

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal Lord, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your Word and obey it, so that we become instruments of your redeeming love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 26:45-46, KJV

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

In this cry of anguish from the Cross, perhaps the saddest word of all is that pronoun “thou”: “...why hast *thou* forsaken me?”¹

The disciples — well, yes, they forsook him:

⁵⁵In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. ⁵⁶But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. (Matthew 26:55-56)

They fled because they were afraid. St. Peter had sworn that he would do no such thing, and he was brave above most of the rest of the disciples, but in the pinch, he deserted our Lord too — denied that he even knew him.

All the world forsook Jesus, except for a few: St. John and the holy women, Mary the Mother of our Lord, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses (Matt 27:56). The fickle townfolk of Jerusalem who had saluted him with

palm branches and sang praises to God for him soon changed their minds and derided him. As far as we can tell by the Bible, even folks who had been cured by Jesus forsook him. The man, for example, whose son was possessed and cut and tormented by a demon, where was he? Why wasn't he loyal to Jesus all the way to the Cross? Where was the man blind from birth who could now see? Where was the man who lay at the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years, until that good day when Jesus came along and healed him? Where was he? Where were the many people who had heard his sweet preaching and praised God on account of him?

Well, they forsook Jesus because they are very much like you and me: flesh and blood, with responsibilities in this world, and fears aplenty. So, they fled. But why hast *Thou* forsaken me? Such was the exhausted, anguished cry of Jesus as he approached his last breath.

You might have heard the answer before. Why did the Father forsake Jesus? I heard an answer long ago, back in my Sunday School days, and I have been in awe of it ever since. It goes like this: God the Father forsook Jesus on the cross because Jesus had taken upon himself the sins of the world, and God cannot look upon sin. Therefore, the Father looked away from Jesus on the cross, and our Lord sensed his Father's turning away.

What a sorrow! For a father to look away from a son! This Sunday's Gospel Lesson is the beautiful story of the Prodigal Son. The great theme of that story is that the father welcomes back his wayward son. The father sees his son off

¹ This fine point about the pronoun “thou” is made more than once by Spurgeon, both in his exposition of Psalm 22 and his sermons on the Fourth Word.

in the distance and goes running toward him, without regard to the wreck and ruin his son has made of his life. Such is God! That is the great theme. God's love is strong and forgiving and searches the horizon for the son.

But in the Passion story, the Father looks away from his Son, such that Son cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."

There is considerable truth in this old Sunday School explanation for the abandonment of Jesus. It is true at least in this central conviction: On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world, and in his own body, he bore misery, that you and I might be spared it:

KJV Isaiah 53:6 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.

²²He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... (1 Peter 2:22-24)

RSV 2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

If ever you have wondered whether God loves you, then let this be your answer: The depths of Jesus suffering is the measure of God's love for you. And perhaps the deepest suffering of all is that Jesus had to cry out about being forsaken by the Father.

I bring to a close this little meditation on our Lord's Fourth Word with two observations.

First, there is another important pronoun in our Lord's agonizing cry. We have so far spoken of that word, "thou." Why hast thou forsaken me. But there is another momentous pronoun here. It is the word "my." It is used doubly: "*my* God, *my* God..."

This is the word of faith. Stand in awe of that pronoun. Let it be your model. When all grounds of hope were stripped away from Jesus, when even his life-long unity with the Father was taken from him so that he had to cry "forsaken," nonetheless, he still prayed to his heavenly Father and he still addressed him as "my" God. Even as a child being disciplined still cries out to the mother who disciplines, "Mother! Mother!" so Jesus, even as he experiences the loss even of his Father, nonetheless cries out to him "my God, my God." Jesus never gives up his faith in his heavenly Father, even when he feels that his Father has given up faith in him!

And then, there is this final point: Jesus suffered abandonment on the Cross that you might never, never be abandoned. One thing is sure in this world: no matter how dark and lonely life might become for you, Jesus will never desert you. He did not call off his project of human salvation on the Cross, and he will never call it off for you now.

To him be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.