

Chapter Four: Jesus' Fourth Saying

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Matthew 27:46

"Alone on the Cross"

When I was in the 7th grade, I had to go to the hospital for some minor tests. I was in a couple of days. What an experience! My parents took me to my room. After visiting hours that night, they left. I felt all alone. In the bed next to me was an elderly man who was delirious. They had him strapped down to keep him from hurting himself. He was yelling. Then I heard him say, "Hey boy, come here. There's a knife in that drawer. Get it, and cut me loose!" Not knowing what to do, I was petrified! I didn't know anybody. I was in a totally strange place. That was an experience I had to go through alone (By the way, finally a nurse came, told me to just ignore the man. Easier said than done! Eventually they moved me to another room).

It's hard to go through a painful experience anytime. But especially if you are alone.

This morning, I want to take you to the scene of the cross again. On the cross, our Beloved Savior endured many horrid types of pain. The blunt spikes that ripped through His hands and feet. The cruel mockery of the crowd. The thorns that pierced His brow.

Yet as terrible as was this pain, there was an even greater pain. The pain of being all alone. You see, Jesus was alone on the cross. He faced loneliness like no other person. We may go through deep valleys where we FEEL alone, forsaken, and forgotten by God. But Jesus WAS alone.

Oh friends, God the Father turned His back on His Son that day on the cross. We feel the pain of His loneliness as we listen to His fourth saying from the cross.

Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish. Here the wormwood and the gall, and all the other bitterness, are outdone. Here you may look as into a vast abyss; and though you strain your eyes, and gaze till sight fails you, yet you perceive no bottom; it is measureless, unfathomable, inconceivable. This anguish of the Saviour on your behalf and mine is no more to be measured and weighed than the sin which needed it, or the love which endureth it. We will adore where we cannot comprehend (51)."

When we come to the 4th saying on the cross, we have reached the pinnacle of our Savior's suffering. His first three sayings focused on the needs of others:

In behalf of His murderers, He prayed: "Father, forgive them." To the repentant thief, He offered hope: "Today you will be with Me." To Mary and John, He spoke words of compassion: "Behold thy son...mother."

Finally, in His fourth saying, Jesus speaks of Himself. And what does He say? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" It is reported that Martin Luther sat for hours without food or rest, silently pondering these words. When at last he spoke, Luther said, "God forsaken of God! Who can understand that?" (Strauss, 68)

Preachers and writers have described this fourth saying in a variety of ways. It's been called "The Cry of Desolation," "The Cry of Desertion," "The Cry of Dereliction," "The Cry of Despair," and "The Cry of Desperation." (Strauss, 68) The bottom line is this. It was the cry of One who was all alone on the cross.

What really happened during those dreadful, dark hours on the cross? Jesus faced the pain of being alone so that we might never be alone again.

Let us ponder Jesus' fourth saying, as recorded in Matthew 27:46. As we do, we will learn that while all alone on the cross, Jesus felt 3 horrid pains.

Context: Luke recorded Jesus' first two pronouncements from the cross. John alone recorded the third. Matthew and Mark both record the fourth. In fact, it is the only saying Matthew and Mark record, and it is the only saying repeated in two different gospel accounts.

Remember, Luke was not an apostle. Matthew was. He had followed Jesus for 3 years. He had fled for his life that night the soldiers came for Jesus.

Notice, from Matthew's perspective, the details at the scene of the cross:

--v 33 Jesus was crucified at a place that looked like a skull.

--v 34 He refused any sedative to dull the pain. He chose to endure the full weight of His horrid execution.

--v 37 A mocking sign was nailed above Him.

--vv 39-40 The crowd scoffed at Jesus. They scoffed at His prediction (40). They scoffed at His lack of ability (41-42 "Come down!"). They scoffed at His Claim (43 "I am the Son of God").

These were blasphemous sins! Jesus could have rightly called the angels to destroy the mob, the world, for this blasphemy. He did not. Rather, He did the unthinkable. He chose to take their sin, and their judgment, upon Himself.

How do we know that? Look what happened. V 45 "Now from the sixth hour...darkness."

Darkness. There's something eerie about darkness. Mysterious. We feel out of control in darkness, vulnerable.

For the Jews, darkness in the land was a sign of judgment and tragedy. Mark tells us that Jesus was nailed to the cross at the third hour (Mk 15:25). That's 9:00 in the morning. He died at the ninth hour, that is, at 3:00 in the afternoon. He was on the cross for 6 hours. During the final 3 hours, from noon to 3:00, there was darkness. Why?

This was exactly what God had predicted would happen. 8 centuries earlier, the prophet Amos recorded this in Amos 8:9-10, "And it shall come to pass IN THAT DAY, saith the LORD God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day. And I will turn your feasts into mourning...and I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day."

And so the words can forth in His native Aramaic, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" While alone on the cross, Jesus felt 3 horrible pains. Here is the first.

I. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Anguish of sin.

"My God, My God"

"My God, My God"--notice He did not pray, "My Father." In His first saying, He cried, "Father, forgive them." In His last He would say, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." But here, He calls out not to "My Father," but to "My God."

Why? Consider two important reasons.

A. He fulfilled prophecy.

"My God, my God" are the first words from a psalm of David, a messianic psalm. Let's turn to Psalm 22.

There on the cross, Jesus quoted the words penned by David. I would suggest that by quoting the first verse, Jesus identified with the WHOLE psalm.

The psalm speaks of the silence of God.

Vv 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...thou hearest not."

The psalm identifies the holiness of God (3). Here's why God was silent! The psalm reveals the Messiah's rejection by hateful men (6-8, 12-13). The psalm records a vivid description of the horrors of crucifixion (14-18).

There on the cross, Jesus identified with the 22nd Psalm. He fulfilled the 22nd Psalm. It summed up His feelings.

Please notice that Psalm 22 does not end in dismay, but in hope. V 24 "For He hath not despised nor abhorred...the afflicted...He heard." God did hear! And though the pain was great, notice the result. V 27 "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD...worship..."

Do you see the sovereignty of God at the cross? Jesus' death was no accident. When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God," He was saying, "What's happening to Me right now is the very anguish David predicted. God's purpose is happening exactly as planned!"

The physical suffering Jesus endured was unthinkable. Yet compared to the spiritual agony of the cross, it pales. For on the cross, not only did our Savior fulfill prophecy, He also faced hell for us.

B. He faced hell for us.

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior! / Guilty, vile and helpless we, Spotless Lamb of God was He; Full atonement! can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

"Was it for crimes that I have done, He groaned upon the tree? Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree! / Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut His glories in, when Christ, the mighty Maker died, for man the creature's sin."

What words! "My God, my God." II Corinthians 5:21 is the key which unlocks the mystery of Jesus' fourth saying. What actually happened during those 3 dark hours of anguish? "For He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us."

Jesus gave His life FOR US. Consider the following:

Jn 10:11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

Isa 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray...the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Jn 11:49-50 Caiaphas the high priest said, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the

people...And this he spoke not of himself; but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die FOR THE NATION."

Gal 3:13 "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law,being made a curse for us"

I Pt 2:24 "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree"

There on the cross, Jesus took our sin for us. No, more than that, He became sin for us. He endured hell FOR US, in our place. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Anguish of sin.

II. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Agony of silence.

"Why"

Note: This is possibly the only recorded question Jesus ever asked His Father.

The text says that Jesus "cried with a loud voice." If you know anything about Roman crucifixion, this was unusual. After hanging on a cross for 6 hours, a victim would have great difficulty breathing, let alone, crying out.

Listen to that word. "Why!" Remember what Jesus is doing. He is praying! Though in His darkest hour, He prays. Sometimes the most eloquent prayer is little more than a cry (Hobbs, 58).

Jesus cried, "Why!" Is it ever OK to ask "Why" when we pray? Surely! Our Lord did. We must bring all of our questions, all of our burdens to God. "Why" was not a challenge, but a faith-cry (Strauss, (75).

Jesus cried, "Why?" The question of a baffled heart.

But there was no answer. He felt the agony of silence. The sound of that silence was the most terrible sound ever heard. There Jesus hung, in the dark, in the agony of silence.

He felt a third pain that day.

III. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Abandonment of a Son.

"Have you forsaken me?"

Is there a sadder word in the English language than this? Forsaken. In the greek, it is made up of 3 words (Jones, 54): to leave (meaning to abandon) + down (suggesting defeat and helplessness) = in (referring to place or circumstance).

In those dreadful hours, Jesus was all alone. He who had enjoyed eternal fellowship with His Father now felt abandoned by His Father.

Why, even during His incarnation, Jesus experienced sweet communion with His Father. Through prayer.

Now on the cross, even that is gone. No fellowship. Only hell. Jesus went through the fires of hell on the cross. Literally. During those 3 hours of darkness, the Son of God tasted an eternity of suffering. The infinite One endured an infinite degree of suffering.

How do we know that? Because of what He said, "My God, my God, why hast Thou FORSAKEN me?" Forsaken! Abandoned by His Father!

The Light of the world hanging in darkness!

And why? Because sin isolates man from God. Sin cut off Adam from God in the garden. Sin cut off Jesus from the Father. Not His sin. Our sin.

Herschel Hobbs wrote (53), "If you can imagine every sin that has ever been or ever will be committed being reduced to one nauseous mass, then you can grasp the horror of that which was nailed to that cross...See them as one bundle of writhing snakes! Smell their putrefying odor! Then we begin to get some fair idea of the revulsion that was in the holy heart of God."

I would suggest to you (as Spurgeon observed, 57), that to be forsaken of God was much more a source of anguish to Jesus than it would be to us. Do you know why? Because He was perfectly holy. We are not. Unholy creatures hide from a Holy God, like bugs that scatter when their rock is overturned. But for the Holy Son of God to be abandoned by His Holy Father! O the eternal pain Jesus endured!

Certainly, none of us are immune from trials. We face trials of all sorts. But we cling to the promise, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art WITH ME." He's always there for us.

But Jesus was all alone. He felt forsaken. Abandoned.

Someone has written (Turnbull, 35): "There was none other good enough, to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven, and let us in. We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains He had to bear, but we believe it was for us, He hung and suffered there."

Conclusion:

How did the crowd respond to Jesus' words? They responded in mocking rejection. Some thought He was calling for Elijah (47). One of them ran and got a sponge of vinegar wine. Out of mercy? No. To dull his pain, so he wouldn't die too soon. To prolong His agony.

And then they watched Him, saying (49), "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."

Jesus was all alone.

You say, "I don't understand how those people could have been so cruel to Jesus." Let me ask you a question. What have YOU done with Jesus?

Challenge: Let me challenge each of us to do 3 things this morning. (see Spurgeon, 67-8)

1. Let us thank Jesus. We deserved the hell He took. God will never forsake us because God forsook His Son on our behalf. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Why did Jesus utter that cry? So you and I would never have to utter it! (Strauss)
2. Let us learn from Jesus. We all go through times of grief and pain, times when we feel all alone. As if God has forgotten us. We must learn from Jesus' example. In those times, we must turn to Scripture and prayer. We must turn to God, not away from Him.
3. Let us hate the sin that brought such agony on Jesus. What a wretched thing sin is! Sin took our Lovely Lord to the tree.

How is it that we can laugh at sin? How is it possible that we can sit in front of a TV, and in the name of entertainment, watch with delight things that caused our Savior so much agony? How can we tolerate pet sins in our lives, knowing what those sins forced our Lord to endure?

Oh friend, if we really love Christ, we will hate sin. Listen to Spurgeon (68): "O, if I had a dear brother who had been murdered, what would you think of me if I treasured the knife which had been crimsoned with his blood?--if I made a friend of the murderer, and daily consorted with the assassin, who drove the dagger into my brother's heart? Surely I, too, must be an accomplice in the crime!"

"Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it?"

If our sin put Jesus through such agony, how can we be so glib about it? Let us hate sin, all of it. Let us rid ourselves of sin, today.