

**The Word Of Dereliction**  
**Matthew 27:45-46**

**March 26, 2017**

**SI:** Easter is five Sundays away.

We're preparing for the celebration of our Lord's resurrection,  
by looking at a special portion of the Gospels.

We're meditating on the words Jesus spoke as he was dying on the cross.

These are often called the Seven Last Words or the Seven Words of the Cross,  
because Jesus spoke seven times.

All of Jesus' words and teachings are important, but isn't it the case that we often  
hang on to the last words of those we deeply love?

Whether it's the last words of dying parents, grandparents, or maybe a spouse—  
don't we look to find special meaning in their last words?

Throughout the ages Christians have meditated on and preached Jesus'  
last words, because they show us his heart and proclaim the Gospel  
in a powerful and condensed way.

**INTRO:** When I decided to go to seminary, a pastor I knew said to me:  
“So you’re going to seminary? Those were the driest years of my life.  
God seemed so far away.”

A Christian I admire once told me—

“I’ve prayed to the Lord to lift this cloud of depression and He hasn’t. Where is He?”  
I once heard another Christian say—“I was lying on the hospital bed  
and it seemed like my prayers were bouncing off the ceiling.”

One of the Psalm writers was a man named Heman. In Psalm 88 he wrote:  
“I cry to You for help, O Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before You.  
Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?”

Another Psalm writer was a man named Asaph. In Psalm 77 he wrote:  
“When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out  
untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.  
I remembered You, O God, and I groaned, I mused, and my spirit grew faint.”

And the most famous Psalm writer of all, King David wrote Psalm 22.  
It’s a prophecy of Christ’s suffering. But was also David’s own experience:  
“Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?  
O my God, I cry out by day, but You do not answer, by night and am not silent.”

Those are troubling Psalms, aren’t they?

The experiences of those three Christians I mentioned are also troubling.  
It’s perplexing to think of believers turning to God,  
only to have a sense that he is not there, or that he has turned his back.

But most perplexing of all is this word of Jesus from the cross.

Jesus took David’s words from the Psalm and at the moment of His  
greatest agony cried out in a loud voice,  
“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”  
One old preacher called this: “This is the most darksome word He ever uttered.”

This is a darksome word.

It’s dark because it brings us face to face with the fact that the most  
terrible thing a human being can experience is to be abandoned by God.  
Being forsaken by God brings an agony of soul that is deeper than any other pain.  
But this word of Christ is not just a dark word, it’s a word of great comfort.  
For that reason Christians have studied this word, pondered it, meditated on it.  
This is the only one of the seven words that is recorded as Jesus said it in Aramaic.

his first language, his cradle language, what Mary and Joseph spoke in home.  
Perhaps because it was particularly memorable and moving.  
More has been written about this word from the cross than any of the others.  
Out of all the seven words, this one has its own name.

It's traditionally called the cry of dereliction. Derelict/abandoned building.  
It's a word that is indelibly printed on the minds of Christians.  
And we are drawn back to this word—not just at Easter—  
but during any time we are greatly suffering.

Because perhaps more than anything else Jesus ever said,  
this word assures us that Jesus knows what it means to suffer.  
He can completely sympathize with us in our sufferings.  
He is not a distant Savior. He didn't live in a magic circle when he came to earth.  
He became a man and lived in a fallen world and suffered the absolute worst.  
So in our darkest hours we can know that he knows what we are going through.

But this word from the cross gives us much more than sympathy.  
Jesus not only suffered. He suffered for us—in our place.  
He was forsaken by God in his hour of greatest need so that you will  
never be forsaken by God in your need.  
If you know Jesus Christ you will never be deserted by God.

This fourth word of the cross is especially for all you here this morning  
who are passing through deep waters.  
Like Heman and Asaph and David perhaps you feel like your prayers are unheard.  
But God has not forsaken you.  
Jesus was forsaken so that you will never be forsaken.

Let's look at this word of Christ. Will study this word under two headings:

What Jesus suffered.  
Why Jesus suffered.

## **MP#1 What Jesus suffered**

When my grandmother was a girl her mother died.

She died at home of stomach cancer.

It was so bad that even the years did not erase the memory from my grandmother's mind. She once told me how her mother would scream when the pain got so bad.

And my grandmother would run out of the house and run down the block but her mother's screams were so loud, she could still hear them outside.

That's a horrible story and this scene at the cross was also horrible—a grown man screaming in the darkness.

Because that's what Jesus did. This verb "cry out" is a rarely used NT word that means to scream or shout. And for emphasis Matthew adds "with a loud voice."

He didn't scream: "My hands, my hands. My feet, my feet."

It wasn't physical suffering that made him scream.

In fact, nowhere in the crucifixion account did Jesus cry out in physical pain.

He was a strong man physically. Years of working in the carpenter's shop, years of travel by foot all over Israel had hardened him.

And he didn't scream: "My friends, my friends. They've abandoned me."

Or "My shame, my shame. My nakedness."

It wasn't psychological suffering that made him cry out either.

Once again, as you read the crucifixion account you see that Jesus was remarkably calm when betrayed, deserted, and treated with contempt.

But his scream in the dark was: "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

That tells us the spiritual suffering he was going through was more painful than anything he was suffering physically or psychologically.

During those hours, darkness covered the land from noon to three.

That darkness was a picture of what was happening in his soul.

When the Bible describes spiritual lostness. When it describes hell, it uses two images—fire and darkness. Called the outer darkness.

It has the sense of being cast out from the light into a dark and lonely place.

Our souls need God's light like a plant needs the sun—when it goes out, we die.

Jesus' soul was plunged into spiritual darkness in those three terrible hours.

Throughout his life, Jesus had lived in unbroken communion with his Father.

He loved to pray. Would spend whole nights in prayer, solitary places.

Often looking up to heaven, sighing, calling out to God.

In everything he did he sought God's blessing and pleasure.

He had a sense of God's presence that no other person has ever had.  
And God always answered him. There is never a prayer of Jesus unanswered.  
Then in the hour of his greatest agony Jesus turned to his Father  
and the merciful presence of God was gone.  
The listening ear of God was gone.  
The warmth of God's love was gone.  
The comfort of God's acceptance was gone.

Some of you might remember a story I told the last time we studied this word.  
It was from Ron Snell's autobiography. Ron was the son of missionaries.  
His parents worked with an Indian tribe in the high jungles of Peru.  
This Indian tribe believed the spirit of a dead person hung around the body  
and could do bad things to you. So they were very afraid of dead bodies.  
In fact, they were so scared of them that if a person was near death,  
they would bury him alive. That way, never had to deal with his body.

So Ron tells of a time an Indian man brought his little son who was sick to see  
the missionaries. Ron's parents examined the boy and found an advanced case  
of tuberculosis. They couldn't do anything for him.

When boy's father realized his son could not be cured he took him right then  
and put him on a raft and pushed him out into the current of a swift river.

Because he wanted his son to be far away when he died.

Ron describes how he and his parents stood there stunned. Ron says:

"Years later, as I write this story, tears run down my cheeks. I see that little boy sitting all  
alone on a tippy raft, trembling and wide-eyed, trying for a last look at the father who had just  
pushed him away."

I tell that story just to make one point. If a friend abandons you, that is painful.

But if your father forsakes you, if he casts you away it's much worse.

When God the Father forsook his Son, it was hell for Jesus.

That's what we mean when we confess: "He descended into hell."

This was Jesus' hell.

Think of all that Jesus suffered during the crucifixion.

He never complained about what people did to him.

When they spit on him, stripped him and crucified him he never complained.

Instead, he prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Jesus was a great soul. He was a spiritual giant. Nothing people did rattled him.  
But what made him scream in the darkness?

When he no longer felt the presence and love of God.

This word from the cross is warning and a consolation.

Going to focus in the consolation in a minute—whole second half of sermon.  
But there is a warning and the warning is:

There is that nothing worse than being forsaken by God.

So you ought to run from everything that separates you from God.

There's a famous passage in CS Lewis' book, *The Great Divorce*. It says:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it.

Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened.

Every morning God gives you air to breathe, food to eat, clothes to wear,  
houses to live in, friends to love, work to do, money to spend.

And in addition to all that he offers complete and full reconciliation with him.

Forgiveness, freedom from guilt, a clear conscience, eternal life, through faith in his Son, Jesus.

But when a person forsakes God, after a lifetime of saying to God—

I'll do what I want with my life—my body, my money, my desires, my goal—  
then the day comes when God says: Ok, you want me out of your life?

I'm out. Depart from me into everlasting darkness.

As CS Lewis says: Hell is a chosen destination. Chosen by decisions of a lifetime.

God, stay away. I want to live my life and do my thing.

If you've been saying no to God, if you've been saying to him:

Hands off this or that part of my life. That's mine.

Listen to this word of Jesus and repent and run to God and say:

Yes, I want you in my life. Yes, I want to give every part to you.

And the Father will embrace you.

That's who God is. He's merciful and loving. See that clearly in second point  
**MP#2 Why Jesus suffered**

Why did Jesus suffer in this way? Why was he forsaken?

That's the question he asked: "Why have you forsaken me?"

It's crucial to see that this was not just a cry, it was a quotation from Scripture. Jesus was quoting Psalm 22. Jonathan read it earlier in service.

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

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him."

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
you lay me in the dust of death.

They have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones.

People stare and gloat over me.

They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

So this Psalm, written 1000 years before Christ describes his suffering.

Psalm 22 ends this way—

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.

So it ends with the assurance that the suffering of the Psalmist will end and that  
it has a purpose—God will be glorified and future generations blessed.

That's because his suffering is substitutionary.

He suffered not just for us, but in our place.

Why did Jesus suffer? He suffered for you.

You are his passion—in the old sense of the word.

You are what he suffered for. He didn't just suffer, he suffered for love.

On the cross he was not just crying out—He was quoting.

He was saying—I'm suffering, I'm being forsaken.

But I'm doing it for a reason, for a purpose—that purpose is you, your salvation.

This word from the cross shows that Jesus is willing to suffer and fulfill God's  
salvation plan because he loves you.

When you believe Jesus suffered for you, that changes things.

One of the big things it changes is how you face suffering.

You can go through the worst and know that that because Jesus was forsaken

by God—you never will be. And even in the depths of suffering, even in the worst pain. Even when you feel God is far away—he’s still with you.

I’ve told you a number of times about the life of William Cowper.

He was one of the most famous English hymn writers of 18<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote *There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood, O For a Closer Walk with God, and God Moves in a Mysterious Way, God of My Life to Thee I Call*.

Cowper experienced a lot of suffering.

He lost his mother as a child. Was sent to a horrible boarding school.

He fell in love but the match was forbidden by her father. Romantically crippled. He studied law and showed a lot of promise but then when he went to take the bar exam he fell to pieces. He was never admitted to the bar.

After that there were times sank into deep depression.

And he often felt that God had forsaken him.

His best friend was none other than John Newton—writer of *Amazing Grace*.

Newton was an Anglican minister.

Sometimes Cowper would live with John and Mary Newton in the church manse. Newton was always telling him—

William, even though you may feel like God has forsaken you, he hasn’t. Jesus was forsaken so that you never will be.

Out of those conversations and Cowper’s suffering came *God Moves*.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.

Cowper was saying something about suffering for Christians.

No matter how circumstances might make you feel God is frowning on you—he’s not. He’s smiling on his children.

Here’s why: Because one time, on a hill outside Jerusalem, during three hours of darkness, God did frown on his Son.

God’s judgment for sin was poured out on a perfect substitute.

And then, when it was finished, the darkness lifted and the smile of the Father’s was felt again—never to be removed.

There may be times in your Christian life when it seems God has deserted you.

This is the experience of some believers.

St. John of the Cross called it “The dark night of the soul”

Even some of the Psalmists felt this way. I mentioned Psalm 77 and 88.

There are times when it seems prayers are not heard, God seems far away.



But because of your union with Jesus, you are not really forsaken.  
Sometimes God hides his face from his children. He has his reasons.

Maybe to make you eager to pray, or to strengthen you against a coming trial,  
or to make you long for Him, or to prove his grace is sufficient.  
But you can know that he has not forsaken you.

And so no matter how deserted you feel, don't desert God.  
Christ was forsaken in those three hours of darkness in a way you will never be.

He suffered hell. But even in hell, he didn't desert God.  
He called Him, "My God, my God."

He still clung to God, claimed him and called out to him.  
In other words, it was Christ's faith that sustained him.  
Didn't see God anywhere, but still called out to him.

Has to be the same with you. You must continue to call out to God in faith.  
No matter how deserted you feel, no matter how spiritually dry you feel.  
There may be other negative emotions—worthless, ashamed. Call out.  
This is one of the evidences of true Christian faith—when a person  
continues to cry out to God, even when h seems to be so far away.

Remember, you will not feel deserted forever.

Praise God that the fourth word of the cross is not the last word.

The last word is, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit."

The darkness lifted. The light of God's mercy, warmth of His love,  
His fatherly presence was restored to Christ. God did not desert Him forever.

If you are right now in a dark, lonely valley and God seems far away.

Remember that God did not leave his Son and He won't leave you.

Cling to all those great Bible promises:

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

"Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you."