

Why Did Christ say, "My God, my God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?"

by Tony Warren



One of the more puzzling things for many Christians is the lament of Christ when He uttered on the cross, "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?*"

Matthew 27:45-46

- "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.
- And 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?"

There are some critics who suggest that in these three hours of darkness, Christ had a moment of weakness where "*as a human*" He succumbed under the weight of His terrible suffering. Others surmise that Christ had lost all hope, and His human soul was unable to fully understand why the Father had abandoned Him. None of this speculation has any viable support from the Scriptures. They are all theories that are at odds with the Biblical facts. This can be easily proven by a myriad of clear passages where Christ foretold His abandonment and suffering. When we read all of Scripture in context, not concentrating on a few select verses, we can see very quickly that Christ never faltered for one moment, and that He knew perfectly well what He had to do, and why He had to do it. The cry of Christ does not in any way diminish His deity, nor divide His human nature from His divine person. Nevertheless, scripture is clear that the Christ had to be abandoned of men and forsaken of God so that He might suffer and die for the elect. These things were not hid from Him, as it was for this very reason that He was born of a woman. These ideas that He was surprised or caught off guard make no sense, considering all that Christ Himself declared of His divine mission.

John 16:6-7

- "But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.
- Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I

go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

Christ knew that He had to go to the cross to suffer the wrath of God for the elect. If He didn't, the elect could not be consoled in having an advocate of the Holy Spirit. It was not a secret to Him that the sin condition of man would be healed by His stripes. Indeed it was this very knowledge that brought Him to Jerusalem, for the nature of the "*required*" atonement for sin was not a mystery to Him, as it was to the people of Israel. They (*much like the Premillennarians today*) expected a political king, the establish of an earthly kingdom and a physical deliverance from being under subjugation. They stumbled ([Romans 9:31-33](#)) on the nature of the Christ and His kingdom, but Christ knew exactly what the nature of the sacrifice was, and how the true restoration of Israel would take place. It would be by His drinking the bitter dregs of the judgment (*that man so clearly deserved*) in the cup of the Lord's fury.

John 18:11

- "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

It is a rhetorical question. Yes, He was determined to drink the bitter cup for the sake of the elect, just as the bitter vinegar mingled with gall that the people gave Him to drink signified. He willfully fulfilled, completed or finished the task that He went to the cross to accomplish.

John 19:30

- "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, ***It is finished:*** and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

He most certainly knew the nature of the cup He had to drink in order to accomplish the task of deliverance for His people, and He willingly drank it. You will also note that when they offered Him that vinegar "*before the time*" of completion, He would not drink of it ([Matthew 27:33-34](#)). The reason that He would not drink at that time was because it was the beginning, and His work was not yet finished as it was at the time of His death. This is what He actually "*receiving*" the cup of vinegar just before saying "*it is finished,*" signified. It was a sign of the accomplishment of the work of the cross.

So if this is all true, then how do we answer the objection of why Christ prayed, "*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,*" or why Jesus said "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" If He already knew perfectly the reason, then why this language? The answer is that all these things were said and done of God for man's benefit. He was not complaining as an eternal example of His own unusually weak (*even for God's people*) fortitude or His delicate nature, or His frail humanity. He said these things as a citation key for us to unlock the Words of the prophets and the psalms that reference these things. By these comments, Christ is revealing to us that He was the God-Man prophesied in Scripture to come as the Saviour of Israel. In other words, God is exhorting His people to search the law (*as the Bereans did*) and

compare Scripture with Scripture to see exactly what these words He spoke pertained to.

Psalms 22:1b

- ..My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"

When Christ called out to God in this manner, as recorded in Matthew and Mark, clearly He was consciously quoting this Psalm as an illustration to all that would come after, that He was the Messianic fulfilling this Old Testament prophecy. This is the key to understanding why the Lord would say this. Jesus Christ, as the living Word, as God's Promise in the flesh, is the prophesied application of God's revealed will concerning the atonement for sin. That atonement would have to be made by death as the wrath of God was poured out upon man for sin. This question we see in Psalms 22:1 of, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me,*" is answered in verse three:

Psalms 22:3

- "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."

That is why God had forsaken Him. It was because to a Holy God, man's sin (*that Christ had taken upon Himself*) is abhorrent to Him. Sin is what causes God to forsake the God man, and as Christ hung on the cross laden with our sins, the judgment of God forsaking man was poured out upon Him. In Christ quoting the Messianic Psalms 22:1, He was revealing that He is the one who atones for the sins of man against the Holy God. His Words make manifest the agony and suffering that Christ was under as He is intimately and personally identified with the judgment of God against man. To suppose that He was rebuking God by this comment, or complaining, or that He was unaware of the meaning of the Words of that Psalm, is to completely ignore all His teachings on these subjects. He surely knew what these Scriptures "actually" meant concerning His suffering.

John 5:36-39

- "But I have greater witness than that of John: for the ***works which the Father hath given me to finish***, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.
- And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.
- And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.
- ***Search the Scriptures;*** for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and ***they are they which testify of me.***"

The work of Christ was not completely finished until He suffered death on the cross. For us to think that Christ was unable to understand fully His abandonment by God the Father on behalf of the elect, which was required as our sacrifice, is to completely

convolute His entire ministry. Christ knew and spoke of His work of the atonement, He knew He had to die for sins, He knew He had to suffer for the iniquity of many, and He knew that the Father had to administer that judgment. If He was the Son of man born of a woman for this purpose, and He knew the cup was handed to Him of God, to say He was actually wondering why God had forsaken Him makes a mockery of the doctrine of Christ.

Mark 8:31-33

- "And he began to *teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*
- And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.
- But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

Since Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Messiah ([Mark 8:29-30](#)) that was prophesied to come, it was incumbent upon Christ to take the opportunity to correct their conceptions of Him as an earthly king who would deliver them from physical subjection under the Romans. He explained to the Apostles the true nature of His Kingdom, purpose, suffering, atonement and resurrection.

Matthew 12:39-40

- "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:
- For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; *so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*"

John 2:19

- "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and *in three days I will raise it up.*"

Clearly Christ knew He had to suffer and die and be raised up in three days. So those who say that Christ lacked the divine knowledge because He "*emptied*" Himself and became human, are obviously wrong. His Words were in no way meant to convey the idea that the Father, the first person of the Trinity, had left the Son in any sense except in judging Him for the sins of man that He was bearing. For God is three personages in one, inseparable, immutable and omniscient. Christ knew perfectly that God was with Him (*He said so*) and He knew perfectly well what the nature of His suffering was, why He had to die, and why He would rise again. Of course He suffered in the flesh, and of course God was His help and this is part of the divine mystery of the trinity. Nevertheless, we are not to suppose that Christ didn't understand what the Scripture really meant in saying, "by His stripes we are healed?" Christ was the greatest teacher of law that man has ever seen, and yet some believe because He was

fully man He didn't understand His true mission of death and resurrection? This is the conclusion many come to simply because He speaks as a man would in declaring, "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me.*" The fact is, Christ said these things that we would know that Old Testament Scriptures were being fulfilled in the man, Christ. He often told us point blank that He was doing things so that we could reference the prophecy in Scripture. For example, just before He died on the cross we see a vivid illustration of this.

John 19:28-30

- "After this, Jesus ***knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled***, saith, I thirst.
- Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.
- When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

Unambiguously, Christ did these things because He knew the plan and He wanted us to know that He was the Savior fulfilling the Scriptures. It was not because He was physically weaker than most other mortal men were. This cry of thirst was to demonstrate the abandonment of God and that the Messianic psalm was being fulfilled.

Psalms 69:21-22

- "They gave me also gall for my meat; and ***in my thirst*** they gave me vinegar to drink.
- Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap."

This whole idea that Christ was so physically weak because of his humanity and had no divine knowledge of what the cost was or what He was saying, is antithetical to the gospel message. Of course He understood this, and He understood that His lot was to be beaten, suffer and die and be resurrected. It was expressly for this hour that He was He born.

John 10:17-18

- "Therefore doth my Father love me, ***because I lay down my life***, that I might take it again.
- ***No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.*** I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

He knew what was coming and He knew what was required. He went to the cross accepting the cup "willingly," because He was not a mere man like everyone else. He was a God man, a superior man who understood fully the bitter dregs of the cup that He had to drink. Both fully God and fully man, and yet superior in all aspects that He might endure the wrath of God for us. As it is written:

Isaiah 53:4-6

- "Surely he hath *borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows*: yet we did esteem him stricken, *smitten of God*, and afflicted.
- But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; *and with his stripes we are healed*.
- 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*."

Of course Christ fully understood this prophecy of His coming to bear the grief and sorrow that we so justly deserved ourselves. Of course He knew that He would be smitten of God, because it was for this hour that righteous God became flesh (*the Son of Man*) to take on the wages of sin for man.

1st Peter 2:24

- "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: *by whose stripes ye were healed*."

Clearly He sacrificed Himself of His own free will, to be forsaken of God for the sins of man. He knew that this substitution was the only way that we could be made righteous to stand before God. Isaiah 53:4 is fulfilled because Christ consciously became our scapegoat, stood in our place, bore our sins, and suffered the required punishment of death from God for us. So there is no need to minimize the inseparable nature of the Father with the Son, or make trivial the deity of Christ by implying He cried out to God because He didn't know what the extent of His suffering would be. We should not speculate or surmise that He was weak or didn't understand these things. Scripture shows He quite obviously did understand and did know that He had to be forsaken of God. Christ's cry wasn't because He was a man, or because He was dejected, or had a lack of faith and felt some failing of God. It was because He understood the Psalms perfectly, and thus He knew the ties the prophecy had to His suffering and His bringing it to our remembrance. He referenced it not for Himself, but "*for the benefit*" of His faithful witnesses who would read it. These keyed comments are guide posts and bookmarks to the elect, even as they are simultaneously a snare to the faith-less. As the living Word Christ, they can be both a precious stone to one, and a stone of stumbling to another. For Christ was made sin ([2nd Corinthians 5:21](#)) in the flesh for us. He was made a curse wherein God's wrath was called down upon Him "for our" sakes. In other words, we were under the curse of the law, thus in order to redeem us from that curse, God became man that He might take that curse in the flesh of man and be forsaken of God. He stood "*in our stead*" as a vivid illustration of God forsaking God, which is the supreme mystery of the gospel of redemption.

Galatians 3:13

- "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, *being made a curse for us: for it is written*, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:"

This was written that we might reference it and learn that no one could be the Savior ([Isaiah 43:10-11](#)) of man except God. This is the mystery of God forsaking God and the illustration that to try and separate God from the man Christ who hung on the cross, is like confessing that God was made flesh that He might die, but then abandoned the flesh when He was needed most to prevail in death. Christ suffered as a divine-human, yet in the sense of payment for our sins ([Romans 6:23](#)), God the Son was separated from/forsaken of God the Father. He was literally suffering the pangs of the grave for us, an atonement that is beyond our full comprehension. He did not cry out over mere human suffering or despair. Would we really believe that the prophets of old who were tortured and the martyrs who were mere men who went triumphantly to torture without crying out, were stronger than Christ? They went to the cross, to the stake, to be burned in fires, eaten by lions, every form of torment and punishment, and are we to believe that Christ couldn't do this without crying out as if He'd lost all hope? **God forbid!** So, why did Jesus say "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" To illustrate to us the cost of our redemption.

The fact is, the very question by Christ "*absolutely does*" imply that there truly was a forsaking by God in some sense. But Christ spoke these words not because of His humanity, but because God is illustrating that He carried the sins of the elect in the body of Christ ([Romans 6:6-11](#)) and deserved the death He suffered. It was "*us in Him*" that warranted His being forsaken of God. Our Savior God took upon Himself that justified forsaking, as our substitute Lamb. Therefore He was speaking on our behalf as our stand in. So the answer to the rhetorical question of, "*My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me,*" is because He was the body of the iniquity of us all. He had literally become sin for us ([2nd Corinthians 5:21](#)). God allowed Him to suffer and die upon the cross as the propitiation for the sins of man. He could have stopped His wrath at any time, but then the chosen would have been condemned to death with the rest of the world, and His Covenant/Promise to Abraham abrogated. God Forbid! He had to forsake Christ for the sake of the elect. Search the Messianic psalms and particularly chapter 22, and also consider the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Messiah. Christ had the sin of all the elect laid upon Him, and that is why God had forsaken Him. This cry was not the voice of despair because He was a mere mortal man, but one of pointing toward the type, "that we might see the Scripture fulfilled" in the anti-type. It is a verbal key that directs and unlocks other passages when we compare Scripture with Scripture. Just as the Apostle John directs us to this same Psalm when testifying of this death of Christ.

John 19:23-24

- "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.
- They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: ***that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith,*** They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did."

These things were done for a specific reason, which was for our benefit, and to God's

glory. It was so that Scripture could be fulfilled that spoke of the work of Christ. This is the same key that is pointing us to the very same Messianic psalm of chapter 22.

Psalms 22:18

- "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

How would we know except the Apostle bear witness of it and the Spirit guide us to it? In Psalms 22 is revealed God's rejection of the man Christ because He stands in as the representative of the elect, as the second Adam ([1st Corinthians 15:22](#); [1st Corinthians 15:45](#)) who had to be laden with our sins. Christ asserts these things that we know that He had been forsaken and rejected by both God and man. Yet in the Psalm we see the "faith of Christ" as He still trusts "His Father," looking toward the resurrection and continuing in faithfulness. It is reiterated that He is sure that in the end God will be His help and his faith will be justified. Christ quotes these Psalms and other Scriptures that we might search them out and understand the truth in their fulfillment.

Luke 24:44-46

- "And he said unto them, *These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*
- Then *opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,*
- And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:"

From these Scriptures we know that Christ was aware of what He was getting into and He uttered these phrases that the mystery of the Scriptures might be revealed to be fulfilled. When our Lord said, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,*" He was directing us to the magnificent Messianic truths of Psalms chapter 22. He declared that it was so we might understand that He was forsaken for our sakes. In His eternal love for the elect, Christ took upon Himself the judgment of God ([Romans 6:23](#)) that we deserved for our sins. When the great darkness fell across Calvary for three hours, it illustrated the purpose of Christ in absorbing the darkness of hell/hades that we deserved in our God forsaken state. The glory of these mysteries are revealed through our searching out the matter within God's Word.

Proverbs 25:2

- "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."

He who hath an ear, let him hear. So what is the consolation that might be drawn from the question of Christ saying, "*My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?*" Chiefly, that we are comforted and have reassurance in knowing that as Christ was forsaken of God for us, we will never have to fear the same fate. Because of His finished work, we know God will never leave or abandon us.

Hebrews 13:5

- "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

He was forsaken, died for our sins ([1st Corinthians 15-3](#)), bruised for our iniquities ([Isaiah 53:5](#)), wounded for our transgressions ([Isaiah 53:5](#)), and it was so that we might know the answer to His prophetic question of "why." We have full assurance of our completed redemption in the body of His death. Joyfully, our hearts are comforted, being knit together in love, unto all riches of the full assurance of salvation and acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and the Father, and of Christ ([Colossians 2:2-3](#)).

May the Lord, who is gracious above all, grant us wisdom and understanding in the knowledge of His blessed Word.

Amen!

Peace,

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