

Text: Mark 15:34

Title: Forsaken...by God?

Truth: We try to understand Jesus's saying "Why have You forsaken Me?"

Date/Location: 3/29/2024 at FBC

Introduction

The purpose: understand the Lord's saying about being forsaken by God.

Handel's Messiah has section which we title "Forsaken by Man and God". The text for Messiah is Psalm 22:7-8.

We add Isaiah 53:2b,3,4b,10.

Also, the disciples piled on by fleeing: Matt. 26:56, Mark 14:50.

But what exactly does it mean to be forsaken by God? It is a disturbing idea because God promises that he will not leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:4). Why did he do that to Christ, the most righteous person who ever lived, besides being very God and the Son of God?

I. The Common Explanation

Jesus became sin for us. He took on the sin of the world. He was "made" sin. Therefore, though He did no sin, nor was a sinner, nor could sin, nor desired to sin, He became a substitute for others who had sinned.

Then God the Father turned away from Christ in justified wrath against sin and poured out that wrath in full measure against His own Son.

The infinite Son suffered the penalty of that wrath in a finite span of a few hours time.

In no sense does the common explanation suppose that God ceased to be God, or Christ ceased to be deity. The explanation is simple, though not simple-minded, in that it is not complicated by concerns of the death of God or a breakdown of the Trinity or that this was a persistent condition that lasted beyond the death of Christ or beyond the grave of His resurrection. It does not suggest

that there was a separation between the divine and human natures within Christ. It was momentary, but still devastating in the inter-personal feelings of harmony within the relationship of the Father and the Son.

Yet it does not explain how one member of the Triune God can in fact forsake another. Nor does it carefully consider the context of Psalm 22 from whence the quotation comes on the lips of our Lord.

II. The Connection to Psalm 22

- A. The psalm is NOT a prophecy.
- B. The psalm is a lament, with elements of praise and trust as well.
- C. The psalm is written by King David.
- D. It is very poetic and thus care must be given to not over-interpret details that seem hyperbolic or only possible if one assumes it is prophetic.
- E. Some of the afflictions mentioned in the Psalm are so extreme that they evoke in many informed Bible readers the images of the worst kind of extremity they can imagine—crucifixion. Examples:
 - 1. Mocked
 - 2. Poured out like water
 - 3. Bones out of joint
 - 4. Heart like wax
 - 5. Dehydration
 - 6. Pierced hands and feet
 - 7. Bones can be counted, meaning they are visible as from starvation
 - 8. Divided garments.

I understand that there were things David experienced that he could explain in such exalted poetic terms. They are like other poetic language that we read in Scripture from David—for example about broken bones (Psalm 51:8), or bones growing old

and drought (32:3-4). Or, they bear similarities to when he was chased out of Jerusalem and His son Absalom took his concubines and all of his things for himself.

- F. The Psalmist is expressing his true feelings in verses 1-21a of abandonment and suffering.
- G. But there is often a major oversight when considering the context of Psalm 22. Note Psalm 22:21b: “You have answered Me.” He adds, as often is done in the Psalms, that God did rescue him. God is worthy of praise for this.

God did *not* despite His afflicted one. He did *not* hide His face from him. God *did* hear his cry. And so David worships God. God is King and is worthy of praise.

- H. This is the cry of a righteous person to his God who can deliver Him from his suffering. David trusts God to do that, and in fact experienced such deliverance. And it appears that God *did* deliver David since he was able to go on to write the psalm.
- I. Here is the main reason I do not take this as a prophecy *per se*. I do not believe that the Jewish believer would have read Psalm 22 as a prophecy. He would have read it as the experience of his king, and as instructive for himself as he faced difficulties, and to know that the righteous do indeed suffer, sometimes severely. If the reader in David’s day could not comprehend the meaning of the Psalm because it had hidden meaning, or it was not “clear,” or there had to be meaning added to it, then this does damage to all of our reading of the Old Testament. Even more devastatingly, it throws doubt into our reading of the *New Testament*, for there may be meanings hidden or changes in meaning coming in the future that will undo our understanding of it on a plain reading today.
- J. This is not to deny that God put some experiences and poetic expressions into David’s mind that were especially useful for drawing parallels or analogies to what Jesus experienced.

III. The Connection of Jesus to Psalm 22

- A. Jesus knew Psalm 22 just like any faithful Israelite could have—and would have and should have—by memorizing it. Because He was

righteous, it was a good expression with inspired words of what He was experiencing.

B. We must avoid three problems in explaining Psalm 22.

1. The first problem to avoid is ignoring the last 10 verses of the Psalm. Yes, there is a huge lament in verses 1-21. But the righteous one trusted God that God would deliver. Because of God's character, he could trust God to do just that. This pulls us up short of saying that the Father broke away from the Son, or that they remained in a state of disharmony, or made some fundamental change to the nature of their divine union. At most the forsakenness was a temporary situation.
2. The second problem in connecting Jesus and Psalm 22 happens if you ignore the parts of the Psalm that cannot refer to Jesus, at least in a literal sense (the part about bulls of Bashan, for example, or paying vows).
3. The third problem we might run into in explaining the connection between Psalm 22 and Jesus's use of it is relying too much on one nuance of the fulfillment language in the New Testament. Just because the word *fulfilled* is used in the New Testament does *not* mean that the author consider the OT text to be a prediction of a future event. Very often *fulfill* is used to indicate some sort of analogy or parallel, as is the case here.
4. The fourth problem to avoid is to not give due consideration and weight to the genuine human feelings of the Lord on the cross at the time of His crucifixion. To say that the Lord spoke Psalm 22:1 as a shorthand that he was *not* forsaken by God falls into this error. He was speaking truthfully, not in shorthand, about how He felt in this matter *at this time*.

I continue with the thought that the Lord not only felt abandoned by His protector and provider, but He experienced this even more deeply than did David. It was not to be that *in this life* Jesus would see the goodness of God in the land of the living. He had to carry His faith in God right into the face of death. David did see that goodness, but Jesus did not—until He arose from the dead on Resurrection Sunday. If *anyone* in world

history could say that he experienced a feeling like David's, it was Jesus in those moments on the cross. In fact, He felt that abandonment more critically than David, because He was closer in fellowship with the Father than David ever was, and farther in spiritual judgement than David ever was.

Despite that, He still commended His soul's keeping into the hands of a faithful creator.

- C. To say this another way: I consider that yes, the Lord does know that God will not abandon His soul in Sheol. But that is the *end* the story. We must consider the matter diachronically, with discrete moments or movements involved, not simply as a whole unit. In the middle, all hope truly seems to be utterly lost, the darkness is impenetrably thick, the wrath is infinitely hot, the connection to the source of life itself is lost. In that time, in His humanity, the cry of abandonment is entirely appropriate.

Conclusion

Therefore, I do not see a need to "abandon" the traditional or common view. If we do not divide the Trinity or posit some other strange happening, we can say that God the Son was estranged from God the Father for a moment in time.

In any case, how is it that the Father and the Son could enjoy a completely harmonious, trouble-free fellowship one with another while one is constituted as sin and the other not? God cannot look on sin with any favor.

The edifying value of the text is that Jesus as a righteous person is using the text of Scripture contextually. He feels a deep problem and expresses His feelings about it. And without him saying so, we know that He knows that *ultimately* God will not abandon him though he has that distinct feeling while hanging on the cross. We too know that God will not abandon us, if we trust in Jesus, to the consequences of our sin. It may feel like we are alone at times, but the end will be glorious. We can use the Psalm in a way just like Jesus did.