

Lenten Series: “Live Like Jesus Is Dying.” “Jesus’ Sayings from the Cross”

Sermon #3: “My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

Scriptures: Mark 15:29-36

Source: Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/sermons/My-God-Why-Have-You-Forsaken-Me/>

Opening Video Clip

PP#1: *Image of three teenage Jewish boys from the time of Jesus.*

[*Monolog*] Josh, Jacob, and I had been celebrating the Festival of the Passover. The night before, we had celebrated the Passover Seder in Jerusalem. Our home is in Bethany, just an hour away, not even that. But we had gone into the city to celebrate the Passover at our aunt’s house, and it was great. We ate the roasted lamb and shared all the sacred foods that reminded us how our ancestors were once slaves in Egypt, but now we are free. And then, after singing the Hillel Psalm, we went back to Bethany that night. And then early the next morning, we woke up excited to have the day in Jerusalem. We were out of school, and it was a feast, a festival, and we were in Jerusalem, and we had the day to celebrate. So, early in the morning—we couldn’t sleep—we made our way back into Jerusalem. We didn’t want to miss anything!

PP#2: *Image of three crosses on a hill, off in the distance.*

We came to the city just after 9 a.m., and we saw in the distance, not too far, Gilgotha, the Place of the Skull, where the Romans crucified their victims - usually thieves, sometimes would-be messiahs. And Josh said, “Hey guys, let’s go see! Let’s watch!”

Jacob said, “Yes, let’s watch!”

And I said, “Sure!”

As we got near the hill, a passed by and said, “They’ve got Jesus of Nazareth there, they’re crucifying Him, too! You had better get up there and see.”

We’d heard of Jesus. He was the one from Galilee, who claimed to be the Messiah, and yet ate with sinners, and tax collectors, and prostitutes, who alienated and angered the religious leaders and the priests. So we went, and there was the crowd. There were three men on three crosses.

It sounds terrible, but we were three, 15 year-old boys, and we wanted to see! Crucifixion. We’d never really seen it before. We knew it would be terrible, but we wanted to see!

We pushed our way through the crowd, and we got right up to the front so we could see them: we could see their faces, and the blood streaming from their wrists and feet.

PP#3: *A closer image of Jesus and the two thieves.*

I was surprised, but the thieves were teasing Jesus in the middle, taunting Him. The crowd was also insulting Him, humiliating Him. Our leaders, and the priests, called out to Him and said, “You, who claimed to be the Messiah, who claimed you could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, look at you now! Come down from the cross, show us your power!”

There were the people of the crowd, from all around, from my town of Bethany, and all around, and they made fun of Him too. They said, “You think you’re the Messiah? You’re going to

teach us something about how to live? Look at you now! You're dying the death of a criminal! You, who ate with sinners and tax collectors, you're going to tell us how to live? I don't think so!"

PP#4: *A close-up image of Jesus on the cross, looking down at me.*

Josh was the first to speak out. We kind of got swept up into it all. We joined in. Josh called out "Get on with it and die already! We're sick of you!"

Jacob joined in, "You who were telling us how to live, you won't be telling us how to live much longer, will you? Just die!"

I couldn't be left out. The anger was thick through the crowd. Now, I'd never seen this man before. He had never done anything to me. But I took a step out towards Him and said, "You are a nobody!" and I spit on Him.

At that moment, He looked down at me from the cross. His eyes were so deep, so full of sorrow...so sad! I stepped back into the crowd, wanting to hide. I felt in my heart a shame. How could I be so mean? And at that moment, He lifted Himself up, took a deep breath, looked up into the heavens, and cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

I'll never forget the shame I felt knowing that I had helped this man feel forsaken by God.

[End of monolog.]

PP#5: "Live Like Jesus Is Dying." "Jesus' Sayings from the Cross"

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" - Mark 15:34

Live like Jesus is dying. Jesus' sayings from the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Today we continue on with the series of listening to what Jesus said those six hours He was hanging on the cross. He spoke seven times, at least that's how many were recorded in the Gospels. The Gospel of Luke records three of them. We began this series with the first of Jesus' statements in Luke: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

And then last week we went to John's Gospel, where there are three more statements by Jesus. We heard when Jesus looks at His mother Mary, and His disciple, John, and says, "Woman, this is your son," and then to John says, "This is your mother." He put His mother in John's care.

Today we go to Matthew and Mark's Gospels. They record only one of the sayings of Jesus from the cross. It's as if they are saying, "This one kind of sums it all up." It is the cry of utter abandonment, when Jesus exclaims, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

As we journey to Easter, we are listening to what Jesus is saying from the cross, and listening for what it says about who Jesus is, about what is going on at the cross, and what it says about us.

Today we listen not as any particular person at the cross, like a Mary or a John, but we listen as part of the crowd. That is where we place ourselves at this scene. You and I, when we see the Jesus on the cross, and hear His words, we are part of the crowd.

Let's see what Mark describes about this crowd.

PP#6-7: Mark 15:29-36

29 People walking by insulted Him, shaking their heads and saying, "Ha! So you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? 30 Save yourself and come down from that cross!"

31 In the same way, the chief priests were making fun of Him among themselves,

together with the legal experts. “He saved others,” they said, “but He can’t save Himself. 32 Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross. Then we’ll see and believe.” Even those who had been crucified with Jesus insulted him.

33 From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. 34 At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*,” which means, “My God, my God, why have you left me?”

35 After Hearing him, some standing there said, “Look! He’s calling Elijah!” 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, “Let’s see if Elijah will come to take Him down.”

Reader: Mark 15:29-36

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PP8: *Image of a large crowd when Jesus is on the cross.*

Six hours of this!

Now, Remember, He had already been insulted and humiliated *before* His crucifixion, by the leaders, the royalty, and the Romans.

But now, it was the crowd. It was His own people. And the most holy and pious people of their day. The most godly! It wasn’t enough to silence Him. It wasn’t enough to kill Him. It wasn’t enough to make Him die the most cruel death there was. But as this was happening to Him, they showed up to throw verbal daggers at Him, to dehumanize Him, to grind Him down in hopelessness, telling Him over and over again that nothing He had done was good, or worthwhile, or would ever last. Totally crushing. The most pious people were doing this...religious examples!

And then, with them, are the common, average, ordinary people. People like you and me. The people were there to celebrate the Passover. They were good Jews, pious people. Twelve hours earlier they had celebrated the Passover meal, remembering how God loved them, chose them, saved them. They proclaimed how they were looking for the Messiah, begging for Him to come. They were there, spewing out insults - hurtful, hateful words. They were bullying a man whose worse crimes were eating with sinners, healing on the Sabbath, and claiming to be God’s Messiah. How do you do that?

PP#9: *Image of people picking on someone, in a way that we can see we do it, too.*

How do WE do that? The problem is that this isn't *them*. It's *us*! We are a part of that crowd. Aren't we? Don't you remember a time when you got all swept up into the moment and unfairly and hurtfully derided someone? Joined in a crowd that was picking on someone, talking badly about someone you really didn't know, and you joined in? Kids can be cruel. Kids, our kids, they pick on any kid with anything different, weird, different. When we become older, we become more sophisticated in how we reduce other people. Ways that we don't like people. Ways that someone is different. We aren't like that...

Civilized, educated Christians in a Christian nation slaughter Jews, dissenters, communists, Roma people, any one different. Concentration and extermination camps! The Cambodia killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, killing people who had glasses or who had an education! Racist reactions, mob action, shooting of random police officers. Insults hurled at political rallies, shoes thrown, degrading comments. On line postings—somehow we are willing to say things and make comments we would never do in person, but on line we feel we can take all the filters off.

Do you see yourself in the crowd? The only way we can understand what is going on, on the cross, is if we see ourselves in the crowd. We would do that. Given the right conditions, we all would lower ourselves and do shameful things. Only by the grace of God that we don't. Say that with me, "Only by the grace of God." "Only by the grace of God."

The grace of God: that we see hanging on the cross, that rings in our ears. What's going on?

PP#10: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

1. Jesus knows what it feels like

Jesus cries out in a loud voice, full of emotion: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus knows what it feels like to feel abandoned by God. Now, we claim that Jesus is God, so this makes no sense to our Trinitarian thinking. But here we hear the humanity of Jesus crying out. Jesus knows that it's like to be in utter despair, when everything seems dark and hopeless. At those times, we always ask "Why?" And so does Jesus. He knows the answer in His mind, but this comes from His heart. It's breaking. Why, God? Why didn't you stop it? Why did you let it happen? When we feel utterly hopeless, when we feel like God's not there...Jesus prayed that prayer, too. He knows.

PP#11: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

1. Jesus knows what it feels like

2. Jesus shows what costly love is

Jesus suffered greatly for us. Jesus did this voluntarily. He died so the world might live. This is not just physical pain or emotional despair. Jesus was taking on the sin of the world. This is spiritual crushing. Jesus the man experienced something no other human ever has: God turning His back on them. Even in our darkest moments, God is still for us. But with Jesus, God withdrew. He experienced a despair I never will, thank God. This cross shows us God's love.

And we, who choose to follow Christ, we see by example what sacrificial love looks like. We see Jesus laying down His life for His enemies...sacrificing Himself for others. This kind of love changes the world! This is what it means to be human!

From the cross, we are invited to follow Him, invited into loving sacrificially. This is no longer playing church. Now, hopefully we are not called to die like this. But this means something...requires something from us. How do we sacrifice ourselves to show God's love to others? How do we give up convenience, comfort, entitlement, what we deserve, and take on inconvenience, pay the cost, choose what we wouldn't prefer, to show the love of God to someone?

We usually only do this for those closest to us. We do it for family, loved ones, close friends. But Jesus did it for strangers, for His enemies. What does that look like for us?

We heard today about the Dulac mission trip. People paid out of their own pockets, took vacation time, traveled hundreds of miles to people they don't know, just to show them God's love. How do you do that, even here at home? How do you spend your day, your time, on strangers?

This is the sackcloth of our lenten journey. We go without, so we can show God's love.

PP#12: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

1. Jesus knows what it feels like
2. Jesus shows what costly love is
3. Jesus turned to God

When Jesus is crushed, He doesn't forsake God, doesn't blame God for not saving Him, not helping Him, doesn't punish God by turning away. Instead, Jesus turns towards God, and prays. He hates what He is going through. He hates having to suffer so. But as He does, He turns towards God: "My God." And when Jesus cannot find God anywhere, Jesus worships.

What Jesus says, you see, is the words of a hymn. He cries out the opening lines of Psalm 22. Turn to it, if you have your phone...or grab the Bible in the pew in front of you. It's near the very center of the Bible. Psalm 22.

PP#13: Psalm 22

- 1 My God! My God, why have you left me all alone? Why are you so far from saving me—so far from my anguished groans?
- 4-6 Our ancestors trusted you...and you rescued them...they cried out to you and were saved...But I'm just a worm, less than human; insulted by one person, despised by another.
- 7-8 All who see me make fun of me—they gape, shaking their heads: "He committed himself to the Lord, so let God rescue him; let God deliver him because God likes him so much."

You'll see from its heading that this psalm was to be sung as a hymn. Jesus starts out the first line of a well-known hymn. He doesn't have the energy to keep going, but you'll see it is precisely what He is going through.

Verse 1, "My God! My God, why have you left me all alone? Why are you so far from saving me—so far from my anguished groans?"

Verse 4 "Our ancestors trusted you...and you rescued them...they cried out to you and they were saved...But I'm just a worm, less than human; insulted by one person, despised by another.

Verse 7 "All who see me make fun of me—they gape, shaking their heads: 'He committed himself to the Lord, so let God rescue him; let God deliver him because God likes him so much.'"

PP#14: Psalm 22

- 15-16 My strength is dried up like a piece of broken pottery. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you've set me down in the dirt of death. Dogs surround me; a pack of evil people circle me like a lion—oh, my crushed hands and feet!
- 18 They divvy up my garments among themselves; they cast lots for my clothes.
- 30-31 Future descendants will serve Him; generations to come will be told about my Lord. They will proclaim God's righteousness to those not yet born, telling them what God has done.

Verse 15 “My strength is dried up like a piece of broken pottery. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you’ve set me down in the dirt of death. Dogs surround me; a pack of evil people circle me like a lion—oh, my crushed hands and feet!”

Verse 18 “They divvy up my garments among themselves; they cast lots for my clothes.”

But this despair is not the last thought in that psalm. Notice it ends with hope! The suffering has a purpose. God is doing something through it. God is bringing out good from it.

Verse 30 “Future descendants will serve Him; generations to come will be told about my Lord. They will proclaim God’s righteousness to those not yet born, telling them what God has done.”

Who is that? Who are the unborn generations who know God, telling all that God has done? That’s us! Jesus was naming that from His despair, God would bring blessing to unborn generations! We see a glimpse of what was going on on the cross.

PP#15: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

1. Jesus knows what it feels like - We have a Savior who knows our deepest despair
2. Jesus shows what costly love is - Jesus calls us to show sacrificial love
3. Jesus turned to God in despair - When we do, God spreads blessing

We see Jesus crucified. We hear Him cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We can only hear this deeply when we place ourselves as part of the crowd. We hear that we have a Savior who knows our deepest despair; He knows what it is like. He’s been there. We hear how costly the love is that God shows us, and we hear an invitation to follow Him and love in a sacrificial way, too. We hear Jesus, in total hopelessness, turning toward God. He shows us how we can do that, too. We can continue to trust in God even when, to us, we see no hope or see no point. We hang on to God anyway. And when we do, God spreads the blessing in ways we cannot see or imagine.

From the cross we hear who Jesus is, what’s going on, and who we can be.
Amen.