

A CRY FROM THE DEPTHS

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

With undying gratitude to you and to God for the privilege of being there, I shall never forget the impressions which I received while standing and gazing on that skull-shaped hill outside the city of Jerusalem where our Saviour died on the cross. Truly, it is an inestimable blessing to meditate on the statements which He made while hanging on that cross. While no pen can describe and no human tongue can express what Christ suffered there, it will be helpful for us to think about His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These matchless words must be approached with great reverence for the place whereon we stand is holy ground.

This cry of Christ stirs my soul more than any of the expressions which He uttered as He hung upon the cross. More than either of the other sayings, it expresses the intense suffering which Christ bore for me upon the cross. It is the most agonizing prayer that was ever uttered. To be forsaken of God is the most terrible experience that can come to anybody. Just to think that Christ went through such an experience for me stirs my soul to the very depths. Those lips, into which grace had become the parched lips of a lonely sufferer crying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus Christ addresses the Infinite by a name that He had never used in speaking to Him before, nor did He ever use it afterward. So far as the record goes, this is the only question that Christ ever asked God during His entire earthly ministry. He always accepted God's will for Him without question. He never faltered in His faith that the Father's plan for Him was best.

This cry makes Christ our Brother in mystery. There is a "why" in every life. Some have stood at the side of an empty cradle and said, "why?" Others with blasted hopes, blighted friendships and broken vows have said, "why?" The Sunday after Dr. Joseph Parker, of the City Temple in London, had buried his beautiful wife, his congregation wondered what text he would preach upon. He chose the one before us and said, "I thank God there was a 'why' in the Saviour's life." Yes, and such a fact brings comfort amid our loneliness and desolation.

Our Lord was then in the darkest part of His way. He had trodden the winepress now for hours, and the work was almost finished. He had reached the culminating point of His anguish. This is His dolorous lament from the lowest pit of misery: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish.

Christ suffered much from His enemies. He suffered in all parts of His body. His head was crowned with thorns and smitten with the reed. They smote Him on the face, and He gave His cheeks to them that plucked out the hair. He said, "I hid not My face from shame and spitting." He carried the heavy cross on His shoulders. He said, "I gave My back to the smiters." "They pierced My hands and My feet." A soldier thrust a spear into His side. He suffered from all sorts of men. He suffered much from the devil.

Christ suffered so much from men. Many followers who would have made Him king melted away. The members of His own household turned away from Him, and so did His fellow citizens of Nazareth. At last even His disciples forsook Him and fled. When those who were passing by wagged their heads, Christ spoke not a word. When the chief priests mocked Him, He did not murmur. He had been given up to the hands of men. They had done their worst, and God had not interfered. Earth had insulted Him, and heaven had not made any reply.

Forsaken! What a tragic word! We seem to hear the moan of a broken heart within it. To forsake means to leave behind in any state or place. What calamities are conjured up in this word--a man forsaken by his friends, a wife forsaken by her husband, a child forsaken by its parents! As the word left the lips of Christ it conveyed the idea of desertion. What a term to come from one who was bathed in the sunshine of His loving Father's

presence! The nails in His flesh, the insults of His enemies, the cruelty of men and the shame of the cross did not cause Him anything like the grief Christ experienced when He was forsaken by the Father. The hiding of God's face from Him was the most bitter ingredient of that cup which the Father had given the Redeemer to drink. As the concentrated wrath of heaven descended upon Him, He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Surely this is a cry that ought to melt the hardest heart!

That desertion was real. God did forsake Him. It was no fancy or delirium of mind, caused by His weakness of body, the heat of the fever, the depression of His spirit or the near approach of death, that led Christ to imagine what was not a fact. He endured all of the tortures of His body in silence, but when it came to being forsaken of God He was cut to the very quick and exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His fellowship with the Father had always been the highest, deepest, fullest and most perfect order, so what must the loss of it have been?

Why was our Saviour forsaken of God? The answer to that question is as close as you are to yourself. You are the answer. I am the answer. The reason why Christ was forsaken of God lies in you and in me. We are the cause. He stood in our stead. He took our place. Instead of you and me suffering the torments of hell, Christ suffered them in our place. Instead of you and me hanging on the cross, Christ was suspended there in our place. Instead of you and me being forsaken by God, Christ was forsaken by Him. Let this truth burn into your soul: Christ was forsaken that you and I might never be forsaken. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 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." He had no sin of His own, but He was bearing our sins in His body on the tree. There could not have been any laying on of suffering for sin without the forsaking of the vicarious sacrifice by the Lord God. Christ not only suffered from sin, but for sin. There could not have been any vicarious suffering on the part of Christ for human guilt, if He had continued consciously to enjoy the full sunshine of the Father's presence.

Exactly at noon that day, something extraordinary happened. The sun slowly began to withdraw its beams and darkness spread a funeral pall over all the world. We may easily surmise how terror took hold of all creation, perhaps the animals being filled with consternation and the birds returning to their nests. Some of the people began to be so filled with terror and terrible forebodings that they left Calvary and went back to Jerusalem, wringing their hands and beating their breasts, as if regretting what was taking place. No wonder that the glorious sun hid its face in darkness and refused to shine upon the Son of God when He was dying for the sons of men. From the sixth hour until the ninth there was darkness over the face of the earth. That was a darkness which no science can explain. It was not the darkness of night, for it came on at twelve o'clock and lasted until three. Nor was it the darkness of an eclipse, for the moon was at its full. It was nature's great expostulation and protest against the crucifixion of its Maker and our Saviour and Lord.

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut His glories in,
When He, the mighty Maker, died
For man the creature's sin."

This period of darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth seems to have been a period of silence. But at the ninth hour Christ broke the silence with His cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Why hast Thou left Me to bear this bitter load alone? Surely there was never such a cry from earth comparable to that lonely cry from the cross! "Why hast thou forsaken me?" It was a cry of desolation, separation and expiation. The very word "forsaken" is one of the most tragic in all human speech.

This abandonment by God was the penalty for our sins. The penalty upon sin is death, or

spiritual separation from God. This, as tasted by Christ, was the utmost price of the world's redemption. If any man thinks lightly of sin, or thinks that sin can be remedied by some light, cheap method, let him hear the echo of that cry from Calvary: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That cry is the measure of God's wrath towards sin; it is the measure of God's love for man; and the measure of Christ's work for our redemption. But there is great comfort in the knowledge that upon the cross Christ passed through utter desolation, experienced the utmost penalty of sin, which is separation from God, in order that you and I might never despair, that we might never be forsaken. How many seem content to live a lifetime in a condition of alienation from God, which our Lord could not endure for even a few hours!