

Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?

Sermon delivered on March 20th, 2016

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Scripture Text: [Matthew 27:45-54](#)

Introduction

In the gospel according to Mark we read ...

[Mark 15:25](#) And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the third hour, which is nine o'clock in the morning.

[Matthew 27:45](#) Now from the sixth hour (noon) there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour (3 o'clock in the afternoon).

It is now noon, and Jesus has been on the cross for three hours and suddenly, darkness falls on Calvary and “over all the land”. The bright midday becomes a dark midnight. This is not a coincidence. This is a miraculous act of God. This supernatural darkness is a symbol of God’s judgment on sin. The physical darkness is revealing a deeper and more fearsome darkness. The worst crime is being committed. The Lord of glory have been crucified. Our Lord, the light of the world, bleeding and dying in the midst of darkness. It’s almost as if the light went out.

Great Mystery

Our Lord was on the cross for six hours and then we read in ...

[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?**

... [Jesus cried with a loud voice](#) ...

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was not hanging there peacefully and calmly. He was in agony. He was in terrible pain. He was screaming out. So much so that one of them took pity on Him, ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar and offered it to Jesus to refresh Him.

While Jesus was on the cross of Calvary in agony and pain, in the midst of deep darkness, He uttered these words ...

[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?**

This is one of the seven last sayings of Christ while He was hanging upon a cross. Of all the seven sayings Jesus uttered while on the cross, this is the hardest sayings. The problem is not with the words. The problem is not because it is in Hebrew or Chaldee or Aramaic or Greek. The words are simple and it could be understood. But there are things in these words which our finite mind cannot fully comprehend.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, after pondering on these words of Jesus for many hours suddenly stood up and exclaimed, “*God forsaken by God. How can it be?*”

How can God be forsaken by God? How can the Father forsake His own Son? What do these words mean?

Saddest Experience

The word “forsaken” is a strong word. It is a sad word. It means to abandon, to desert, to disown, to turn away from.

We need to understand that when Jesus cried, “Why have you forsaken me?” it was not simply because He felt forsaken. He said these words because He was really forsaken. Literally, truly and actually God the Father abandoned His own Son.

At the cross, we do not hear our Lord complain about the crown of thorns, the nails and the spear, the mocking and insult thrown at Him, the disciples forsaking Him. But now we hear Him cry with a loud voice, being forsaken by God.

But how can this be, since David said in ...

[Psalm 37:23](#) The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. [24:](#) Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. [25:](#) I have been young, and now am old; **yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.**

But our Lord Jesus was forsaken. When Jesus was bleeding and dying upon a cross, the Father abandoned His own Son. He turned His back, He disowned Him, He rejected the One who is His “only begotten Son.” Jesus was truly forsaken by God. In that dark moment on the cross, God the Father turned His back on God the Son.

Why would God do such a thing? What would cause Him to forsake His own Son?

There is no statement of Jesus that is more mysterious than this one. There are many things we do not understand and we will never understand about the cross but there are things we could know as we ponder on these solemn words of Jesus Christ upon the cross. As we ponder these words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”, may we remember three things.

1. The Merciful Substitution for Sinners

During those six hours of darkness, our Lord Jesus was dying as a **Substitute** for others. Jesus was bearing the sin of the world. It is true that God is forsaking Him, but He is being forsaken **not for His own sin but for others**. It is all because of substitution.

He Became Sin for Us

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 sinless One was “made sin” for us. When God looked down that day, He saw His sinless Son becoming sin for us. Though sinless Himself, He was treated as a sinner. He was treated by the justice of God as if He had been a sinner.

All this was "for us", in "our" room and stead, to bear the punishment of sin, and make satisfaction and atonement for it; of which He was capable, and for which He was greatly qualified.

Galatians 3:13 **Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:**

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. At the cross, the beloved Son became “a curse for us.”

Isaiah 53:6 **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

The sins of all His people were laid upon Him, transferred unto Him, and placed to His account. All the iniquity, all the sin, all the transgression, all the trespass, all the evil of this world—all of it was “laid on him.”

Murder, hatred, cursing, bitterness, gossip, character assassination, criticism, false accusation, lying, cheating, stealing, greed, jealousy, envy, covetousness, theft, lust, adultery, fornication, pornography, drunkenness, drug abuse,

Every idle word, every wicked thought and vain imagination, every vile deed - all of it was laid upon Jesus when He hung on the cross.

Jesus was made sin for us. Jesus became a curse for us. And all our sins were laid on him. He died in our place. It was for this reason that God the Father forsook His beloved Son.

So when you read these words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", remember the merciful substitution for sinners. The Just for the unjust, the Righteous for the unrighteousness, the Innocent for the guilty. The One who have been offended took the place of the offender and suffered and died in their place.

1 Peter 3:18 **For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:**

2. The Infinite Holiness of God

Another thing we need to remember when we ponder these words, is the holiness of God.

When God looked down and saw His Son bearing the sins of the world, in that dark and awful moment, the Father turned away. Yes, He turned away from His only begotten Son and whom He said in His baptism and in the mount of transfiguration ...

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

He turned away not because of lack of love. He loved His Son. He turned away not because He was angry at His Son. He turned away because He was angry at all the sin of the world that sent His Son to the cross.

Habakkuk 1:12 Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. 13: **Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity:** wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

God's eyes are too pure to look on evil. He cannot stand the sight of sin. God cannot look with favor upon wickedness. God's holiness demands that He turns away from sin. God will have no part of it. His eyes are too pure to approve the evil in the world.

The people in the crowd, which were many because it was the Passover time, were very familiar with the words. They were not strange words. They were quoted from the Psalm which the Hebrew people are familiar with.

Psalm 22:1 **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? 2: O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

Here is a question which none of those around the cross, though familiar with the Scripture, could have answered. It was a question which, at the time, none of the apostles and disciples could not have answered. But the Lord Jesus had answered His own question ...

Psalm 22:3 **But thou art holy,** O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

When you ponder these words of our Lord, remember the infinite holiness of God. The reason why the Father turned away from His Son is because of His absolute holiness and inflexible justice.

3. The Incomprehensible Love of Christ

The third thing we must remember as we ponder these words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", is the amazing love of Christ for sinners.

John 15:13 **Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

Here we see the supreme evidence of Christ's love for us. He laid down His life for us and we already talked about what was involved in the "laying down " of His life.

As we have seen, it meant much more than physical death, even though that also brought indescribable and incredible pain and shame to our Lord. But it meant that He had to take our place and be "**made sin**" for us, "**made a curse**" for us, and "**the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all**".

He experienced being forsaken and being abandoned. He suffered the loss of all comfort and consolation because of the greatness of His love.

Here was love matchless and unmeasured. In Gethsemane He prayed ...

Matthew 26:38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. 39: And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, **O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.**

Matthew 26:42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, **O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.**

But because of His love, He drank that awful cup of judgment, the cup of being forsaken, the cup being abandoned, the cup of woe and wrath. There was no one in the universe who could drink it, He drank it and drank it all and He did all alone. And He did all because of His great love wherewith He loved us. Blessed be His name!

*Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

Where sin had brought men, love brought the Saviour.

How great is the love of God! Oh, how our hearts should overflow with love and say with the apostle John;

1 John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

The whole heart of Christ is toward His people. He "loved us and gave Himself for us." His love which beyond knowledge and understanding. What a precious Saviour we have! He loves us without measure, without change, without beginning, and without end, even as the Father loves Him!

Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, **Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love:** therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

May God the Holy Ghost shed abroad the love of God in our hearts

Romans 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Closing Thoughts

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

May this saying sink down into our hearts, and may we not miss its significance.

May we remember, as we ponder these words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", the merciful substitution for sinners, the absolute holiness of God and the amazing love of Christ for us sinners. There is so much food and meat here for us to digest.

Practical implications

1. It is a cry that should stir us up to hate sin

May we never take sin lightly. May we never minimize the seriousness of human sin. How serious is human sin? Look at Calvary. Behold the man crucified there. Hear Him say, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

It was our sin that was laid on Jesus that day. It was our sin that caused the Father to forsake His beloved and to abandon His only begotten Son. Remembering this, may we never take our sin lightly. May we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

To reconcile sinners to God, to bring man back to God is not free. Oh, it is free to us but it cost God and Christ everything. It cost Christ a life of humiliation and sorrows. It cost Him a painful and accursed death. It cost Him all comfort and consolation. It cost Christ everything to redeem us. Let us never make light of what cost Him so dearly. Let us hate sin and appreciate our Saviour. But you and I will never appreciate the great sacrifice of our Saviour unless we see the grievousness of human sin.

Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. The more bitterness we taste in sin, the more sweetness we shall taste in Christ. - Thomas Watson

2. It is a cry that should cause us to love Christ

He was forsaken that you might never be forsaken. He was abandoned that you might never be abandoned. He was deserted that you might never be deserted. He was forgotten that you might never be forgotten. He experienced hell that you might never experience hell. All these He did for you. All these He went through for your sakes.

Aren't these compelling reasons to love Christ. Aren't these compelling reasons to love what Christ love. Aren't these compelling reasons to love Him not only in word but in action and deed.

This great and glorious and holy God who is above all, who is incomparable, who is without sin, humbled Himself by coming to us, took a human form, dwelt among us, made sin for us, made a curse for us, bore our sins in His body, for what? To redeem sinners like you and me.

Oh, love Him! Love Him with all your heart. He deserves your love.

*Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Now, allow me to speak to those who are still lost among us. My prayer as you hear the words, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**, may you also hear the gracious voice which says;

Isaiah 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

But, oh, guilty and unforgiven sinner, there's light for a look at the Saviour, and life more abundant and free. Turn now your eyes upon Jesus. Oh, trust Him! Simply by trusting him. He will not cast you away. He will not disappoint you. He will give you mercy, forgiveness, eternal life, and heaven.

How about it? Come to Jesus. Come as you are. Why not come to Jesus now? Come! Come! Come! Come to Jesus now! Come, confessing and believing and trusting.

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?

He cried with a loud voice so that you may hear His anguish. He cried with a loud voice so that you hear what He went through to make salvation possible for you. But He also He cried with a loud voice so that you may hear Him say to you, "I did all these for you!"

Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30: For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Come confessing and believing and trusting the One who was forsaken for your sakes. But remember Christ was not forsaken forever. The Father honored Him and exalted Him by raising Him back from the dead.

Romans 8:34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

I am not inviting you to trust a dead and defeated Saviour. I am inviting you and asking you trust a great and a mighty Saviour. He is mighty to save. He able to save the vilest sinner.

Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Come to Christ. Come the to the Saviour. He is ready, willing and able to save all who come to Him. He will forgive you. He will cleanse you. He will save you. He will make you holy.

Amen!