

Words of Life From the Cross: The Faithful Word!

A sermon based on Matthew 27:45-46.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Where were you, God?” Have you ever asked that question before? In our Sunday morning Bible class, we’ve been working through the book of 1 Thessalonians, which is this letter of encouragement to those Christians who were undergoing persecution and trials and struggles because of their faith. A couple of weeks ago, we were talking about the persecutions we face today, how they’re still here, just taking different shapes and forms.

Anyways, one form we talked about was the persecution our kids are facing in schools today. We mentioned this picture of a t-shirt going around on Facebook...real fitting, especially in light of the gun violence happening these days...and even in our schools. The t-shirt said, **“Dear God, why do you allow so much violence in our schools? Signed, a concerned student.” And God’s reply? “Dear concerned student, I’m not allowed in schools. – God.”**

Now, you might agree with that sentiment; maybe you find a little bit of humor in the irony of the reality. But what that t-shirt does is, it points to something a lot of people are feeling these days...abandoned, forsaken, left all alone to face the troubles of this life. And you might be there, too. And so often, it’s leading to this question: “Where are you/where were you, God?”

That’s the question we hear this morning from Jesus as he hangs on the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Are his reasons the same? We’d have to say ‘yes,’ right? Why would God, a fair and just God, allow his Son – his only Son – to die the death he didn’t deserve? To the one who had been faithful to God his entire life, with every thought and word and deed right in line with God’s will and God’s desires and God’s commands, you would have expected God to carry out his justice and remove Jesus from this torment, or at the very least, to be present there right up to the moment the pain and suffering was over. But he wasn’t, and so we would expect Jesus to be anxiously crying out, **“Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?”** “Where God, are you, when I need you the most... why aren’t you there when I need you by my side, to right this wrong?”

To us, that understanding would make the most sense. But that wasn’t what Jesus meant. Allow me to present two other explanations to his words here. First off, Jesus’ words were a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. With His cry, Jesus underscores the prophetic nature of His death. This was no accident, no simple miscarriage of justice, no quirk of history. The sentences are no coincidences; they are the plan of God from all eternity that the world should find its redemption in the death of the Son of David, the Son of God. Flip through Psalm 22 and you’ll see. Hundreds of years before that moment on Calvary, King David, in the midst of his own trials, wrote, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me?”**

Jesus’ onlookers would have had to recognize the connection. If they had the psalm committed to memory, and many did, they would have remembered David’s vividly prophetic portrayal of a crucifixion long before crucifixions were even a thing. **“Dogs have surrounded me;”** he wrote, **“a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and**

gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” Jesus is living and dying this psalm.

But the people still misunderstood his cry. Those who heard Jesus misheard Him and thought He was calling out for Elijah to save Him. They offered Jesus a drink of sour wine and then waited to see if Elijah would come.

But Jesus had no need for Elijah’s services. He hadn’t just come to be the direct fulfillment of David’s psalm. There, hanging on the cross, was the one who had come to fulfill Elijah and all of the prophets...and all of their prophecies mirroring the first gospel promise, there in the Garden of Eden: ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”***

And so, his cry is not a call for help, but a cry out of the depths of our fallen humanity, out of our own death and despair. This is your abandonment, your darkness, your sin, your death that Jesus is experiencing in His own flesh.

God’s not the one who abandoned Jesus. You are. I am. The whole world is.

You see, sin is alienating. It drives a wedge between God and us and between each of us. And it’s not God’s fault. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and barred from the tree of life. Because of our sin, we are driven into the isolation of self. We set the barriers between us and God. We push ourselves away from God. We push God away from us. We too many times live like the Israelites did during the time of the Judges, where we hear, ***“everyone did as they saw fit,”*** not as God desired...which, what does that say to God? Something similar to the t-shirt? ***“God, you’re not allowed in my life.”***

Sin shuts us out from God and from one another. In our time of darkness and despair, we cry out, ***“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”*** but, again, the truth of the matter is we have forsaken God. We have turned from Him. We like sheep have gone astray, each in his or her own way. We have turned from God; God has not turned from us.

You need the proof? Look at the cross. Jesus, as the perfect Substitute, takes our place. He puts Himself where we are, and in so doing, experiences the silence and darkness and despair, the “dark night” of our collective human soul. He places Himself into our killing fields, our death camps, our concentration camps, our abortion clinics, our prisons. He enters into all the God-forsaken places where we cry out in despair, “Where are You, God? Why have You forsaken us?” Jesus utters the “why” question on behalf of all of us. Why does God permit this to happen? Why do the innocent suffer? Why does a just God permit suffering and a merciful God not prevent it?

And there’s the paradox in this cry. Jesus prays to a Father who appears to have abandoned Him in His time of need; the God who is absent and silent. He cries out into the darkness from His cross, and His cries trail off into the silence of space.

You see, He became the Sinner, condemned under God’s wrath, cursed on the tree. He is the adulterer, the thief, the murderer, the idolater. He is you. He willingly, knowingly, freely offered Himself on the altar of God’s justice, taking on Adam’s sin and rebellion and yours and making it His own, just like Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might***

become the righteousness of God.” For our sake God made Jesus – perfect Jesus - to carry our sin, so there on the cross, with all sins of all time heaped on him, as the worst sinner ever, God abandoned him...completely separated from him, and so Jesus experienced, suffered...our hell.

And yet still, like David who prayed these words before Him, Jesus prays. Isn't that faith? Faith prays to the God who is silent, who appears to have withdrawn, whose hand of blessing has shut tightly, who appears not to be there. Faith calls out “my God” and will not let God off the hook. This is faith that clings to the promise of God, when all that you have is the promise of God. Like the centurion who said to Jesus, “Only say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8), faith in Jesus trusts that the word of Jesus is sufficient.

This is the faith of Jesus that is at the heart of our faith. He trusts for us. He prays for us. He cries out for us. He suffers for us. He dies for us. He embraces us so we will never be forsaken in our time of need; we will never be alone in the hour of our death; we will not be abandoned in the Day of Judgment. Jesus is there, joined to us and we to Him in through our baptismal faith. He is with us, always, promising never to leave or forsake us.

“Where are you, God?” Remember this faithful word when God seems to have forsaken you, on your dark Good Friday afternoon. Remember this cry of the Son of God calling out to heaven in your place, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”, and hear in that the word of life...in his death...even more so, in his complete separation from God – enduring hell – we have life through Jesus, in Jesus, because of Jesus. ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*** That is you. You are reconciled to God in Jesus. You are justified in Jesus. You are safe in Jesus. And you are never forsaken. Amen.

We pray... For Your suffering in the darkness, for Your cry of abandonment, for Your becoming our sin so that we in You might become the righteousness of God, for Your taking upon Yourself our alienation, our division, our estrangement, our death, we give You thanks, most holy Jesus. Amen.