

## Seven Words: Word of Compassion *Matthew 27:45-50*

### Introduction

A few weeks ago our region of Southwest Ohio was sickened as we heard the story of a six-year old boy named James Hutchinson. On Friday, February 26, James and his two siblings were taken to Rush Run Nature Preserve in Preble County, just south of Eaton, OH. That night the mother of these three children attempted to abandon James and his siblings. Her new boyfriend had made it clear that he didn't want to be around her children.

As his mother was driving away, James grabbed onto the door handle of the car and was dragged a considerable distance. Some reports suggest he may be run over by his mother's car. His body was dumped into the Ohio River and has yet to be recovered.

Try to put yourself into the heart and mind of James and his siblings that night. Through no fault of your own, you were abandoned, left to die. The person who – in theory at least – should have loved you the most turned her back on you and left you in the darkness.

I doubt this word would be in the vocabulary of any six-year-old, but the word that fits is:

### **FORSAKEN**

It is a word that means "abandoned and deserted." A lot of people – maybe even a lot of people in this room – know what being forsaken feels like:

- A few years ago, right after the Christmas holidays, the husband of a good friend of ours, told her that he no longer wanted to be married to her. There was no one else in the picture. He just no longer wanted her.
- A teenager who no matter how hard she tries can't break into any circle of friends at school.
- A man or woman whose spouse unexpectedly dies, or maybe slowly drifts away because of the disease of dementia.
- A employee who suddenly finds himself rifted out of a job he loves.

Jesus not only experienced the physical pain of crucifixion on that Good Friday, He also knew the emotional pain of being forsaken. In deep anguish, He cried out from the cross:

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") (Matthew 27:46)

Jesus echoes the same words from Psalm 22, a Psalm written by David:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. (Psalm 22:1-2)

This Psalm is therefore known as the "Psalm of the Cross." I have an old commentary set that my dad bought used when he started his ministry in 1970. The author of that commentary says this about these words:

Before us we have a description both of the darkness of the cross and the sufferings of Christ. We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this Psalm.

In a sermon he preached on this passage, the great 19th century preacher C.H. Spurgeon said,

"I think I can understand the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as they are written by David in the 22nd Psalm; but the same words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" when uttered by Jesus on the cross, I cannot comprehend..."

Martin Luther was seen sitting in his study for hours as he meditated on this passage. Finally, someone heard him say, "God forsaking God . . . no one can understand that."

I make two observations:

### **OBSERVATION #1: JESUS EXPERIENCED SOMETHING NEW**

Scripture never records another moment like this as it tells the story of Jesus. Notice how Jesus refers to His Heavenly Father:

My God, my God ... (Matthew 27:46)

Remember:

- At age 12 in the Temple after his earthly parents came to retrieve him: "I must be about my father's business."
- He begins His high priestly prayer, as recorded in John 17:1, like this: "Father the has come."
- He taught us to pray "Our Father."
- He made it clear that since He was the way, the truth and the life, no one could come to the Father, except through Him.
- And in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "Father, if it is possible, remove this cup from me."

But here in this moment the "father" reference is gone. For the first time in his 33 years of life on earth, for the first time in all of eternity, the relationship between God the Father

and God the Son was broken. The intimate fellowship He had known was no longer there. Jesus was alone. Forsaken.

You know, the Scriptures tell us about the consequences of our sin and the penalty that has to be paid for it. We read:

The wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23)

And again:

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)

This moment on the cross shows us what this look like. Jesus was receiving the “wages of sin” – sin that he had not committed. Our sin. The wages our sin had earned, the penalty of which is relationship with God that is broken. God turned away from His beloved Son. Forsaken.

From the day you and I are born, we are in a broken relationship with God. By nature we are unbroken. Our whole lives are a quest to have that relationship restored. We are trying to gain something we have never experienced.

For Jesus it was just the opposite. He lost something He had always had.

Maybe we don't grieve our sins to the degree we should because we don't fully understand what we are missing.

- Maybe these words will remind us how serious sin is, and how costly the price that must be paid.

## **OBSERVATION #2: THE PEOPLE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING CONFUSING**

The people gathered near the cross weren't quite sure what to make of they were experiencing. It all seemed so confusing. At first, during the middle of the day – at high noon – the sky went pitch black:

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. (Matthew 27:45)

It could not have been a solar eclipse, because the festival of Passover always happened during a full moon. They had never experienced that before. And if that weren't confusing enough, they hear Jesus recite the words of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm in Aramic:

*“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (Matthew 27:46)*

It so startled them they thought He was crying out for the prophet Elijah to come to His rescue.

From our vantage point 2000 years later, we see the darkness as a fulfillment of prophecy.

“In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.” (Amos 8:9)

One of the signs that God exercises judgment is the darkness that accompanies the moment.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” (Exodus 10:21)

The meaning may have been lost on this gathered at the cross, but it is apparent to us. At noon the darkness settled in – at the exact hour when the Old Testament Law prescribed that the sacrificial lambs could begin to be slaughtered for the annual forgiveness of sins.

Inside the city gates, on the altar of the temple, the priest would lay his hands on the lamb thus transferring the sins of the people to the lamb, and then they would sacrifice it. The lamb would die.

- Outside the gates, on the cross of Calvary, God transferred the sins of all the people onto the Perfect Lamb of God, and that Lamb would die.

The judgment of God was complete.

## **APPLICATION**

Man did a work that day.

- Man crucified an innocent man.
- Like Pontius Pilate, they washed their hands of the One whose teaching created discomfort for them.
- They crucified a man who failed to conform to their expectations.
- “Good riddance!” they thought.

But God was also doing a work.

- In the midst of the darkness, God was canceling the debt of sin for every person who has ever and will ever lived.
- The Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world was doing just that. The wages of sin were being paid.

And in that moment, the One who had never known what it was like to be separated from God was forsaken so that we, who had never know what it was like to be in relationship with God, experience the wonder of the new birth.

That 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm that begins so ominously has a very different ending. It goes from the feelings of being forsaken to the result that occurs when God intervenes to restore a right relationship with His people.

- 26 The poor will eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord will praise him—  
may your hearts live forever!
- 27 All the ends of the earth  
will remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
will bow down before him,
- 28 for dominion belongs to the Lord  
and he rules over the nations.
- 29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;  
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—  
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
- 30 Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord.
- 31 They will proclaim his righteousness,  
declaring to a people yet unborn:  
He has done it!

He has done it indeed! Amen.