

As you know during this period of Lent we've been examining the 7 last phrases which Jesus spoke as he hung on the cross. We've looked at Words of forgiveness – Father forgive them, words of Assurance – today you will be with me in paradise, words of love – behold your son, behold your mother, and today we come to words of anguish – My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. Now, when I begin each week working on a sermon, I sometimes come across quotations of great theologians and preachers of what they have said about a passage of scripture. And sometimes what I might do is include this as a quote in my talk. In my preparation for today's talk I came across 2 theologians views on this verse. First the great Martin Luther who said, "God forsaking God who can understand that?". And then Charles Spurgeon said "Fully understand it, who can?"

So, that makes things really easy and comforting doesn't it?

Just a little story as I begin. Imagine the scene of 2 University students, who are sitting drowning their sorrows in the student's union bar – neither look terribly happy. They both, it turns out, have the same complaint, but their situations really could not be more different. The first guy is complaining about that his parents have cut him off. Not only will they not send him more money, but they aren't even interested in talking to him. He says he feels abandoned. He says to his mate, "Hey, aren't parents meant to love you no matter what: It's not fair. Why are they treating me this way". But as you delve into his story, you find that he's actually been fuelling a drug addiction, and had come home one day to take money that's in his parents' house, and at the same time takes his mum's rings and sells them to get more cash".

So the other guy tells his mate a similar story, that his parents don't want anything to do with him either. There's been no contact, no comfort, no support, no love. But again as you delve deeper into his story, you find that there is no easy explanation, because he was always the perfect son. He always did the right things, always showed them love and respect, and did whatever pleased them. He only left home because they sent him away, and now he's all alone. He doesn't understand it. It's not like them to treat anyone this way, and it's not fair. And so he asks, "Why me?"

When we think of those words of Jesus on the cross, it's not so much a why me question, but it's more a where are you question.

Like the second guy, humanly speaking, there was no good reason for Jesus to be suffering, because he had done everything right. He deserved nothing but the best from his Father, and yet here on the cross he was getting the worst. He had been abandoned. Cut off. Left alone. Left to suffer. Left to die. Forsaken. And here it is important for us to understand the unity of the Godhead. We are not just talking about a relationship with his Father God. Jesus has already declared in John 10:30 that [he] and the Father are one. He is not a messenger of God, he is equal in power to God. His equality with God has placed him at risk of stoning because of blasphemy. Jesus was present with God his Father at the time of creation, as Paul states to the church of Colossae chapter 1:16-17 when he says, "in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all

things, and in him all things hold together”. So when Jesus is forsaken by the Father, this is a dismantling of the Godhead in that split second.

And you have to admit that it doesn't make much sense to us. If Jesus and God are one, then Jesus should know what God already knows. And this shows how complete the separation is. And so in this very moment, he voluntarily sets aside his divine powers and privileges, and so there were things hidden from his sight and comfort that was withheld from his heart. On all other occasions Jesus addresses God as his Father. Here he doesn't. It meant that he really was abandoned. Not just that he felt like he was all alone in the world — he really was.

And so why? Why would a loving and perfect Father forsake his loving and perfect Son? Why would he put him through all the torments of hell? That's right – Jesus is going to hell, because the weight of sin that he is carrying means that he has to take it, because if he doesn't then all of humanity is going there.

I'd like to explain the why with a bit of science. Last year, we took the boys to Lake Como for our holidays, and one of the evenings there was a massive lightning storm over the lake. I love watching lightning – and it seems to be particularly dramatic in other countries – it's the sheer power that is released in the flash. I wonder do you know how lightning works – basically in a storm cloud there will be a mixture of positive and negative charges. These separate out and the negative charges begin to make their way towards the ground. In response to these negative charges coming from the cloud base, currents of positive charges start moving upwards from the ground, The charges build up, and the situation can't continue indefinitely – something's got to give the tremendous force that's built up needs to be discharged. So almost instantaneously, a much larger electric current shoots up to the cloud, following the path taken by the charges. And that's what we see in the sky that is known as lightning. You might think that lightning flows downwards, but it's actually the opposite way. So after it strikes, the tension between the clouds and the ground is removed.

When we consider what happened at the cross, it is this massive build-up and tension between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, between what is holy and what is sinful. All humanity, before the time of the cross, and after the time of the cross until present was charged with sin. It has grown in opposition to God's positive and perfect holiness — and the situation could not continue indefinitely. Eventually something had to give, because God's wrath over our disobedience and unbelief would not be held back forever. It would either burn against each and every one of us individually, or something had to take our place. You see God is perfect and therefore no evil, no corrupt sin can be near him. A bit like a high rise building , the man who stood tallest and stood out from all others would be stricken, so that the tension between heaven and earth would be gone — God and humanity would be reconciled, at peace, declared righteous.

And that's the amazing thing that God planned, and accomplished when he walked away from Jesus on that cross. When people wrongly consider God to be vengeful, they've not understood the power of the cross. And today folks if you don't hear anything else, hear this. God loves everyone of his creation – no one, no one is excluded from his love, and as a loving God he did not want to discharge his wrath on any of us. God desires the death and

punishment of no one. But justice demanded that a price had to be paid for each and every sin, every piece of brokenness in our world. Someone would have to die, because as Paul reminds the Romans in chapter 6:23, 'the wages of sin is death'. Who would that someone be if it wasn't you and me? And this is the most incredible thing - God, in his love, determined that it would be his own Son. No one else would be able to defeat death, so the only way of defeating sin was in Jesus. And so at that very point, the full force of God's wrath exploded upon him, as all of the Father's righteous anger focused in on that one person, at that one place, at that one point in time. He was stricken for us and in our place. He suffered so we wouldn't have to.

That ultimate moment of complete separation from God, ensured that we through Christ, would never be separated from God. I'm not sure how many people fully get this, but once you do, and I hope by the power of God's Holy Spirit it has, then it completely changes your life forever. God gave his Son so that all of us might be his children. You are a child of God, if you recognise his forgiveness because Jesus was forsaken.

When I take funeral services, I try to remind people through the words of Paul to the Romans, that not even death will separate you from God's love. And so, in light of what Jesus did for us when he stretched out his arms on the cross, and with God-given faith in him, we can come, and confess our guilt and bring our brokenness to Jesus. We lay all of this on Jesus who bears them all and takes all the blows that we deserve — but then they're gone. They're paid for, washed away, they're forgiven. And even though Satan will try to dig up your past, he can't take our sins and use them to accuse us any longer, because the sting of sin has been removed forever.

That is why Jesus came. That is why God abandoned him on the cross. To take away your sins, and make you his own dear child. God loves you, and wants you with him, and there is no greater evidence of his love than the cross of Christ.

As you know from time to time I have a take home thought or question for you based on our reading. But actually today, Jesus' statement to God, "why have you forsaken me?" doesn't actually apply to us. You see, because Jesus asked this of God — because he suffered separation from God and all the pains of hell as our substitute — we will never have to ask the question — we will never even have to contemplate a present or a future apart from our Lord and his love. Never. God's grace gives us the amazing answer that Jesus suffered and died in your place — and he did it because God loves you, and wants you to be his child.

This morning as we close, may we remember the pain and the cry in that statement from Jesus on the cross. He went through that sheer agony of being separated from His Father so that you and I would never have to be separated from our Father. Yet, the reality is that so many people are walking around in a broken fellowship with God. It doesn't have to be that way. Christ went through that separation from God for you. Don't make what Christ did pointless in your life, because if you choose to not see the point of Christ in your life, then your future isn't pointless, it's actually hopeless.

4<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – My God, my God, why have you forsaken me Matthew 27:45-50

Instead today know that God will never forsake you. Know his love for you today. Know your inheritance in his Kingdom, and receive it.