

For Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion March 28, 2021

John 12:12-19; Zechariah 9:9-12; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

Why did the good Jew, Jesus cry out, “Eloi, Eloi, Lema sabachthani”? – My God, My God why have you forsaken me?

Jesus was a good Jew. He had gone to the parochial schools of his day. He studied all of the law and the scriptures. So why would he say that God had forsaken him?

Were all those years of parochial school down the tubes? Had he forgotten all that he had been taught? Had he lost all that he had said?

No. He knew he was quoting from Psalm 22. This is the Psalm we will read at the end of worship Thursday. On the cross, in his pain, he couldn't say the whole psalm. He didn't have enough strength to say the whole thing. So he says only the first line.

That first line brings to his mind the whole of the psalm. If I say the words, “I pledge allegiance to the flag,” it brings to mind the rest of the pledge for each of you.

Jesus quoted the words of a favorite psalm.

So, why did Jesus, cry out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Was it because God did turn His back on Jesus at that moment?

I was told as a child, as the pastor spoke from a comfortable pulpit, that God would not look at sin. At that moment, the weight of our sin was on Jesus. That meant that God could not look at Jesus because of the sin that weighed him down.

How atrocious of a thought. Think about that. If I want God to ignore me.... if I want to get rid of God...I only need to go deeper into my sin. Never mind the fact that the Bible says that there is no place that we can hide from God. There is no place that God isn't.

While now I know that this is an explanation that is often given, I also know that it contradicts scripture. It is also the opposite of what we know about God.

So why did Jesus say, “Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachthani?” Was it because God did turn His back on him at that moment?

No, because God promised that he would never desert His children.

Israel before us –and the church after Jesus were disobedient. For Israel this led to them going into captivity. But God did not desert them. They were never deserted. No matter what God's people did...even when they worshiped other gods...God did not desert them.

So why would God desert Jesus here. He didn't.

But if you read the whole of the 22nd Psalm – remember by saying the first words, the later words are remembered.

“With liberty and justice for all,” would have been brought to mind when I started the pledge of allegiance.

Those first words bring to mind the rest. And God is the ultimate victor in the 22nd Psalm.

The first words aren't the whole story.

He quotes the Psalm, which calls to God for his strength. It says that God does not despise or disdain the suffering of an afflicted one. The feeling of abandon is there – but that God has not really hidden his face. And finally the psalm claims that all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord for what he has done.

Why did the good Jew Jesus cry out, “My God my God why have you forsaken me?”
Was it because he felt God had deserted him?

He was empty inside. Nature itself had pictured this desertion and darkness.

Jesus had had some good years. They were enjoyable years.

Yet now crucifixion and the end of those times.

This was a loss of the excitement. There was no longer the joyful center of attention.

One week earlier he had heard people call out what we said to begin this service,
“Hosanna to the Son of David.”

And now he was alone on a cross.

Was it because he felt God had deserted him?

Perhaps. But note that in spite of the feeling, he called out MY God.

Not “God where are you,” but calls out to MY God.

That means he knew that God would still hear. By calling out for MY God he claimed to know the Father personally. In spite of feeling deserted, he still trusted the Father to work. That God would be active EVEN IN THIS.

Was it because he felt God had deserted him?

By calling on God he claims that God had not totally deserted him. Total desertion would mean he was ignored by God. He wouldn’t speak with God. He would go against God – NOT CALL TO GOD.

Yet even knowing that, we can still understand that that is how he felt.

Deserted.

Like you might feel. In Fact, because of the isolation of Covid, there has been a rise in suicide – people feel deserted.

When all those around him had deserted him. When even his best friends disdained him.

He was lost.... alone. We deserted him. All who claimed to be his friends had deserted him. And so he FELT deserted by God. In spite of confidence in God’s calling him to do this.

He felt deserted...desolate...forlorn.

Why did the good Jew, Jesus cry out, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”

Was it because he had expected a miraculous saving from this cross?

Was he upset that God did not send his angels in this hour.

After the temptation he had in the desert the angels came. Isn’t that what we want – and what we expect when we are in trouble. When we hurt we look for God to miraculously come down and wipe away our tears.

“I’ve suffered enough...take me down from this cross...now.”

No, he did not believe that he didn’t have to go through any pain. He had asked that in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was told that it wasn’t possible for him to avoid this death...this cup.

Too often Jesus had told others that he would suffer and die. He knew the consequences of his becoming a servant – of becoming a human like you and me. He knew what would happen for his declaring God’s message.

In Gethsemane, he had prayed as hard as he could, “let this cup pass.”

He knew the consequences of the path he choose. Yet he went into it with his eyes open.

But, you know, it is different to know what is coming, and to actually go through it. Jesus felt the loss. Ask anyone who has lived through a war...

Why did Jesus call out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Was it because he was angry at God?

He was suffocating. That is what happens in crucifixion. Tears rolling down for his loss. There was the loss of any future. He had never fathered a child. Never married. Never done many things.

On the cross he could change his mind. He could go away and hide. Everyone had run away from him. There was not friend there to help. And all of those human emotions were there.

Was it because he was angry at God?

That is possible. That is a human reaction to pain. Even though he knew he had to go through with it.

Why...why this way and no other?

Why do I have to go through with this?

Why now?

Why not wait until I'm old and gray and lived a fuller life? That is the kind of bargain we grandparents want to make when we see our grandchildren suffering.

Where are you in this God?

Why must I be deserted? I'm angry.

That may be behind Jesus statement as well.

Why did Jesus cry out, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?"

Because he thought the whole world had turned against him. He felt totally alone and deserted. We first know God – not through a revealed blank wall...or a printed page...but we first experience God through others.

Even for leaders that is true.

No one stuck around Jesus. So perhaps also God himself may have deserted him.

That is a very true feeling of this moment.

That is seen in the physical pain he was undergoing. And no friends stuck around the cross.

That is seen in the weight of the sins of all of us upon him.

God will look at a sinner... But...But we won't look at those "lower" than us. We are repulsed by the sinner as well as the sin. We are repulsed by anything we feel better than. We don't want to look at all that sin on him at this moment...even though it is our sin. There is no one there to comfort him.

Why did Jesus cry out, "My God My God why have you forsaken me?"

He may have felt deserted by God – in his pain.

He was definitely lonely as he was deserted by us – as well as any others.

Though he knew God would ultimately bring victory out of defeat – he felt deserted in the pain.

He knew that no one would look upon him at that moment.

Even if God really would – that is known in the head – but not the heart.

And we too deserted him. He had nothing at that moment, except a hope that eventually God would bring something out of this, and even that could not be seen by him at that moment.

And so the Word of God made flesh, knows our feeling:

- Of desertion
- Of loss
- Of emptiness of sorrow
- Alone