

Title: "My God, My God why have You forsaken me?"

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It was a traumatizing moment. As a little boy, I enjoyed going to the mall with my parents. But there was one rule: "Stay by our side." Like all children, I disobeyed and thought I would have fun by hiding in the clothing rack. I stayed there waiting for someone to come find me, but no one did. As I crawled out from under the clothes, I discovered no one was there. I began frantically searching for my parents, but they were nowhere to be found. In a state of panic, I thought for sure I had been abandoned.

We have all experienced hard times in our lives when we have felt forsaken. It's not uncommon, even for those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ. For example, Job cried out "I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me." (Job 30:20). Habakkuk also felt forsaken when he saw wicked men prosper (Hab. 1:13). Even King David thought God had forsaken him (Ps. 13:1-2).

You may ask, can God forsake His own? The answer is no, scripture is full of promises that assure us that God will not abandoned His people. Moses instructed Joshua in front of the people to "Be strong and courageous" because God will never leave us or forsake us (Deut. 31:6). Psalm 94:14 reassures us that "the LORD will not reject His people and will never forsake His inheritance."

So God won't leave us because He is faithful to His promises, but there's another reason He won't forsake His people -- He CAN'T. God cannot abandon believers because Jesus was abandoned by His Father on the cross on their behalf.

In Matthew's gospel we read: "Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour." (Matt. 27:45) Up to this point, heaven had not acknowledged the indignities and brutalities that Jesus suffered. For three hours the earth went dark. God used darkness as a gigantic object lesson to the world regarding His judgment of sin.

Then, the crowd heard the most staggering words ever uttered: "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?" (Matt 27:46)

In the last three hours before our Lord's death, His silence was broken. Suddenly, Jesus cried out with a loud voice asking His Father why He was being forsaken. Let that sink in. For the first time, Jesus felt something He had never experienced. For three hours, Jesus felt the agony of being separated from His Father.

Why did heaven forsake Him? The answer is both beautiful and horrifying. The two were separated because Jesus was paying for the sins of the world. God was pouring out His holy anger on His own Son who had committed no sin.

The answer to why Jesus asked that question is found in the first few words of His cry "My God, My God." Jesus characteristically used the term "Father" when He spoke of God. In fact, He used it approximately 170 times. This is the only time in all His prayers that He referred to Him as "God." Earlier He prayed "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" and in the last few moments of His life, He said "Father, into my hands I commit My Spirit."

Why did He call His Father God? As He hung on the cross, the relationship that existed between He and His Father was no longer simply paternal, it was judicial. It was no longer only a father and a son, it was the Son of Man, man's representative taking our place and enduring the judgment we deserved. This should horrify us.

But believers share in all the benefits of the Person and work of Christ. He came to earth to obey the law, to die, and be resurrected for us. And along with those realities, we now know He was also forsaken for us. So as well as being horrific, God abandoning the sinless Jesus is beautiful.

Clearly on that day as a young child I was not actually abandoned. In fact, I learned that those who love us will not abandon us, even though we might think otherwise. So the next time it feels like God has forsaken you, remember the cry of Jesus on your behalf: "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" Since Jesus was forsaken by God, God CANNOT forsake us.

I pray you find hope in that truth.

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