

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: April 3, 2011
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

Mark 15:34

□ {Mark 15:34} **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** This is the cry of dereliction, Christ’s fourth word from the cross.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This is the most gut-wrenching, heart-breaking part of the entire crucifixion.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

→ This word (lowercase “w”) from {Jn 1:1} **“the Word”** (uppercase “W”) who **“was with God, and [who] was God”!** From the Christ who was {Php 2:6} **“in very nature God”!** From the Son who said, {Jn 14:9; 10:30} **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” “I and the Father are one”!**

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This is an alarming word, is it not? It is hard to hear!

It becomes even more disturbing when we begin to see that it was because of me Jesus said this. It was because of you. It was because of humanity in its entirety.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

🔔 We are the answer to his question! {Is 53:4-5, 10} **“He took up *our* pain and bore *our* suffering ... he was pierced for *our* transgressions, he was crushed for *our* iniquities.” “The LORD” made “his life an offering” (or “sacrifice”) “for [*our*] sin.”**

That last phrase (“**made his life...**”) is the crux of the matter. It clarifies why Jesus endured the cross, and it helps to interpret the cry of dereliction

Sacrifices of animals, grain, and drink were tightly woven into the fabric of Hebrew theology and worship. They set the pattern for Christ’s incarnation, ministry and death and, by extension, our discipleship.

☆ Most Old Testament sacrifices fell into five categories. Each had its own procedures, but one step that all the animal sacrifices had in common was the laying on of hands.

→ The instructions for the burnt offering are typical of the rest: {Lev 1:4} **“You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.”** (The original Hebrew is forceful, which is why {JH Kurtz} **“The rabbis expressly required that [this action] [must] be performed with all the powers of the body.”**)

👉 With the laying on of hands the worshiper was identified with the sacrifice (and the sacrifice with them) and they transferred their guilt to the animal. As it died, so did their burden of guilt (albeit temporarily).

✝ So it was with the Messiah. When his enemies laid hands on him he became identified with all sinners, and our guilt was transferred to him – even though their intent was murder, rather than worship.

→ When the Sanhedrin met to discuss how to restrict Christ’s influence, the high priest Caiaphas said: {Jn 11:49-50} **“You know nothing at all! You do**

not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

He was talking about the violent Jewish revolt and subsequent Roman crackdown he mistakenly expected Jesus to provoke. Even so, without realizing it he was announcing a deep theological Truth about salvation.

→ {Jn 11:51-53} **“He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.”**

→ The Father worked through their wickedness to accomplish his good plan. In the death that they engineered, {2 Co 5:21, TNIV/NLT} **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”**

→ Remember Isaiah {59:2}: **“But *your* iniquities have separated *you* from your God; *your* sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”** (As an aside, note that sin changes *our* hearts toward God, {Ro 5:10; 8:7} it makes us his enemies, hostile in mind and unable to submit to him; it does not change God’s heart toward *us*. And so the atoning work of Christ does nothing to change God, and everything to change us. Scripture explicitly states {2 Co 5:19} **“that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ”** – not that God was reconciling himself to the world.)

Jesus took on our sin. That is what separated him from God, and that is why he cried, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”!**

There is more.

☆ The five normal kinds of sacrifices were presented daily, sometimes by tens of thousands of people. But the most important offering of all was made only once a year on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) by only one man (the high priest).

◇ 1st, the high priest cast lots over two male goats. One said “[for] **the LORD**,” the other said “[for] **Azazel**”.

◇ 2nd, {Lev 16:15-19} the high priest laid hands on and then slaughtered the goat that was “[for] **the LORD**.” Its blood made atonement for the worship center, its contents, and the whole community of Israel.

◇ 3rd, the high priest laid {Lev 16:21a} **“both hands on [the] head [of the goat for Azazel] and [confessed] over it all” of Israel’s “wickedness and rebellion... – all their sins – and put them on the goat’s head.”**

◇ 4th, instead of slaughtering this scapegoat, the high priest sent it away into the wilderness outside the community {Lev 16:21b} **“in the care of someone appointed for the task.”** That goat, explains Leviticus 16:22, would **“carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.”**

The animal was forsaken. It was physically abandoned and figuratively alienated from the Tabernacle or Temple, and thus from God’s presence, and also from the people whose sins it bore.

✝ The goat that was slain foreshadowed the violent physical death of Jesus. The scapegoat that

was driven into the wilderness, never to return, foreshadowed the even greater agony of Christ's separation from the Father, due to the fact that he bore the sins of humankind.

→ Remember Isaiah {59:2}: “**Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.**” But Jesus had no iniquity, so it was not his iniquities that separated him from God. And though {Heb 4:15} “**He was tempted in every way ...– he did not sin**”, so it was not his sins that hid God’s face from him.

No, it was because of my sin, and yours, and that of your dearest loved one and worst enemy that Jesus cried, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”!

✠ This is precisely the point at which the cross is {1 Co 1:23-24} “**a stumbling block to Jews**” (and all others who expect a triumphant, political Messiah) “**and foolishness to Gentiles**” (and all others who bristle at the suggestion that they are so far gone as to need a Savior to make them right with God).

☹ Many enjoy hearing that God loves them – but not that their iniquity divides them from him. They take offense at the doctrine that {Ro 3:23} “**all people**” (including them) “**have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” They assume that if Jesus cried, “**why have you forsaken me?**” it was because of the wrong done by other people (the really bad ones).

☹ Many warm to the idea that Jesus was a martyr for a good cause – but not that he died as a scapegoat. The doctrine that the Messiah shed his blood to reconcile us to

God offends their sophisticated sensibilities. They are confident that whatever the cry of dereliction was about, it had nothing to do with the atonement of human sin and guilt.

That kind of thinking is attractive because it harmonizes with worldly wisdom. Unfortunately for those who buy into it, it conflicts with reality.

★ It is in conflict with reality in that it underestimates the insidious nature, pervasive penetration and lethal results of sin.

Sin is not just a “mistake.”

Sin is missing the mark. It is failure in the things that matter most: love, truth, and inward beauty.

Sin is lawlessness. It is rebellion against the good and the wholesome.

Sin is injustice. It is treachery against God, other people, the self, and the created order.

Sin is ungodliness. It is opposition to God’s goodness, and God himself.

Sin is depravity. It is a spiritual and moral infection that sickens the soul, mind and body.

Sin is slavery. It is bondage to a master whose purpose is to abuse, humiliate, and use us up.

Sin is degeneracy. It is dehumanization, degradation into less than we were created to be.

{Ro 6:23} “**The wages of sin is death.**” Slave for it long enough, and it will kill the body and soul – not just of thugs and killers and tyrants, but of even the nicest, most decent people, if they remain in their sin.

Those who are offended by the cross underestimate sin, and make a mockery of Jesus' cry: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

☆ It also conflicts with reality in that it underrates the infinite value, all-encompassing magnitude, and life-changing power of God's redeeming love poured out on the cross.

Receiving, returning and sharing God's perfect love is the one and only way for us to be in right relationship with him, thereby fulfilling our purpose and experiencing wholeness. His love is of infinite value.

Jesus died for everyone, from the greatest to the least, because it is his Father's desire to save everyone, without exception. His love poured is all-encompassing in magnitude.

A person can change their attitudes, thoughts and actions for the better, to a degree, for a time. But God can actually recreate us, gifting us with a new mind, a new heart and (after the resurrection) a new body! His love has life-changing power.

Those who are offended by the cross underrate God's redeeming love poured out upon it, and make a mockery of Jesus' cry: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

The cry of dereliction is the most gut-wrenching, heart-breaking part of the entire crucifixion. It is hard to hear. Yet I thank God for it.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This is the word of the Lord.