

## **MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY?**

Psalm 22: 1, Matthew 27: 45-49, and Mark 15: 33-36

Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This fourth saying of Christ crucified was a cry of agony that came out of darkness. Those three hours of darkness, from 12 noon to 3 PM, followed the first three sayings of Christ on the cross. Following Jesus' words to his mother and to John, John from that sixth hour, at that moment, led Jesus' mother, Mary to his home through the blackness and the darkness. That darkness fell upon the land for the last three hours that Jesus hung on the cross. Silence reigned from the cross in this darkness that could be felt for three hours, before Jesus uttered His last four dying utterances. The first words that broke the silence in the darkness, were "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani" which translated from the Aramaic is "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Was Jesus in His meekness only merely feeling abandoned by His Father? We all are so prone to magnify the physical and emotional suffering of the cross, what we feel is most important, and we so easily miss the monumental significance of what was happening spiritually in Jesus' Spirit as the God-Man, our Savior Jesus Christ suffered in darkness, in our place. At Golgotha, two other men, thieves were being crucified. They felt terrible physical and emotional suffering. Jesus experienced more than just the awful torture of crucifixion. That was just the beginning. Jesus experienced the weight of carrying my sins, yours sins, and the weight of the sin and guilt and shame and punishment for the sins of the whole world. Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly of heart." The Greek scholar, W. E. Vine said of Jesus' meekness, "Meekness is strength under control, without disputing or resisting God's will." That is going against our feelings. Feelings have a way of trumping our words and our thoughts. In our lives, too often our feelings rule. God may speak clearly to us by His Word, or through a sermon or through a brother or sister in Christ. We know God has spoken to us, we are convicted, but we don't feel like doing anything about what we have been told or been taught or called upon to do. This is one of the greatest tragedies of our Christian lives. Our feelings often rule in our hearts, even as believers. In our darkest days, we feel like God is absent, but He isn't absent at all. Again I ask you, was Jesus only feeling abandoned on the cross at Calvary?

During the last days the Third Reich, in Germany, as the Nazi terror struggled in its final throes before Hitler fell, Allied bombs were raining down on the city of Stuttgart. The German theologian and pastor, Helmut Thielicke, at that time was preaching in a very large church, preaching a series on the Lord's Prayer. These were days of uncertainty and death. The shriek of air raid sirens interrupted Thielicke's sermons. Finally, the bombs physically destroyed the Stuttgart Church. Thielicke spent his days burying his dead church members. During the Allied

bombing, Thielicke told his flock about the terrible mistake of jumping to conclusions and going by our feelings. He said, “God is frequently silent, but never absent.” Thielicke recounted meeting a woman from his congregation who was standing in the city street looking down into the pit of a cellar. This was all that remained from a building that an Allied bomb had shattered. The woman approached her pastor saying, “My husband died down there, right under this hole. The clean-up squad was unable to find a trace of him; all that was left was his cap.” Not knowing what to say, Pastor Thielicke paused and this woman went on, “I don’t ask for your sympathy. We were there in church, the last time you preached in our cathedral. Here before this pit I want to thank you for preparing my husband for eternity.” Beloved, that’s what I’m asking for our preaching in our church to be—preparing all of us for eternity. Preaching is taking our stand before the pit and bearing witness to the rubble in our “ash heap world” that the Kingdom of God is at hand—that Jesus is coming soon. “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.” Today, let’s not get mixed up as we consider Jesus’ words from the cross. At the end of six hours on the cross, and with three of those hours being darkness, Jesus had trodden down the winepress of the fierce wrath of God the Almighty on your sin and mine. His atoning work was nearly finished. These words that came from Jesus’ lips as He had reached the culminating climax of His anguish. No words ever spoken have ever been so full of anguish. As we gaze upon our Savior at the foot of the cross, may God help us to measure the height of God’s love by the depth of Jesus’ grief. I see in these agonizing words, four truths we dare not escape: Something was happening on Golgotha’s center cross between two thieves. What was happening?

**JESUS WAS ALONE, FORSAKEN BY HIS FATHER, AS HE CRIED, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” (L.) Verses 33, 34.**

Jesus experienced at Calvary the wormwood and the gall of something that will never be known to us on earth, this side of eternity, and that is the desertion and the absence of God. Make sure you understand that Jesus was expressing far more than His feelings that His Father seemed to be gone. No! Jesus was expressing reality. God the Father was absent, having forsaken Jesus for those dark hours on the cross. Before praying His high priestly prayer, in John 16: 32, Jesus prophesied to His disciples, “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed, it has come, when you will all be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave Me alone. Yet, I am not alone, for the Father is with Me.” Yet now in the darkness at midday, from noon until 3:00 in the afternoon, black darkness covered the land, a darkness that stunned the whole land. On the cross, no longer was the Father in sweet fellowship and communion with His beloved Son. It was a grief that cannot be weighed fully by any of us, for the Father and the Son were eternally one in communion as well as in essence, as they are yet today—One God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit. The absence of God the Father's fellowship and presence with His crucified Son for three hours, was incredible and intolerable and unbearable. Beloved, the absence of God is intolerable even to sinners. Did you know that? Do you remember what happened here in America for two months after 9-11-01? God has for too many years in America, been an inconvenience to so many in our country, a contrivance of churches and a perceived "made up story" of preachers to millions. But for two short months, from September to November, 2001, America and Americans cried out to God.

I ask you, "Where was God when 60 million American babies have been aborted? Do you know the most disturbing question gnawing at the edges of consciousness for our Jewish friends? It is—"Where was God when six million of our people died in the horrors of the Holocaust, the Shoah, as the Jews call it? Sadly, many Jews have concluded that the Shoah or the Holocaust teaches us that there is no God, or worse, that if there is a God, He is evil. From Israel to America, Jewish atheism and agnosticism runs far ahead of the numbers of those who hold to Jewish orthodoxy. This Jewish angst and pain and sense of the intolerable—that God is absent, is illustrated in the work of a sole survivor of a Jewish family in Auschwitz, a Romanian Jew named Elie Wiesel. He wrote his heart wrenching memoir, entitled "Night!" He told the account of an execution he and all the Jewish prisoners were forced to witness as two men and a boy, falsely accused for putting out the lights in their prison, were mounted on chairs with a hangman's noose around their necks. At a signal from the guards, the chairs were kicked out from beneath their feet and the ropes snapped. The two men died instantly as the fall broke their necks. But the boy, small and emaciated, did not die for over a half hour and he flailed and gasped desperately for breath. The Jewish prisoners gasped in horror and they were forced to go stand beneath the boy. Someone cried out, "Where is God? Where is God? Wiesel said that God was dying in the image of that young boy struggling to breathe his last. For those Jews, it was too horrible to imagine that a loving God could allow such evil. So they concluded God was dead.

We all need to feel deep empathy for those who endured that day of suffering as one little boy they deemed innocent, died between two Jewish men. This takes us today to the cross as the only man who never sinned, the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ, was suffering and finally He died between two thieves outside Jerusalem. So where was God when 60 million babies were aborted in America? Where was God during the Shoah, the Holocaust? He was suffering and mourning the suffering, the dying and the dead, as their sinful persecutors' minds were blinded by sin and their lust for power. This year, Resurrection Sunday falls on April 20, one week before Yom Ha Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, April 27. So what is the difference between the seeming absence of God and the real absence of God?

Five days before Calvary, on Palm Sunday, the multitude cried “Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.” Many of them, five days later, joined with the scribes and Pharisees, and like a pack of wolves, they were baying and crying wildly for Jesus to be crucified. If the Holocaust seems like God was absent, what was it like for God to truly be absent as Jesus cried out in the black darkness, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabathani?” When Jesus died, God the Father hid His holy face and shut off the light of the sun as our Substitute and Atonement for sins, hung dying on the cross.

Where did Jesus’ words, “My God, My God, why... originate? They were inspired words of David in the midst of his awful years of running from King Saul and hiding in caves all over southern Judah. Why didn’t Jesus quote all of Psalm 22: 1-31? He would have known it by heart. Beloved, why did Jesus only quote the first phrase in Psalm 22:1? That was the only part of the psalm Jesus and David did not have in common. When David cried, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” –it truly felt to him that God was absent, and as far as David could know and sense and feel and experience, it was the truth as best he knew it. Yet God the Holy Spirit was there, inspiring David’s words that ended in praise in Psalm 22: 30, 31 as he declared, “Posterity shall serve Him. It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim His righteousness to a people yet unborn, that He has done it.” God the Holy Spirit helped David recover from the awful feeling of God’s absence so he closed his psalm, recognizing God’s presence. David, like many of us have felt, for a time, he felt like God was absent because He was silent, but he did not know at that time, the promise of God we now know from Hebrews 13: 5, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” All of us today have felt that God is absent in many situations in our lives. Have we recovered with God’s reminder—“I will never leave you, nor forsake you.”

So why did Jesus only quote the first phrase only of Psalm 22: 1? Because if Jesus had gone on to quote the whole Psalm he would have done no more than to identify with David and fulfill David’s Messianic prophecy. Then on the cross, Jesus would have gone on by faith to speak of God’s presence at Calvary, in spite of His struggle. Jesus didn’t do that. Jesus did not deny His Father’s existence. No, never! Yet Jesus quoted Psalm 22: 1 because what He felt like was not the end of the truth. If it was just a feeling Jesus had, He could have gone on to say, “I know it feels like You are absent, Father, but I know by faith that You are here with Me.” Jesus was doing far more than feeling the absence of God; He was experiencing the absence of God, something no man can or will or has ever experienced this side of eternity. Be certain, as Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree, He experienced the hell that is coming for sinners who refuse to repent, believe and receive Him. Jesus spoke of that day coming when He would tell those who never

knew Him, whom He would condemn to hell in Matthew 7: 23 saying, “Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you.” That will someday be a banishment from God’s presence, the absence of God forever, which Jesus experienced at Calvary. In Matthew 8: 12, Jesus spoke of hell as outer darkness, where there would be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. In Matthew 22: 13 Jesus spoke of throwing the man at the wedding feast without a wedding garment into outer darkness. And in Matthew 25: 30, Jesus said to cast the man who buried his only one talent into outer darkness. The absence of God for Jesus was a prelude of hell. Jesus partook of hell for us at Calvary. 2ndly,

**JESUS TASTED DEATH FOR EVERYONE AS HE CRIED, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”** (II.)

Verses 33, 34. The Word is clear in Romans 6: 23 declaring, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This death means far more than physical death, or since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the daily process of dying which we each see more clearly as we age. No, the wages of sin is death—not only physical death and the process of dying each day, but eternal and spiritual death which is separation from God—the absence of God eternally. Beloved, physical death, separation of the soul and spirit from the body, is when we breathe our last someday. Spiritual death, the separation of body, soul and spirit from God forever is what will happen if we reject Jesus, and refuse His love. The Jewish leaders accosted Jesus in John 8: 52, saying to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, “If anyone keeps My word, he will never die or see death.” Jesus was speaking to them about spiritual death. Speaking to Martha after the death of Lazarus, before Jesus raised him from the dead, in John 11: 25, 26, Jesus spoke of physical and spiritual death both, saying, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die (that’s physically) yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die, (spiritually/ eternally, the 2nd death, lake of fire Rev. 20: 14, 15!)

Jesus died physically, in a manner beyond comprehension. He also tasted for hours for us all, the second death and hell. He experienced that awful lake of fire on Calvary’s cross, that hell fire of burning, raging fever physically and the spiritual and physical outer darkness apart from God’s presence which we all deserve to face eternally. Jesus tasted what He wants none of us to taste—total absence from the presence of God. Why? Hebrews 2: 9 is too awesome to understand fully. “But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, He might taste death for everyone.” Don’t misunderstand Jesus tasting death for us. Don’t think Jesus died for us outside or apart from God’s will. No! God the Father willed the death of Jesus. Isaiah 53: 10 says, “Yet, it was the

will of the Lord to crush Him, (Jesus) He, (the Father) has put Him, (Jesus,) to grief.” The Father at Calvary, hid His holy face from His Son. Hebrews 2: 9 tells us that ‘by the grace of God, Jesus tasted death for every person.’ Jesus as He cried, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabathani!” was apart from the presence of God the Father, but never was He apart from the grace of God, or the eternal plan and will of the Father—that Jesus would bear death and hell for us, so we could be redeemed. Thirdly,

**JESUS KNEW HOLINESS AND SINFULNESS COULD NOT COEXIST AS HE CRIED, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”**

(III.) Never was this fact this clear as when Jesus cried in verses 33, 34. Both unbelievers and Christians struggle to comprehend the holiness of God’s holiness and the sinfulness of man’s sin. As a believer, do we cower and try to avoid talking about the holiness of God? When it comes to sin, do we trivialize our own sin, knowing full well, your own sins and mine led to Jesus be crucified for us? God refuses to avoid talking about holiness, and He will not trivialize one of our sins. James 2: 10 declares, “Whoever keeps the law but fails in one point, he is guilty of all.” That’s why God will separate the sheep from the goats at the Great White Throne Judgment. Matthew 25: 31-46 illustrates that the holiness of God and our sinfulness as men and women cannot exist together. That eternal judgment on sin will be banishment from God, or the absence of God. That’s why God the Father required a sinless Substitute to redeem us and pay the price for our salvation. Over the years, even Bible scholars have tried to get around the need we all have for a Substitute to have died in our place. What audacity! Part of the price paid by Jesus, our sinless Substitute, is that he had to experience hell for us at Calvary, banished from His Father’s fellowship as He hung on the cross dying. Jesus had to pay the full price of our sin, as our sinless Savior, to become our redeeming Savior. Only Jesus’ death, dying absent from His Father’s presence, could fully pay the price for our redemption. God is just and righteous, meaning He always does the right thing. Since our sin and God’s holiness cannot coexist, God’s amazing love for us made His justice and righteousness take over. God in Christ, had to banish sin from His presence. It is against the backdrop of God’s justice and holiness, that God’s message of love and grace and mercy stands. On the cross, God in holiness still had to reject sin, in justice, He had to punish sin, and the consequences of God must be separation, banishment from God. But God’s love said, “But I still love those hell-bound sinners created in My image. I want to show them mercy and rescue them. Love found a way. James 2: 13 declares, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” God’s love declared He must in love provide an opportunity for sinful men, women, boys, and girls to embrace a sinless Substitute, Someone must be made a curse for us, Someone must be the ransom for many. Someone must bear the consequences of the sins of the whole world, so God’s justice on sin was done,

it was finished, so that His righteousness remained intact, so that His holiness was still untainted, so that His love and mercy and grace could reign at Calvary. Must you and I have a Substitute? We must! Paul declares in Romans 5: 19, “For as by the one man’s disobedience (Adam) the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience, Jesus, the many will be made righteous.” That’s what happened when Jesus cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? 4thly/lastly,

**JESUS HAD ONE INCREDIBLE REASON HE CRIED, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”(IV.)**Verses 33, 34. It’s time as we close this message to answer the why question Jesus cried out at Calvary. In the silence of God the Father’s absence at the place of the skull, Golgotha, and in the withdrawing of the Father’s presence from His only beloved Son, we find the reason, oh, the reason, the glorious reason, the incredible reason for Jesus’ loud cry of agony. What is that answer of Jesus’ loud cry? And the answer is, “For you and for me!” It’s true. Almighty God, The Trinity, 3 in one, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love us so much that God’s love would not let us face eternal judgment and destruction, the wages of our sin, being banished from the presence of God forever, without providing a way out for us, if we repent, believe and receive Jesus. We can’t explain the Trinity, but as one little girl came closest, I chime in and say, “There’s three in one and one in three, and the one in the middle died for me.” And the One in the middle cried out, “My God. My God, why... but though no answer came, He and His Father knew the answer. And now I trust all of you now know the answer--“For you and me.” Amen.