

The Fourth Word From The Cross.

Text: Matt 27:45-46

Suggested Hymns:

82 pt. 4, 326, 59, 70, 78

1) Christ Was Forsaken, Abandoned,
And Deserted By God

2) Why? What Was The Reason?

3) What Are The Lessons?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 27:45-46, ⁴⁵ *Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.* ⁴⁶ *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

For three hours the Saviour had been suspended on the cross. It is now midday. The sun stands in its zenith, when, the Sacred Record tells us, suddenly and mysteriously, without the least hint of its approach, a veil of thickest darkness, intense gloom, like a funeral pall, begins to spread over the Holy City and on the hill outside its gates.

It was not the darkness of night, for it began at twelve o'clock, at noon. It was not the darkness of an eclipse, for it was the season of full moon, and it is only at the time of the new moon that an eclipse of the sun can take place. It was not a darkness for which we can find any astronomical reason.

Nor does it seem to have been a mere local darkness, but one that was observed in far-off lands. Some say that notes of it are to be found in the chronicles of the Chinese and that, when it reached Egypt, the astronomer Dionysius exclaimed: *"Either the gods are suffering, or the mechanism of the world is tumbling into ruin."*

The early Church Fathers boldly appealed to the Roman archives for this remarkable phenomenon at the time of the Saviour's death as a well-attested fact. Imagine, to impress it upon your minds, that weird, ominous darkness creeping

slowly over the distant horizon, as coming up, closer and ever closer, deeper and ever deeper, striking dismay and haunting consternation into every heart.

Nor did it instantly pass away like a storm that heralds the approaching rain; no, it lasted for three formidable hours.

We read of the darkness that fell upon Egypt at the time of God's visitation upon Pharaoh in Exodus 10:22–23, ²² *So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days.* ²³ *They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days.* No song of birds, no hum of insects, no noise of machinery, no voice of man, but terrified silence.

We may suppose that the effect was the same over the scene of crucifixion. No voice is heard, no laugh, no sneering taunt: *Come down from the cross.* Horror and fear had tamed into stillness every scoffing tongue. Such was the circumstance.

Then from out of that darkness there issues a voice; and oh, how mysterious, soul-harassing it sounds as it rends the awful stillness! *“Eli,”* it says, *“Eli, lama sabachthani?”*

The evangelist informs us that ⁴⁷ *Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, “This Man is calling for Elijah!”*¹ It may have been that they misunderstood the words, since in the original tongue the word *“Eli”* is quite similar to *“Elia,”* the name of Elijah, and under the influence of superstitious fear, aroused by the strange occurrence, they were moved to believe that the Sufferer was calling Elijah to come and relieve Him.

⁴⁸ *Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink,* while ⁴⁹ *The rest said, “Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.”* But not for Elijah, as mistakenly these men supposed, had the divine Sufferer called. *“Eli,”* He had said, *“Eli, lama sabachthani?”* that is, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

That brings us to the contemplation of these words, the most appalling words that have ever pierced the atmosphere of this earth. In the entire Bible there is

none other more difficult to explain, just as no mortal mind is ever able to fully grasp, to fathom, or to understand them.

The early Church Fathers wanted to pass them over, not venturing to pry into their sacred depths, and of the great Reformer Luther it is related that he, when in his Passion meditations he came to this fourth cry, he abstained for a long time from food, sleep scarcely came upon his eyelids, silent, wrapped in deepest study, he sat in his chair, and when he finally emerged from his reflections, he exclaimed in amazement, *“God forsaken of God. Who can understand it?”*

It is truly too deep for the dive of our little minds of ours to sink into. And yet, it has been recorded in the Bible for our instruction, admonition, and comfort.

What, we would ask, was the meaning of these words? Let us consider this fourth Word from the Cross. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Christ Was Forsaken, Abandoned, And Deserted By God

The first question is, “Was Christ forsaken by God? Is any person ever forsaken by God? Does not Christ say so? Yes, that is the unfathomable mystery.

What unutterable anguish, indescribable woe, horror, yes, the most horrible sensation! But that is what our Lord experienced during those three hours of darkness, which, as it were, screened the Son of God in the deepest depths of His agony.

As God withheld the light of the sun from the sky, so He withdrew from that Man nailed to the cross, the spiritual light of His divine presence. It caused Jesus to know and feel, to realise and experience, the horrors, anguish, and woe which a person would feel who is forsaken by God.

That is the fact, proclaimed by Christ Himself. So reads the cry. And it is not for anyone to modify, pare down, fritter, or explain away what this cry of anguish of the crucified Saviour tells in plain, unmistakable language. He says *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

2. Why? What Was The Reason?

And note that Christ does not only proclaim the fact that He was forsaken by God, but He asks for the solution. He inquires, *“Why?”*

And that “*with a loud voice*,” as if to indicate to those who heard it and to us all who hear of it, that there was an important reason for it, a reason for which it is necessary for us to seek the answer.

And is there an answer? The Bible lays it down as the first and fundamental principle that God never forsakes anyone but for one cause only. And what is that cause? Let us learn and always remember that that cause is sin. The Bible’s clear and positive statement is written in Isaiah 59:2, ² *But your iniquities have separated you from your God.*

And what is true of our human race is true of God’s only beloved Son. That Son had taken the place of the sinner. That was His representative position on that cross. Jesus hung there as man’s Substitute. The apostle says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God *made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us*. And so it was sin that made God hide His face from Him. Not as if He had any sin of His own; that the Bible emphatically denies.

But Jesus changed places with the real, actual sinful party, so that what that party — man — had done against a holy and righteous God, done throughout all generations and ages, that ocean of guilt, that world of crime, that enormous, mountainous accumulation of iniquity which mankind had done is that which rested upon the soul of the lone Sufferer on Golgotha.

And so, no wonder that, when all the curse of God because of man’s sin exhausted itself upon Jesus, when the vials of God’s wrath, and righteous judgement were poured out upon His thorn-crowned head, when the light and favour and comfort of God’s presence and love were shut out, when He realised the horrors of abandonment, of God-forsakenness, by reason of the punishment for all the world’s sins, that, steeped in the pangs of hell, He cried out in such anguish of soul.

Only in this way can we explain to some extent those mysterious words of Jesus, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” namely, that as our Substitute, Jesus there bore the curse of our sins for us.

3. What Are The Lessons?

First, the great Passion lesson. What is that? That our sins have been fully atoned for by Jesus suffering on the cross, that, since He was thus forsaken, we

shall not be forsaken; that the horrors of desertion which came upon Him by reason of sin shall not come upon us.

Let us grasp that, bring it home to ourselves in personal application. The Lamb of God, there taking away the sins of the world, has once and for all borne for us the curse of sin, so that it need not be borne again by us.

We learn in Romans 8:1 that ¹ *There is therefore now* [by reason of Christ's suffering on the Cross] *no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.* When your conscience accuses you, when the devil wants to make you believe that you are forsaken by God because of your sins, then go in spirit to the cross and hear that cry: *"My God, My God, why have Youe forsaken Me?"* by the sinner's Substitute.

That cry expresses in a nutshell, in a few divine words, what we confess in our Catechism: *"He,"* who uttered these words, *"has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil,"* by His forsakenness on the cross. Yes, the very heart of Christianity, the substance and marrow of our Christian religion, are in that cry — justification, and salvation.

And as it gives us precious comfort against our sins, so also in our sorrows. Who with somewhat of life's experience has not felt something of the sense of abandonment? When wave upon wave of adversity, like in the case of poor Job, trouble and affliction of all sorts, disappointments, wrongs, bereavements, roll over us; when the days are filled with sadness and the nights with gloom, and no ray of light seems to penetrate the skies, our weary spirit is disposed to cry out, *"Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He shut out His loving-kindness from us?"*

In such moments let us think of that great Sufferer and His cry. We may say that all the millions of 'whys' which have arisen from agonised souls were concentrated in that one 'why' uttered when the thick darkness of enveloping nature told of the thick darkness of perplexity which shrouded His soul.

What a comfort to us that Jesus who is always touched with a feeling of our infirmities, passed through that sense of being forsaken by God! He knows as we indeed shall never know what it means to utter such whys of grief and perplexity; yes, He mercifully sustains us at such times.

“Take,” said Dr. Luther to a man who one day complained to him that he could not bear his burden any longer because it was becoming too heavy for him, “take that,” remarked the great Reformer, as he handed him the crucifix; “*here is your comfort and cheer.*”

May we indelibly impress it upon our minds, the words of the hymnist,²

When the woes of life o’ertake me,
Hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me;
Lo, it glows with peace and joy.

Holding to that, the dark mysteries and problems of life will ultimately be cleared up, and the sense of God’s wisdom and love will be revived, and the conviction will grow upon us more and more that, mysterious as God’s dealings with us are at times, they all ultimately tend to our good, and while passing through them, we shall be uplifted by the confidence that God, for Jesus’ sake, never does and “*never will forsake in need, the soul that trusts in Him indeed.*”³

Second, we have an important lesson which teaches us about the great evil of sin! The Hymnist wrote,⁴

Ye who think of sin but lightly,
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.

Our views of sin, it is to be feared, are very imperfect. That is the cause of that superficial religion of which there is so much among us. We think but lightly of sin, and that God is too merciful to punish us.

It is distressing to observe what blinding cobwebs people are weaving around their conscience, deceiving themselves. Do they truthfully want to learn what sin is? To such a person we say, “*Come with us. Gaze upon that Golgotha scene. Hear that bitter cry wrung from Jesus, that great lamentation as it sounds in our ears; and then you think that the holy and just God, who laid down His laws and commandments for us, is going to show greater forbearance to you and to me, than to Jesus on the cross?*”

If those things were done in a green tree, what can the dry tree expect? If God spared not His only Son when He was found in the sinners' place, who dare hope that we ourselves will be spared?

May God, through His Holy Spirit, work in us a true realisation of the deadline, the damning and damnable heinousness, of that abominable thing which God hates that we may truly repent of our sins and avoid it as a poisonous serpent!

The hymnist wrote,⁵

Grant that I Thy passion view
With repentant grieving,
Nor Thee crucify anew
By unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun
Every sinful pleasure,
Since for me God's only Son
Suffered without measure.

Let us conclude and review what we have heard. Jesus' wretched experience on the cross, with all its shame, agony, and abandonment; passing through those three hours of dread and profound darkness, the screen, as it were, behind which He suffered such horrors of spirit and soul, yet enduring it all for our sakes and for our salvation - can we withhold the exclamation: *What a sublime Saviour is ours!*

In return, let the heartfelt resolve be ours:⁶

Thanks from my heart I offer,
O Jesus, dearest friend,
For all that Thou didst suffer,
Thy pity without end.
O grant that I may ever
To Thy truth faithful be;
When soul and body sever
May I be found in Thee. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 27:47

² Hymn 171 v 2

³ Hymn 407

⁴ Hymn 70 v 3

⁵ Hymn 59 v 4

⁶ Hymn 52 v 6