

# Christ Forsaken!

*Dr. Joel R. Beeke*

*Psalter 240:2, 5*

*Read Matthew 27:33-50*

*Psalter 230:1-6*

*Psalter 416:6-7*

*Psalter 4*

Dear congregation,

With God's help, we wish to consider one of Scripture's most solemn and immense texts, Matthew 27:46, "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Our theme is *Christ Forsaken!*, which we will examine in three thoughts:

1. The profundity of His sufferings
2. The purpose that lay behind His sufferings
3. The love that pervaded His sufferings

## **The Profundity of Christ's Sufferings**

It is twelve o'clock. Jesus has been on the cross for three pain-filled hours. Three times He has spoken from the cursed tree, focusing on the well-being of others: He has lovingly prayed for His enemies, promised salvation to a thief, and made arrangements for His mother's care. Many in the tumultuous crowd have scarcely heard the words Jesus has said. Many who, five days earlier, have waved palm branches before Him and cried, "Hosanna!" are now making abominable accusations against Christ.

Then, at noon, something unusual happens. Something quiets the noise and clamor at the place of execution. It suddenly becomes strangely dark at Calvary, and "over all the land." This darkness is no

natural phenomenon; it is more than a thunderstorm and more than an eclipse. By a miraculous act of Almighty God, midday becomes midnight.

This supernatural darkness, which lasts for three hours, is a symbol of God's judgment on sin. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, Scripture tells us. The Bible often associates sin with darkness and holiness with light. So the physical darkness that covers Calvary signals a deeper and more fearsome darkness that Christ Himself has described as "outer darkness," or the darkness of hell, where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The sun withholds its light as thick, heavy darkness descends on Golgotha, and the great High Priest enters Golgotha's holy of holies. The curtain is drawn, excluding friends and enemies. The Son of God is left alone. At Christ's birth, the bright light of God's glory and a multitude of angels fill the heavens. When Christ dies, the heavens go black because God is forsaking His Son. It is night within Jesus, for the God of light is letting go of Him. God does not look upon His suffering Servant. Forsaken of God and forsaken of people, Jesus confronts a dark end.

In His first three hours on the cross, Jesus has suffered intense physical and internal pain; in His last three hours, He suffers such incredible internal pain that it induces darkness to descend on Calvary. From noon to 3:00 p.m. that Friday, the Lord Jesus Christ is cast out of God's presence into utter darkness. What the Savior endures in those final three hours on the cross defies our imagination. No filmmaker can begin to picture it.

A plague of darkness precedes the slaying of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12. Here on the cross, the great Passover Lamb is being sacrificed in a much more profound darkness. The thick darkness over the land is intensified in the darkness within the soul of Jesus

Christ. For three long hours, Christ wrestles with the powers of darkness. He is in the midst of natural darkness as spiritual darkness descends into the depths of His being. We read of no word during these three hours by Christ or anyone in the crowd around the cross. It is an awesome, eerie, unforgettable scene of silence.

Hear the silence and feel the darkness, then tell me that Jesus doesn't understand your darkness. He *does* understand. He is a Friend who can sympathize with your darkest moments, your deepest fears, your most indescribable agony. He comes alongside you when you cry out with tears, saying, "Heaven is silent!" His response is: "I understand; I have been there and I know what it is like. I can get you through this. Your weeping may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning." When you walk in darkness, Jesus is there, for He has endured midnight at midday.

Christ has endured most of His physical suffering in silence. He has not responded to the spitting and scourging at Gabbatha; He has been silent as He has carried the cross, as He has been lifted on it, and as nails have torn at His flesh. But as He experiences the full brunt of His Father's wrath, Jesus cannot stay silent. Though invisible in the darkness, He cries out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

This fourth word from the cross represents the nadir, the lowest point, of Jesus' sufferings. Here Jesus descends into the essence of hell in the most extreme suffering ever experienced. It is a time of incredible destiny and density—a time so compacted, so infinite, so horrendous as to be incomprehensible and seemingly unsustainable. To begin to grasp a little of the profundity of this amazing cry from the cross, let us look at five things that this word from the cross do not reveal, then at four things that it does reveal.

First, Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?," does not in any way *diminish His deity*.

Jesus does not cease being God before, during, or after this. He was and is God and man.

Second, Jesus' cry does not *divide His human nature from His divine person*. His person is not split so that the union between His natures is broken. These two—God and man—never cease to be united. What is more, Christ does not experience desertion in His divine nature, but in His human nature. Nor is this desertion mutual. The Father temporarily deserts Christ, but Christ does not desert His Father.

Third, Jesus' cry does not *destroy the Trinity*. It does not reveal a crack in the Trinity so that the Father and Son fall apart. God the Father cannot forsake His Son as God. Father and Son are still one in their being and one in all their attributes. The three Persons have not become two Persons. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain three Persons in one Godhead, but the awesome fellowship of delight has been temporarily severed between the Father and His Son, the God-man. Thomas Goodwin writes, "The Godhead was not separated, though the operation of comfort from the Godhead was sequestered."

Fourth, Jesus' cry does not *detach Him from the Holy Spirit*. He does not cease to be filled with the Holy Spirit without measure. The Son lacks the comforts of the Spirit, but He does not lose the holiness of the Spirit. The Spirit is still in Him without measure.

Finally, Jesus' cry does not cause Him to *disavow His mission*. Both the Father and Son have known from all eternity that Jesus will become the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. Acts 15:18 says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Jesus has been walking with destiny to this very moment, and the hour of laying down His life has finally come. Now He will accomplish the redemption of sinners by being made a sacrifice for their sin.

It is unthinkable that the Son of God might question what is happening on the cross or be perplexed about why His Father's loving presence departs. Jesus has refused wine mixed with myrrh at the very start of crucifixion so that He will be alert to the end. All His feelings serve this redemptive end.

Taken collectively, these five principles teach us that even when—indeed, *especially* when—Christ is deserted by His Father, we must bow down and worship Christ. If Christ had ceased to be God when His Father left Him, our worship of the Son would be idolatry, for we would be worshiping a mere creature. Surely, if we are Christians, *the ultimate reason* for worship is the moment when we hear Jesus cry out to God. Instinctively, we feel the need to fall down in worship and say, “My Lord and my God!”

Though we can scarcely begin to grasp what being forsaken by God means for Jesus, we know that it is more awful than we can imagine. And we can stammer out at least four things that these words from the cross do mean.

First, Jesus is expressing the *agony of unanswered supplication*. The words Jesus says echo what is said in Psalm 22:1–2, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.” Precisely what Jesus is praying for here is not exactly clear. Is He once more asking for the cup of suffering to pass? Is He begging for a token of His Father's light—a smile or benediction? Whatever it is, He receives no answer except the echo of His own voice and the cruel taunts of hell. The heavens are as brass before Him.

Unanswered, Jesus feels forgotten of God though He is not really forgotten. You too, dear believer, know a little of that sorrow. And yet, in your most “forgotten

moments,” you are not truly forgotten by God either. A mother would sooner forget her sick, sucking child than your Father in heaven, for the forgotten Savior’s sake, would forget you (Isa. 49:14–17).

Second, Jesus is expressing *the agony of unbearable stress*. Stress and distress so overwhelm Jesus that He cries with a loud voice, the kind of “roaring” mentioned in Psalm 22. The famous painting titled “The Scream” depicts a person with a huge mouth uttering an awful scream. It represents humanity under so much stress that it utters a primal scream. But even this horrific figure pales in comparison to the roaring cry of the Lord Jesus. His cry pierces the darkness. It is like the perpetual shriek of those who are cast away forever. It is the roar of desperate agony without rebellion. John Flavel writes, “It is as much as if Christ had said, O my God, no words can express my anguish: I will not speak, but roar, howl out my complaint; pour it out in volleys of groans: I roar as a lion.” It is the cry that is uttered in hell when the wrath of God overwhelms the damned. This cry is heart-piercing, heaven-piercing, and hell-piercing. What agony!

Children, how do you feel when you fall and hurt yourself, then run to your father for help, only to find that your father is not there? You are so anxious that you begin to scream, “Dad, Dad, where are you? My dad is gone!” That anxiety is nothing compared to Jesus’ excruciating distress in the absence of His Father. What do the angels think when they hear Jesus cry and witness the Father’s silence as He turns His back on His own beloved Son?

In this moment, as in none other, the Son knows the full measure of His Father’s wrath. That anger deluges the Son with no restraint. All of divine justice crashes upon Him, wave after wave. Never has He been such an object of wrath!

Yet, at the same time, the Son is the supreme object

of His Father's pleasure. The Father loves His Son because His Son lays down His life for His enemies. Never has the Father approved and admired His Son so much, though the Son temporarily feels no comfort of it.

If you are not a believer, does this cry of Jesus not frighten you? Does not this cry of hell disturb you and make you tremble? Jesus' words about being forsaken by God will be your words if you remain unrepentant. If you do not believe, you will experience unbearable stress, wrath, abandonment, forsakenness—not for three hours, but forever. Do you not need this Savior for your soul? Will you not embrace Him, believe in Him, trust in Him, and be saved?

Third, Jesus is expressing the *agony of unmitigated sin*. All the sins of the elect of all ages, and the hell that they deserve for eternity, are laid upon Christ on the cross. Without the support of His Deity, Jesus could never have sustained the burden. Because His Deity and humanity are combined in one infinite Person, His sufferings carry infinite value in the presence of an infinitely holy God. That is how Christ can bear our justly deserved eternal hell in such a short time.

I once saw a picture of a man standing in front of the multistoried Sears Tower in Chicago. He held two large boulders in his hands. The caption beneath the picture said that some stars are so dense in weight compared to their size that the two boulders the man held could weigh as much as the Sears Tower. That is a faint suggestion of how God compresses on His Son all the agonies of sin in a short period of time.

Jesus' cry includes such a profound sense of sin that, temporarily, His sense of Sonship seems to recede. That does not mean, of course, that Jesus doubts His own divine Sonship or loses a sense of it altogether. That would amount to a failure to receive in faith the Scripture's testimony about His very identity. Jesus is fully conscious of His divine identity and often cites

Scriptures that testify to it. So it would not be compatible with Jesus' impeccable faith in the Word of God to think that He doubted His divine identity.

Let me explain. Though Christ has a divine consciousness and a human consciousness, He has only one self-consciousness that belongs to His divine Person. His divine personhood is the foundation on which His theanthropic constitution is erected. Though He experiences change and development in His human consciousness so that He can pass into deeper sorrow when He enters Gethsemane, Jesus' self-consciousness never changes because it was an aspect of His personhood, and that personhood is divine.

That being the case, how can He cease to be conscious of Himself in His identity as the eternal Son of the Father? Would that not suggest a self-consciousness seated in His humanity rather than in His divine personhood? In His human mind, Jesus is conscious of human experience, and, in His divine mind, He is conscious of realities that His human mind cannot comprehend. But when He reflects on His individual identity, Jesus at all times knows but one self, the self who is the I Am That I Am, who is with the Father before the creation of the world, and who is sent by the Father to come into the world as a man.

Nevertheless, in these moments, a sense of sin dominates Jesus' consciousness to a frightening degree. In Gethsemane and in the first and last words on the cross, Jesus has called on God as His Father. But now He cries, "Eli, eli," or "Eloi, eloi"—"my God, my God." He is aware of God: the goodness of God, the justice and holiness of God. But that awful moment, in His self-image, He feels sin more intensely than His Sonship, though the Sonship is by no means obliterated.

He is feeling your and my sin, dear believer. Paul says that God the Father "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). In His self-image,



Jesus feels at this moment not so much that He is the Beloved in whom God is well-pleased, but rather that He is the cursed one who is vile, foul, and repulsive. That is the essence of what God thinks of sin—the essence of the price the God-man has to pay for sin.

Yet, in the midst of this agony, Jesus exercises unassailable faith. He cries, “Eli, Eli” (which is Hebrew), or “Eloi, Eloi” (which is Aramaic)—the *El* meaning “strong one.” His feelings are saying, “No God,” but His faith says, “*My* God.” His feelings are saying, “No strength, no strong one,” but His faith says, “*My* strong One.” He is appealing to the One who has always supported Him in His troubles. His feelings are saying, “You have been left alone,” yet His faith says, “No matter what my feelings tell me, or what providence tells me, or what taunts are thrown in my face, He is my Lord and my God.” Calvin says of Christ in this moment, “Still in His heart faith remained firm, by which He beheld the presence of God, of whose absence He complains.”

In these words, “Eli, Eli,” Jesus exemplifies how we must abandon our feelings when our feelings say, “God has abandoned me.” Too often as Christians and as pastors we are governed by our feelings rather than our faith. We need to model for others how to live by faith in the midst of our darkest hours and our deepest trials. At such times, people are watching us more closely than ever to see how our faith holds up under suffering.

Then, too, we see Christ’s faith in the question “Why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus is not asking this question in a spirit of boldness or impudence or rebellion. Nor is He asking with a sense of puzzlement, as if wondering, “What am I doing here?” Rather, Jesus is asking “Why?” in the spirit of submissive faith. He is asking the Father of heaven to make known in a vivid way why God is abandoning Him. He knows why, but

He wants the reasons to be stated again so that He can hold onto them for sustenance in these hours of darkness. He is saying, “Father, remind Me why this is necessary. Oh, yes, it is necessary for Me to be God-forsaken so that God-forsakers may know union with God. And now, look at the end—is it not glorious?” This is what the Lord is doing; He is asking in faith that His human nature might be strengthened as He is reminded of the reasons for His suffering and the end to which they serve. Here again is a wonderful example for us to follow.

Finally, Jesus is expressing here the *agony of unassisted solitariness*. Jesus is asking His Father, “Why hast thou forsaken, deserted, and abandoned me?” Before coming to earth, Jesus has been the eternal Son of God in heaven. The Father’s love has been lavished generously and continuously upon Him. As Proverbs 8 says, “I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.”

Jesus also has experienced His Father’s love on earth. Jesus has known continuously the Father’s love and support and nearness. He has felt one with the Father. There never has been a sweeter Father, and there never has been a more loving Son. They have gone up from Bethlehem to Calvary together, like Abraham and Isaac going up the mount in Genesis 22. In such moments of trouble and sorrow, God has sent help. In John 12, the Father has affirmed the Son, saying, “This is my beloved Son.” In the Garden of Gethsemane, God has sent an angel to strengthen His Son.

But now, in His hour of greatest need, Christ experiences a pain unlike anything He has ever experienced: His Father’s abandonment. When Jesus most needs encouragement, no voice cries from heaven, “This is my beloved Son.” When He most needs reassurance, no one says, “I am well pleased.” No dove descends from heaven to symbolize peace; no angel is

sent to strengthen Him; no “well done, thou good and faithful servant” resounds in His ears. He is in a far country, a strange country, hanging in the naked flame of His Father’s wrath. The women who have supported Him so often are silent. The disciples, cowardly and terrified, are far away. Feeling disowned by all, Jesus walks the way of suffering alone in pitch-black darkness. Not one beam of sunlight is permitted to shine on Him. God is present only in displeasure, bearing down upon Christ in anger. Instead of love, there is wrath. Instead of affection, there is coldness. Instead of support, there is opposition. Instead of nearness, there is distance for three long, agonizing hours. The Son’s cries do not bring the Father back. There is no change in the Father’s demeanor until He is so far away that He eventually disappears. The Son cries out one last time, “My God—why?” That is what we have here. The Son is pursuing the Father as He distances Himself even further. There is an indescribable pursuit going on here, and yet the Father purposefully retreats. No amount of pursuing will catch up with the Father, and eventually there is nothing left but abandonment. Jesus is alone. Deserted. Forsaken.

Don’t misunderstand. Jesus does not pity Himself. He does not cry out with the rich man, “I am tormented in this flame.” But Jesus cries out for God.

Every detail of this abandonment shouts to you and me, “This is what God thinks of your and my sin!” Every detail declares the irrationality, the heinousness, the dread character of sin.

The fourth word Jesus utters from the cross takes our breath away. We can understand how David can utter this heart-rending cry in Psalm 22, but we find it impossible to understand how those same words can be uttered by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. How can He endure unanswered prayer, the fading of filial consciousness, and then the abandonment of His Father,

when He too is God of God? How can God forsake Christ as though He is Cain and not Christ? How can God the Father forsake God the Son?

Martin Luther exclaimed, “God forsaken of God! Who can comprehend it?” What this abandonment meant for Christ cannot be adequately explained, even by Christ Himself. Although He uttered these words in human language, they reflect an experience of which human beings are strangers. No son of Adam has ever gone through what Christ endured. Many people have felt forsaken of God, but no human being, not even reprobates, are completely forsaken by God while still in this life.

Outside an emergency room in a California hospital is a drop-off box for unwanted babies. The thought of abandoning one’s baby like dropping mail in a mailbox makes us shudder. Yet, when believers feel forsaken, it is like that: a feeling that does not correspond with reality. They lose the sense of God’s presence, but not this presence itself. With Christ this loss was both feeling and fact. He felt forsaken because He was forsaken. He endured the essence of abandonment; believers endure only the shadows of it, even though those shadows can be so fearsome.

### **The Purpose that Lay Behind Christ’s Sufferings**

Why was Christ forsaken by God? We cannot hope to find a completely satisfying answer to this question. If even Christ Himself asked, “Why?” and received no answer, how shall we find a solution to this terrible darkness, this appalling situation, this unfathomable depth of suffering?

But Scripture does not leave us completely ignorant of why Christ was forsaken. Isaiah 53 offers part of the answer by telling us in verse 10, “It pleased the LORD to bruise him.” In His love for this evil world, God the Father offered up His own Son.

But why? Why did God deal this way with His own divine Son, whom He loved? Why did God bruise Him and place Him under His own wrath and curse? Christ was sinless; He was divine; yet He was accursed by God. Why? There are only four possible explanations of such actions of God the Father.

The first possibility is *capriciousness*—that the Father, out of a simple change of mind, anathematized His Son. Such an answer, of course, is unthinkable. God could never bruise and desert His Son out of mere arbitrary sovereignty. He knows no mood changes. He is not capricious. His love is steady; it is *agape* love.

The second possibility is that God the Father bruised His Son out of *malice*—that Jehovah crushed and bruised and extinguished the life of His own Son because of the evil that was part of His nature. This is also unthinkable, for it would be criminal on the part of God. If you saw a father bruising and murdering his son, you would not conclude that this father loved his son, but quite the contrary. Yet many who have no understanding of the atonement stand before the cross and foolishly say, “This is only proof of the love of God.”

The third possibility is *didactic*—that the Father wanted to teach the Son profound lessons about suffering so He laid harsh judgment, especially the judgment of desertion, upon Him. This approach is drawn from how God treats His people at times by bruising them with painful desertions. He appears to leave His people from time to time, though He doesn't actually do so, just as He never actually left Jesus. The Christian can have a sense of God's presence sometimes, but at other times have no sense of it.

Sometimes God withdraws His presence as a disciplinary measure because we have offended Him. Sometimes He withdraws Himself as a precautionary measure. He sees us heading into dangerous territory,

and He withdraws to make us aware of the direction we are heading. Sometimes He withdraws as a test, not because we have done wrong, but just to ask, “Will you stay with me if I take away the sense of My presence with you?”

But God had no reason to teach His Son such lessons. His Son was already perfect. The Father had no need to bruise His Son as a test, a discipline, or a precaution.

Finally, the Father’s real cause of bruising His Son is *penal*. That is, the source of the sufferings of Jesus is the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God demands that sin be punished. The Father’s bruising was judicial wrath. It was a just infliction of punishment for the sin that Christ carried for His people.

The logic of this judicial substitution is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The logic of Calvary is that Christ was made sin for us. He died for us; He bore our sin; He was made accursed for us; He gave His life a ransom for many. When all the anomalies and mysteries of salvation pile on top of one another, this little word *for* demolishes them all. In this *for*, darkness is illuminated; this small word unites Jesus Christ and sinners. In other words, there is only one thing that can explain why God inflicted punishment on His own Son, and that is that His Son stood in an intimate connection with sin and sinners. If Christ did not connect with sin and sinners, then Calvary was the darkest moment this world has ever known. But we are joined with Christ to sin and to sinners by the word *for*!

So in what sense was Christ *for* His people? First of all, Christ was acting on behalf of His people for their benefit. He was acting as their representative; He was acting in their interest. Christ is the Representative, the Advocate, the One who acts in the place of His

people. He intercedes for His people, pleads for them, and looks after their interests. But Jesus Christ is more than a representative.

Second, He suffered on behalf of His clients. He is not only the Priest interceding and pleading for His people, but He became the sacrifice in their place. He not only acts for the client, but He assumes the liabilities and responsibilities of the client.

As our substitute, Jesus bore our sin in our place and obeyed the law in our place so that God's justice can be satisfied and that God can be the justifier of those who believe in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). As our substitute, Christ assumed the guilt of His people and justified God in treating Him as His people deserve to be treated on account of their sin.

Dear believer, do you understand how Christ is anathema because He is your substitute? Because He is your sin, God bruised His Son and did not spare Him. He was made a curse for you to redeem you from the curse. He is your condemnation so that there is no condemnation for you. He is the Son of God crucified, Son of God anathema, Son of God desolate, Son of God forsaken, because He is the Son of man who must suffer many things. And that "must" is not rooted in human conventions nor in theological contrivances, but in the great central truth that God delights in mercy (Mic. 7:18) and therefore is in the business of saving sinners.

God loves to forgive sin. He loves to multiply pardon and to make it abound. But He condones nothing. God Himself must bear the sin. The God who forgives, who bears, and who exacts is the God who demands atonement. But wonder of wonders, the God who provides the atonement became the atonement. God is the Lamb. God has found the Lamb in His own flock, in His own bosom. This, surely, is the greatest reality in the Christian faith: that Jesus Christ became the sacrifice, the scapegoat.

No one at the foot of the cross could answer Christ's profound question. Even the angels had no answer. But in Psalm 22:3, Jesus answers His own question: "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." Why did God forsake Jesus? Because God is holy. God's love is a pure, sin-hating love. As Habakkuk says, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity" (1:13). This was also true at the cross. God could not behold evil, even when that evil was found on His own Son. He could not look upon the iniquity that His all-seeing eye detected on Christ.

As far as any personal sins were concerned, Jesus had none. But as the representative of sinners, He bore much sin. When He took on Himself His people's sins, God treated Him as sin-bearer, holding Him responsible for the payment of their sin. That is why God forsook Jesus. God the Judge severed connections with His Son in His human nature.

Christ also received the wages of sin, which is death. Death means more than physical death; it also involves spiritual and eternal death, the complete separation between God and man. Adam brought that death upon himself and his descendants. So Christ, having taken Adam's sin upon Himself, also had to bear Adam's punishment. He descended into hell, the place of total loneliness and abandonment, where He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

The answer to that question is: "Thou art holy, Thou art just in demanding satisfaction for sin at My hand. I know that I must answer for all the sins of My people. Therefore I can but justify Thee, O my God. Let Thy sword awake against the Man that is Thy fellow!" (cf. Zech. 13:7).

Christ's penal suffering, therefore, is vicarious—that is, He suffered on our behalf, dear believers. He did not simply share our forsakenness or take the brunt of it, but He saved us from it. He endured it



for us, not *with* us. You, dear believer, are immune to condemnation (Rom. 8:1) and to God's anathema (Gal. 3:13) because Christ bore it for you in that outer darkness. As interceding High Priest, Christ sympathizes with you, but what Golgotha secured for you was immunity rather than sympathy.

Because Christ died on the tree, there is no longer the slightest need for one grain of penal suffering to be visited on any of His people. He endured all the torments and relational distance from God that we deserve as sinners. The Savior was once abandoned for me so I shall never be abandoned. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Golgotha will achieve all that God intended it to accomplish. Every lost sheep will be brought home to God.

This, then, is the only explanation for the three hours of darkness and for the roar of dereliction. God's people still experience the confirmation of this truth today when the Holy Spirit brings them to the cross in dreadful darkness, before the tribunal of the Judge of heaven and earth, only for them to experience, as the darkness subsides, that they are not consumed for Christ's sake. They come out of the darkness, confessing, "Because Immanuel has descended into the lowest hell for us, God is with us in the darkness, under the darkness, through the darkness—and we are not consumed!"

### **The Love that Pervaded Christ's Sufferings**

I leave you with three applications relating to the Triune God's love in Christ's forsakenness.

First, Christ's being forsaken by God reveals the stupendous *love of Christ*. If Samuel Rutherford could say, "God incarnate is nothing but love covered with flesh," how much more vivid is Christ's love displayed in His cry of dereliction. "My God, my God, why hast

thou forsaken me?” was the cry of the incarnate God whose soul was sinking ever deeper into the bottomless pit of divine wrath. Believers cannot possibly fathom the love of the One who saved them from perdition. As one hymn writer put it:

*But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed,  
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord  
passed through,  
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.*

As followers of Christ, Christians can expect suffering and persecution. Paul writes, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). In Philippians 2:5–8, the apostle tells us to let the mind of Christ Jesus dwell in us. The Philippians were claiming their own rights rather than surrendering them; they wanted to be praised for the service they gave the Lord. They wanted their gifts to be acknowledged and honored. Paul responds, “If you are complaining that you are not being honored for what you do, look to the Lord of glory. Though He was God, He did not grasp at equality with God. Jesus did not insist on coming to this earth in all His regalia. He did not protect His dignity by refusing to be born in a stable.” Paul cautions the Philippians—and us—to abandon all pretensions of glory.

Is Christ’s mind in you, dear friend? What practical, profound teaching lies in the fourth word Jesus spoke from the cross! If we worship Jesus, we will relinquish every form of unresolved bitterness against anyone. How can we nurse bitterness against someone who treats us far less ill than we have treated the Lord of glory? Let us abandon our petty rights, our mundane complaints, at the foot of the cross. Let us quit trivializing. How do we dare to trivialize at the foot of the cross?

Second, Christ’s being forsaken by God reveals the

stupendous *love of the Father*. You ask, “Where is the love? There seems to be nothing but wrath here!” Look again and remember John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” True, God had to turn His face away from Jesus because He found sin on Him. But this was all according to His plan. Remember, Jesus was made sin by God so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus was forsaken that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken of Him.

In the gospel, the Father loves sinners lavishly. He gives everything He has and holds nothing back. When the Father gave His only Son, His bosom Friend from eternity, He took the best He had and gave Him for the worst He could find—sinners like you and me—asking His Son to experience the worst imaginable humiliation and suffering. He spared not His own Son but gave the supreme commitment of His heart.

Christ’s forsakenness by the Father makes plain that the Father held nothing in reserve but was extravagant in His overflowing love to sinners who were at enmity with Him. Dear believer, the fourth word from the cross preaches God’s unchangeable love for you. You are caught up in a love that has broken down all the prejudices of your evil mind and heart. That love has brought you into its own domain and caused you to swim in its infinity. The love of the Father flows from His very heart and being. Who can stop such love? No one has ever loved this way. And this love is made transparent at the cross in the cry of dereliction. Amazing grace! God is willing to turn a deaf ear to His Son’s agony to listen to your needs as a poor sinner.

Reverently speaking, such extravagant love appears to be almost foolish. When we learn how sinful we are, we are prone to cry out, “O God, how foolish Thou art to love such a creature as I am! Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” The wisdom of men is

foolishness with God, Paul says, but “the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). The foolishness of God’s amazing love is incomprehensible to us. Had others treated us the way we treated God, we would offer them no hope, no mercy, no forgiveness. We would refuse to cast our pearls before such swine, but God put the Pearl of great price in the pathway of the likes of us—wretched, sinful swine. In His infinite wisdom, God decided to bring glory to Himself and the Son of His love by making His Son the Mediator and Savior of a great multitude that no man can number.

Finally, Christ’s being forsaken by God reveals the stupendous *love of the Spirit*. After Christ drank the cup of His Father’s wrath, Mark 15:37–39 tells us that three veils were rent. The Father tore the veil in the temple (v. 38), the Son tore the veil of His flesh (v. 37), and the Holy Spirit tore the veil of the human heart (v. 39). The Spirit so convinced a centurion of the true identity of Jesus that he could not help crying out in the midst of a Christ-despising crowd, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (v. 39). The Holy Spirit used Christ’s last words and His loud cry of victory in death to persuade the centurion that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

The Spirit still shows His incredible love in working patiently yet irresistibly in the hearts of sinners, applying to us the wonderful truths of the cross. He lovingly and persuasively shows us that Christ was forsaken of the Father that we might never be forsaken of the Triune God. He convinces us that all our sufferings, including feeling forsaken, are the fruit of merely walking in His shadow and are a far cry from the reality of forsakenness that Christ endured. In response, our hearts so overflow with love that we cry out, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

If you are a believer, meditate on this love the next

time you feel forsaken of God. Think of what your Savior experienced. No matter how terrible your affliction is, remember that Jesus has been there before you so He understands your feelings. He can sympathize with your fears and anxieties, for He, too, has experienced them. Do not conclude that because you feel forsaken you cannot be a child of God.

A minister was standing by the deathbed of one of his members who suffered from deep depression. The pastor tried to find something to say that might comfort this man who had given evidence of being a Christian. But no matter what he said, the reply was, "It's no use." Suddenly the pastor said, "What became of that Man who died whom God did really forsake? Where is He now?" The dying man clung to that thought and said, "He is in glory, and I shall be with Him where He is!" Light finally came to this dying man.

In Christ's cry of dereliction, there is true hope for discouraged believers. If you feel abandoned and forsaken and wonder where God is, take heart. Your feeling of spiritual abandonment is only a feeling. It is not a fact. Flee to the once-forsaken but never-forsaking Savior, cast yourself upon Him, and you will experience the truth of Hebrews 13:5, best translated as "He will never, no never, no never forsake you."

Praise be to God, we will not be abandoned because Christ has suffered that abandonment for us. We can look into the beautiful face of Jehovah in heaven and say, "My Father," and He responds: "My child, I cannot leave you or forsake you. You are too precious to Me because the Lamb of God has made you Mine forever." Experiencing this, we can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

We can feel sorry for needy children of God who are thirsting for God and His communion, but at the

same time we can rejoice because such people will not perish. They will see God's gracious countenance. But we must be gravely concerned about the self-deceived who profess to know the Lord and yet do not have close communion with Him and who do not seem to know the difference between His presence and His absence. What else can this mean than that they are still strangers to God and His grace?

My friend, if you can live without a sense of the Lord's presence and are satisfied with mere outward Christianity, you are still lost in your sins. The wrath of almighty God rests on you. If you die like that, you will be forever where Christ was in essence for those three terrible hours on the cross. Hell is utter forsakenness by the favorable presence of God.

Whether you are self-deceived or knowingly unsaved, the fourth word from the cross warns you to flee from the wrath to come. You must be born again. Repent of your sin, believe in Christ alone for salvation, and submit to the Savior's lordship with your entire being. Do not rest until you, too, believe in Him who was forsaken in wrath that you might be accepted in mercy. Receive the admonition of Hebrews 2:2-3: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Amen.