

April 22, 2011, First Baptist Church, Vancouver

So That None of Us Ever Will

Text: Psalm 22

Good Friday joint service held at First Baptist Church with
Darrell Johnson, Senior Minister, First Baptist Church and David Koop, senior pastor, Coastal Church

The most troubling word from the cross, certainly the most mysterious, is Jesus' cry "My God, my God, Why have You forsaken Me?"

Was He? Was He forsaken? As He hung on the cross on Good Friday was He forsaken?

The words come from Psalm 22 which we have been reading this morning. As David Koop has pointed out, most of what Jesus prays from the cross echoes the Psalms.

That is because in the hard times, in moments of great agony, our hearts pray what we have been trained to pray. Jesus, as a faithful Jew, grew up praying the Psalms. His mother, as a devout believer, would have taught her Son to pray by praying the "Prayer Book" of Israel.

So in those hours of incomprehensible suffering in the anguish with which none of us, however much we have suffered, can possibly identify, Jesus prays what His heart had been trained to pray. He prays the Psalms. Especially Psalm 22, which begins, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Was He? As the darkness engulfed Him, was He forsaken?

Psalm 22 is one of what are called "Psalms of Lament". Psalms of Lament are a great gift to those who suffer. They begin by naming the problematic situation: enemies, sickness, impending death, depression. They then express the agony they are expressing in the situation. They especially express their confusion – "Why?" Why God, in light of all You have revealed Yourself to be, in light of all Your promises to be our God ... to be for us Why are You letting this happen? And how long are You going to let this go on? Then through the laments of the praying, they come to a place of resolution, to a place of even deeper trust.

One of the best examples of a Psalm of Lament is Psalm 13.

¹ *How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?*

How long will you hide your face from me?

² *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

³ *Look on me and answer, LORD my God.*

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,

⁴ *and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

⁵ *But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

⁶ *I will sing the LORD's praise,
for he has been good to me.*

So Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And as the Psalm unfolds, David, and then David's greater Son, Jesus, comes to resolution and deeper trust.

As we have been reading the Psalms this morning, were you not struck by how much of Good Friday is reflected in it? You would think the psalmist had been transported into the future and wrote it watching the Good Friday events unfold. Verse 7-8 [Psalm 22, NASB]

All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him." Sounds like what Matthew tells us.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself..." [Matthew 27:41-42, NASB]

Then Matthew quotes Psalm 22, verse 8, "Let Him rescue him"

Verse 15 [Psalm 22]

*"My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;"*

Sounds like what John tells us: "Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'" [John 19:28, NASB]

Verse 16, "They pierced my hands and my feet."

Verse 18, "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

It is what the soldiers did at the cross. But the line for which Psalm 22 is most known is verse 1, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" What comfort to know that someone else cries out "Why?" What comfort to know that Jesus cries out "Why?"

We are not alone in our lament. We are not alone when in our confusion or grief we cry out "Why? Why God?" What deep, deep comfort to know that the Son of God, having become one of us, having taken on our flesh and blood, cries out "Why?" Oh, my God – why?

"My God" "My Lord". If anyone can say those words, is it the only begotten Son of the Father? "My ... God" "My..."

- You said to Me
on the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased".
Then why have You forsaken me?
- You said to Me
at my baptism, "You are my Son, with whom I am well pleased". Then why have You forsaken me?
- You have been "My God"
since my birth. Psalm 22, verse 9
"You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts." Why have You now forsaken Me?
- You have been "My God"

since You created the world. You have been “My God” from all eternity. Why? Why, My God?

Why My God have You forsaken Me? Was He? As the onlookers sneered at Him, crying out “Save Yourself”. Was He? Was He forsaken? Yes. As difficult as it might be to comprehend. Yes. In those hours on the cross He was forsaken. For He had become sin. He who knew no sin had become sin. Oh the mystery! He who is perfectly holy, and has been and ever will be, took on all the unholiness of all of unholy humanity. He who knew no sin became sin. And in those hours on the cross suffered what we who do know sin ought to have suffered.

The prophet Isaiah had declared: [Isaiah 59:2, NASB]

“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you ...”

Isaiah feels this “separation” when in a vision of the Holy God “high and lifted up”, he oratorically cries out, “Woe is me ... for I am an unclean man and I dwell among a people of unclean lips” [Isaiah 6:5]

Sin separates at a profoundly deep level. At His baptism, in accordance with the will of His Father, the Son of God chooses to identify with sinful humanity. The Sinless One becomes sinful humanity. As the apostle Paul puts it, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” [2 Corinthians 5:21]

And then, on the cross, again in accordance with the will of His Father, the Son chooses to bear the judgment sin deserves. He suffers the separation from God sin deserves. He suffers the abandonment sin deserves. He was forsaken so we would not be forsaken! Jesus takes away the judgment of forsakenness by suffering the forsakenness Himself! He endures the forsakenness so we never do! It is all part of the mystery of the Gospel; it is all part of the great reversal of the Gospel.

- Jesus goes up by going down.
- Jesus wins by losing.
- Jesus heals by taking on our sickness. [Isaiah 53]
- Jesus gives life to the world by dying.

And ...

Jesus overcomes the forsakenness sin deserves by entering into the forsakenness Himself. Jesus absorbs the forsakenness in Himself so no one who puts their trust in Him is ever forsaken. Oh we may feel forsaken, but the feelings are not based in reality. He was forsaken so that none of us sinners ever are.

Some of you may recognize the name William Cowper. He was a greatly respected poet of the 18th Century. Cowper put his massive literary talents to work for the glory of God by composing some of the most beautiful hymns in the English language. Hymns like, “O For a Closer Walk with God”, “God Moves in Mysterious Ways His Wonders to Perform”, and “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood Flowing from Immanuel’s Veins”. They celebrate the benefits of the finished work of the cross. But ... sadly Cowper never really experienced the joy his words produced in others. He lived nearly all his life fighting depression and

despondency. For he lived with the fear that because he still sinned, God might one day abandon him, forsake him. The fear was likely rooted in the fact that his mother died when he was only six years old; and he never received the healing the Holy Spirit offers for such deep wounds. He transferred that expression of forsakenness to his relationship with God.

For all his powerful proclamations of the finished work of Jesus, Cowper did not overcome the fear that God might forsake him. But ...as a testimony to the triumph of the Gospel, someone chiselled on William Cowper's grave the last stanza of a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It goes like this:

Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry His universe hath shaken—

It went up single, echoless, "My God, I am forsaken!"

It went up from the Holy's lips amid His lost creation,

That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation!

(*from stanzas XIII and XIV of "Cowper's Grave")

Jesus Christ suffers the abandonment sin deserves so that we never do! Love so amazing
Love so amazing He became sin Who knew no sin that we might become His righteousness He
humbled Himself and carried the cross Love so amazing! Love so amazing.