

FORSAKEN

Text: Matthew 27:45-56

Read: Hebrews 10:19-25

1: Jesus forsaken by God

Jesus' cry
Darkness

2: Jesus dies

Jesus gave up his spirit
The curtain of the temple split
An earthquake
Holy people raised from the dead

3: Jesus' death and its significance not unnoticed

Those raised to life appeared to many people
The Centurion and those with him confess
The women are witness - his death, burial, and resurrection

And so: Confess Jesus as the Son of God, Saviour from sin!

Mt 27:45-56 rev

Dear Congregation, family and friends

On a Friday morning a long, long, time ago, an innocent man was condemned to die as the worst of criminals. And with the worst public death they could think of at the time being crucifixion, he died on a cross. Since then, that Friday each year that Friday has been commemorated as Good Friday.

But how then can we possibly call it "Good"? How can you call a day commemorating the execution of an innocent man as the worst of criminals 'good'? How can you call a day on which a righteous and godly man was forsaken by God 'good'? And we can only call it good because Jesus went willingly, to be forsaken by God, so that God might not forsake us. He went to his death for our sakes.

Another reason we can call it 'Good' is because Good Friday isn't the end of the story – Good Friday leads us to Easter. And of course Easter speaks of resurrection. Easter speaks of new life. Jesus may have been forsaken by his heavenly Father on Good Friday, but not for long. Immediately after his death he joined his heavenly Father in Paradise. His body stayed in the grave just long enough to prove that he was dead. And then he burst out of the grave again. Death couldn't hold him. He conquered sin and death. Satan was defeated. And surely that is something we can describe as 'good'.

Point 1

Matthew *starts to describe that victory here in this passage in the words that Jesus cries out on the cross*, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

One thing you notice is that the gospel writers aren’t overly concerned about describing all the gory details of what happened on the cross. They would have made hopeless movie producers nowadays. There’s no vivid description of the sweat and the blood from the crown of thorns stinging Jesus’ eyes. You don’t read about his body wracked by pain because of the nails through his hands and feet. There’s no action close ups, no distorted face filling the screen.

And it’s only because *they’re much more concerned about the significance* of what was happening, rather than the physical side of thing. And they bring that out in other ways. And so, Jesus is recorded as having made something like 7 statements from the cross. And Matthew records one of them, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Matthew wants us to know that on the cross *God the Son was abandoned by God the Father*. It’s a quote that Jesus took from the beginning of Psalm 22. The first half of the psalm speaks of the despair of being abandoned by God. ‘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? O my God, I cry out by day, but you don’t answer, by night, and am not silent.’

Another thing in this passage that speaks of abandonment is the *3 hours of darkness that continued from noon until 3 o’clock*.

Maybe you’ve seen the eerie darkness as a bad storm rolls in - 10 o’clock in the morning feels like 8 o’clock at night. And these hours on the cross were something like that. Something was happening that was out of the ordinary.

In the Old Testament unusual darkness is a symbol of God's judgement. Think of the 3 days of darkness over Egypt when Pharaoh wouldn't let Israel go. The Old Testament prophets like Amos also saw the final Day of the coming of the Lord as a day of darkness for those who'd forgotten God and only thought of themselves. Darkness in the Old Testament is a direct sign of God's anger against sin. God is perfect light, and when he removes himself from the presence of those who stand against him, they're left in darkness. During the 3 hours of darkness on the cross, Jesus was under God's judgement.

The point is that here *on the cross, Jesus takes upon himself the sin of the world*. He willingly offers himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. God poured his anger against sin upon him. Jesus literally went through hell on the cross. He took upon himself an eternity of hell for every one of us who turns to him in repentance from sin and faith. He was forsaken by his heavenly father.

And it was a terrible thing for Jesus to have to go through. On the other hand, we only have the opportunity of salvation because he did. We're only saved from God's anger against our sin because Jesus took it upon himself in our place. We're only saved from hell, because Jesus took hell upon himself on our behalf. And because he did what he did, as we put our trust in him, committing ourselves to him in every way, we can know that we are saved. We have the salvation from sin that only he can offer.

Point 2

And then *with a loud cry, Jesus gave up his spirit*.

And that is a surprising thing in itself. Usually by the time of death those being crucified were weak and struggling for breath. They didn't have any strength left. They didn't have the air in their lungs to shout. It's surprising that with that kind of strength left, Jesus reached the point of death.

And it's only because death wasn't calling the shots here. Someone else was in charge. When all that needed to be done was finished, Jesus gave up his spirit. Death wasn't in control, Jesus was. Luke makes it even more obvious. He describes Jesus as calling out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I

commit my spirit.” And then breathing his last.

And at that very moment ***a number of things happened to bring out the significance of this death.***

The curtain of the temple into the Holy of Holies split from top to bottom. If you know anything about that curtain, you’ll know that that was no mean feat in itself. The curtain was 30 feet high, and thick. But even more impressive was what that meant. The Holy of Holies represented God’s throneroom on earth. No one was allowed to enter it. If they did, the punishment was instant death. The exception was once a year when the high priest would enter on the Day of Atonement to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of Israel. But now on the cross Jesus had done that once and for all. There was a new and living way into God’s presence, Jesus himself. The old way was obsolete. The curtain was no longer needed.

The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as the perfect high priest, the one the world needed all along. He has entered the sanctuary before us, on our behalf, a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. And Hebrews describes his body as the heavenly curtain that we pass through to come into God’s presence; a new and living way that makes us right with God.

Which means that if we’re hoping to come to know God, if we’re wanting to meet him, if we’re wanting to be accepted by him, and be received into his presence, the way to do that is through Jesus. Jesus gave his body and shed his blood on the cross so that we might be right with God. The way to approach God is through faith in Jesus and everything he has done.

Something else that happened at the same time as the tearing of the curtain ***was an earthquake.*** The earth shook. Rocks split.

And once again, if you look to the Old Testament, earthquakes often went hand in hand with the mighty acts of God. And Old Testament prophets spoke of earthquakes accompanying the Great Day of the

coming of the Lord.

And with the earthquake ***tombs broke open*** and some of the righteous folk of previous years rose again to life.

And you don't want to imagine them as zombies walking around half decayed, with strips of cloth hanging off them. This isn't the movies. You want to think of them the same way you think of Lazarus being brought back to life by Jesus not all that much earlier - he had died too and already been in a tomb for a few days.

The significance here is that with Jesus' death, and his resurrection a few days later, death had been defeated. The future resurrection of believers was a certainty. Jesus' resurrection on the third day would demonstrate what was in store for believers. And the rising to life of these folk proved it.

And like Lazarus, they would have died again some time later and returned to the grave. On the other hand, after his resurrection Jesus didn't. And when he comes again all believers will enjoy the resurrection to new life, and the kind of resurrection body that he already has. Then we'll fully enjoy the eternal life that only he can give.

Point 3

And then a third thing that you notice in this passage is that ***Jesus' death, and the signs that came with it didn't go unnoticed.***

In our legal system, witnesses often play an important part in the success of a case. In Jesus' day that was even more the case. They didn't have forensic experts then. They didn't have the technology we have today. And maybe the witnesses to the crucifixion didn't fully understand what was happening at the time, but a little later, when they did, their eye-witness accounts were available to confirm everything that had happened.

You notice that *those who were raised to life appeared to many people*. Within a few days they had entered Jerusalem. They would have caught up with friends and family. People couldn't believe that their dearly departed were with them again. Surely that was something that would have made an impact that wasn't quickly forgotten.

And *not only the Jews noticed that something was happening, so did the Romans*. The Centurion was so struck by everything happening that he confessed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!' And there's every chance that this wasn't a fully Christian confession, but it all made enough of an impact on him to say what he said.

And *the women were also witnesses to his death*. They had often provided bed and board for Jesus throughout his ministry, and supported him financially. And their witness was important. If you read a little further in Matthew, you notice that they also witnessed his burial. And then they witnessed his resurrection as well. They're a thread of eye-witness that links the accounts of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. They were there at each event. They saw it all happen.

And to give a sense of how important this kind of evidence is, you might know that a number of different groups have tested the strength of the evidence that these witnesses give. I've heard that the case for Jesus' resurrection has even been heard in a number of legal courts in different countries. And time and again the verdict has come back that on the strength of the witness available we can only accept the truth of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

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Which leaves each of us with a challenge. It leaves the whole world with a challenge. Do we accept this witness? Do we accept the truth of the things they describe? Do we believe that Jesus died, and rose again from the dead? Do we believe that he was forsaken by God so that God might not forsake us? Do we commit ourselves to Jesus as the one he revealed himself to be?

And if we do believe these things then Jesus also did these things for us. Through faith in him, Jesus also died in our place. He is not only the Saviour of others, but also our Saviour from sin. And we begin to understand why this Friday is called 'Good Friday'.