end of a stroke of lightning. But after it strikes, the tension between the clouds and the ground is removed — they are no longer electric opposites.

Now that is actually a pretty good picture of what was going on with Jesus on the cross. You see, there were storm clouds above us. A tremendous tension existed between heaven above and earth below, because all mankind was charged with sin, and grew in opposition to God's positive and perfect holiness — and the situation could not continue indefinitely. Eventually something had to give, because God's wrath over our disobedience and unbelief would not be held back forever. It would either burn against each and every sinner individually, or ...

Or God could focus and discharge the horrific energy of his anger over sin at one particular point — at the point, at the man who stood tallest and stood out from all other men — so that after justice struck him down, the tension between heaven and earth would be gone — God and man would be reconciled, at peace, atoned.

And that's the amazing thing that God planned, and accomplished when he abandoned Christ on the cross. God loves all people, and he did not want to discharge his wrath on any of

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46
Good Friday 2024

them. God desires the death and punishment of no one. But justice demanded that a price be paid for each and every sin of each and every man, woman, and child. Someone would have to die, because death is the wages of sin. And someone would have to suffer hell, because hell is the eternal consequence of sin.

Who would that someone be? God, in his love, determined that it would be his own Son — because he was the only One who could do what needed to be done. Jesus was raised up tall on a cross and drew to himself the charge of all the world's sins. And then the full force of God's wrath exploded upon him, as all of the Father's righteous anger focused in on that one person, at that one place, at that one point in time. He was stricken for us and in our place — as a spiritual lightning rod, as an atoning sacrifice, as the innocent but willing Lamb of God Isaiah described. He suffered so we wouldn't have to. He died so we sinners wouldn't spend eternity in hell.

That is why the Father left his Son all alone there on that cross — because it was the only way to save the world. God's justice demanded that our sins be punished, but God's love sent Jesus to be punished in our place. Jesus was forsaken so that we never would be. God gave his Son so that all of us might be his children.

Yes — his children, because God has promised that whoever puts their trust in Christ and what he did for their salvation will enjoy, forever, what he sacrificed everything to give us: the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life with him in heaven, and a new life here and now as his child. Nothing and no one can ever undo the reconciliation that Jesus brought about between us and our Lord — as the Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Romans, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46
Good Friday 2024

else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39).

And so, considering what Jesus did for us when he stretched out his arms on the cross, and with God-given faith in him, we can come, and confess our guilt and bring our sins to Jesus. We lay them on that spotless Lamb of God who bears them all and takes all the blows that we deserve — and then they're gone. They're paid for, washed away, forgiven. Satan can't take our sins and use them to accuse or torment us any longer. Death no longer has any hold over us because the sting of death is sin and Christ has removed our sin forever.

So you can take those angry words you spoke to your kids and the shameful things you said to your parents to the foot of the cross and leave them there — because Jesus already paid for those sins. You can place the guilt you're carrying from that embezzlement, abortion, or affair on the altar of the cross, because you know that Christ's sacrifice covered it all. You can take all those hours that you stole from your employer with computer games, long lunches, or shoddy work and trust that Jesus' blood is sufficient to wash all those sins away. That is why Jesus came. That is why God abandoned him on the cross. To take away your sins, and make you his own dear child. God loves you, and wants you with him, and there is no greater evidence of his love than the cross of Christ.

So praise God, praise God, for why Jesus was forsaken. We are saved. We were the reason why. Thank him today, and thank him always. Amen.