

## A Question of Suffering

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Matthew 27:35-46 (text v. 46—“*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*”)

Jesus asked approximately 295 questions recorded in the Bible. Of all the questions Jesus asked, this question is the most difficult. Unlike all the other questions Jesus asked of people, this is the only question Jesus asked of God.

It is a question Jesus asked, but God did not answer. And, who am I, a mere finite man, to presume to understand the answer of Jesus’ question. I can understand why David asked in Psalm 22, “*My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me?*” But I fail to grasp all Jesus meant when He cried out, “*My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me?*”

Martin Luther once sat in his study considering this text. After several hours of thinking on Christ’s question, Luther finally rose from his chair and said, “God forsaking God! No man can understand that?” And then turned his attention elsewhere.

Jesus uttered seven things from the cross. The question of our text is the fourth statement He made. It is **the CENTRAL saying** and the **most mysterious** of the seven.

### IA T ASKING

#### A. The LANGUAGE. (Spoken in Aramaic)

1. Jesus did NOT use the term of endearment “*Father*” as He did in His first prayer (Luke 23:34—“*FATHER, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*”), or in His last prayer (Luke 23:46—“*FATHER, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*”). In this instance He does NOT say “*Father,*” BUT “*My God.*”
  - ➡ Somewhere between His first prayer and last prayer from the cross, that Father/Son relationship was temporarily broken.
2. Jesus’ relationship with Father is both 100% as God and 100% man. Here Jesus was speaking to God as a man! This was not the question of Jesus as the Son of God. This was the question of “*the MAN Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5).

- B. The LAMENTATION — “*WHY?*” — No answer! Silence.
1. This was the question that tormented Job—“*Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?*” (Job 13:24). Job felt God abandoned him and he did not know why.
  2. How often has someone prayed: “God, I’ve been living for you. I pray... I read my Bible... I go to church... I tithe... I’ve tried to be a good witness. WHY, am I going through this trial? WHY did I lose my job? WHY has my wife/husband left me? WHY am I so sick? WHY did my child die? WHY does it feel like You have deserted me when I need You the most?”

## **IIA T AGON**

- Jesus hung on the cross from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. During the first 3 hours, Jesus said three things: :
1. “*Father forgive them...*” — A word of PARDON.
  2. “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*” A word of PROMISE.
  3. “*Woman, behold your son... behold your mother...*” A word of PROVISION.
  4. Now, at noon Jesus cries, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” A word of PAIN.
- A. Pain is part of the human experience—Emotional pain... Physical pain... Everyone endures suffering to a certain degree.
1. Jesus experienced the emotional pain of... being betrayed... being abandoned... being homeless... being humiliated... being hungry and thirsty... being lied about and falsely accused.
  2. He endured the excruciating physical pain of crucifixion (the word “excruciating” comes from the same root word as “crucifixion”). Nailed to the cross, hanging there under the blazing sun for three hours... Dehydrated.
- B. Jesus could have suffered the physical pain of crucifixion without a whimper. Thousands of people had been crucified before Him. But, for the Holy Son of God “*to be MADE SIN,*” and forsaken by God! That was the worse pain of all—the pain of being out of fellowship with His Father for the first time in all eternity!

➡ Tim Keller writes in *Leadership*—<sup>1</sup>

Unless we come to grips with the terrible doctrine of hell, we will never even begin to understand the depths of what Jesus did for us on the cross. His body was being destroyed in the worst possible way, but that was a flea bite compared to what was happening to His soul. When He cried out that His God had forsaken Him, He was experiencing hell itself.

If an acquaintance denounces you and rejects you—that hurts. If a good friend does the same—that hurts far worse. However, if your spouse walks out on you, saying, “I never want to see you again,” that is far more devastating still. The longer, deeper, and more intimate the relationship, the more torturous is any separation.

But the Son’s relationship with the Father was beginningless and infinitely greater than the most intimate and passionate human relationship. When Jesus [felt] cut off from God, He went into the deepest pit and most powerful furnace, beyond all imagining. And He did it voluntarily, for us.

### IIIA T ALONENESS

- A. The DARKNESS—The question came after three hours of utter darkness—A supernatural darkness.

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Not a solar eclipse. Luke 23:44—“...*there was a darkness over ALL the earth until the ninth hour...*” (No eclipse lasts three hours, nor covers the entire earth.)

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1. Darkness accompanies God's judgment (Gen. 1:2; Ex. 10:21; Jude 1:6; Rev. 16:10-11). Hell is described as “***outer darkness***” (Mt. 8:12).
2. When Jesus was arrested in the garden, He said, “...*this is your hour, and the power of darkness*” (Luke 22:53). Darkness represents the presence of sin and the absence of God. They cannot co-exist— “*God is light and in him is no darkness at all.*”

➡ Darkness is a very lonely place.

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Craig Brian, *Choice contemporary stories and illustrations*, Baker Books, 1998, p. 56.

B. The DERELICTION. It is hard to understand the full implications of the word *"forsaken."* According to the etymology of the word, it means "dereliction," "separation," or "leaving entirely alone."  
**"FORSAKEN..." What a sad word.**

➡ "WHY" Christ was forsaken ...

1. Because of God's HOLINESS—
  - a) Sin separates from God. ILLUS: Before the fall, Adam enjoyed close fellowship with God, but sin broke that fellowship.
  - b) Jesus not only bore the sins of the world, He actually became *"sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* This necessitated a separation from the fellowship Jesus enjoyed with God before the cross.
  - c) As Jesus bore the sins of the world, He who is Eternal Life, was abiding in eternal death, tasting death for every man.
  - d) Death means separation. **Physical** death = Separation of the soul/spirit from the body. **Spiritual** death = separation of man from God. **Eternal** death is to be eternally separated from God in the lake of fire.
    - Sin, in its final analysis, is forsaking God (Isa. 53:6).
    - God's judgment on sin is forsaking the sinner forever in the lake of fire.
2. Because of God's LOVE for us—This is the cry of One dying IN MY PLACE! He was forsaken by God so we should never have to be forsaken! He bore our condemnation that we might not be condemned (Rom. 8:1)!

C. The DEAFNESS to the question. "WHY?" — No answer! Silence.

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This is what makes Christ's question so difficult to understand. I'm not even sure God *heard* Christ's question. Why? Because at this moment, Jesus was made sin! Psalm 66:18—*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:* Isaiah 59:1-2—*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;*

*neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that HE WILL NOT HEAR.*

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## I A T AD OCAC

- Christ's enemies taunted Him concerning His faith—*"He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him..."*
- A. That is where the devil will taunt you also—"You've trusted in God and look at the mess you're in!" Will your faith hold even in the dark hours of your life? Will your faith sustain you when you cannot understand WHY painful things are happening to you?
- B. It is easy to trust God when you are in the presence of friends and other Christians who encourage you. But, how is it when you feel God is a million miles away... When everything looks dark... When you are surrounded by enemies... and all your friends have deserted you? And you pray and get no answer? Will your faith hold on then?
1. What has been the worst pain you ever experienced in your life? As bad as physical pain can be, there is probably no greater pain than the emotional pain of losing a loved one... a marital breakup... a family member forsaking you... or being betrayed by a friend.
  2. When we go through times of severe suffering, we need to take comfort in remembering that our Lord Himself experienced the same pain we suffer (and worse).
  3. That is why Jesus is such a merciful and faithful High Priest to us. Hebrews 2:17-18 says Jesus was *made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest... in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor [help] them that are tempted.*" Therefore, He is *"touched with the feeling of our infirmities"* (Heb. 4:15).

**SUMMATION:** While I don't understand all the implications of Jesus' question, I take comfort that He asked it. I've sometimes wondered the same thing myself. Haven't you? Job did. David did—*"Why standest thou*

*afar off, O Lord? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” (Ps. 10:1). And so did others.*

- Ps. 13:1— *How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*
- Ps. 44:24— *Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?*
- Ps. 77:7-9— *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.*
- Ps. 88:14— *Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?*
- Lam. 3:8— *When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.*
- Mark 4:38— *Master, caress thou not that we perish?*

I don't need to know "why" Jesus was forsaken. Just knowing Jesus felt what it was like to be totally abandoned comforts me when I feel alone and forsaken.

Just knowing Jesus suffered being forsaken by God so that I would not be forsaken by God, gives me peace.

Jesus suffered the hell I deserved, so I would not have to suffer in Hell myself. Hallelujah!

Have you accepted His payment for your sin?