

Thorn-Crowned Devotions

Week Four

Darkness

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

Mark 15:33

We move now from the fourth Gospel to what was probably the first written. Mark tells us of a time of darkness that came over the whole land. Remember that the sixth hour refers to six hours from daybreak or noon. This darkness will last until three o'clock.⁹

It is supernatural in origin and covers at least Jerusalem and as far as one could see from Golgotha. What is the significance of the darkness?

The Bible uses darkness as a warning of judgment to come.

⁹ *“And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.”¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.*

Amos 8:9–10

It would have been impossible with the background of the Hebrew scriptures to see this as other than a day of mourning and judgment (*Joel 2:2; see Mark 13:24*).

But the darkness will give way to light, not through human effort, but because the Lord will work.

² *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.*

Isaiah 60:2

The Cry

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

Matthew 27:45–49

The misunderstanding of Jesus' words began right there in the crowd surrounding the cross and has continued through the centuries. Let's clear up *some* of the confusion:

Jesus was not calling for Elijah as the people thought. Matthew's translation into Greek clears that up definitively. It is not to Elijah that He calls, but to His Father.

I don't believe God forsook Jesus on the cross, nor do I think that He felt forsaken, although it seemed like He was forsaken. Jesus knew he had to drink the bitter cup. It was not the wine vinegar on a sponge which contained no myrrh to deaden the pain. The cup was this death and He was going through it victoriously.

Jesus was announcing the twenty-second Psalm.

It begins with these words, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* and continues with a prophetic description of these sufferings, but it is not a psalm of despair, but of triumph. He caused these words to be included in 22:24, *"For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy, He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help."*

Psalms had not been numbered in the days of Jesus. It was customary to refer to a psalm by its first line. This let others know which psalm you were thinking of and would like to sing.

We do the same thing and indexing hymns. If you look in the back of a hymnal at the index, you will be able to find a song by either its title or its first line. For instance, the hymn entitled “*Make Me a Blessing*” can also be found by the words, “*Out in the highways and byways of life,*” its first line.

If all we had of Psalm 22 was the first two verses, we would have to classified as a lament psalm and a very gloomy one. But it’s true message is not found at the beginning, but at the end.

As we read, study, and meditate on Psalm 22, I want you to remember that Jesus was not crying in despair, but offering us hope and encouragement, even in his intense suffering.

The Cry

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

*Why are you so far from saving me,
from the words of my groaning?*

*²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

What does it mean to be forsaken by God?

The psalmist expresses this idea as “abandonment” in the words of the second line, “... *you are so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning.*”

He is expressing the *feeling* of abandonment, but the comment, “... *You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!*” (v.21) shows that he has not actually been abandoned.

It is not unusual to feel forsaken when our prayers are not answered as we would like and when we would like, but it never means we have been written off by God.

Was Jesus forsaken by God on the cross. It was certainly the Father’s will for Him to die there on our behalf. Jesus did it for the joy of being with us in the Father’s presence. That His sufferings were acceptable to God is clearly seen in the Father’s raising Jesus from the dead. It is no less than we should expect from the holy God. He will keep His commitments to those He loves.

*³Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

*⁴In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

⁵To you they cried and were rescued;

in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

One encouragement when we feel forsaken is to look back at how God had worked in the lives of others who trusted in God. There were times when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had felt abandoned, but God preserved them. Joseph certainly could have given in to despair in Egypt except he knew God planned it for good. As the Lord's anointed, David, fled from King Saul, he eventually had to leave the land to survive, but in God's time, he became king. Even the exile would give way to return to the land. God's plans cannot be stopped.

But will God deliver you?

*⁶But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
⁷All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
⁸"He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
⁹Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
¹⁰On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

Another way to turn the feeling of being forsaken into faith is to look back at how God has worked in your own life, even from birth.

It is this trust which becomes the source of the world's mocking. Their purpose is to drive us to despair and away from faith. This attack can only be conquered by faith.

*¹¹Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,*

and there is none to help.

There is nothing wrong with appealing to God for help at any time, but certainly it is imperative when “*there is none to help.*” We should never fear to ask for His help in the struggles

¹²*Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*
¹³*they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*
¹⁴*I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;*
¹⁵*my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

With very descriptive language, he describes the power of the enemies in the danger he felt. The “*bulls of Bashan*” and were well fed, strong and dangerous as anyone who has been in an open field with a large bull can tell you. Their ferocity can rightly be compared to that of hungry lions.

When that happens, fear takes hold of our bodies and produces in us a weakness very similar to what Jesus felt on the cross. It is the process of dying bodily.

¹⁶*For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—*
¹⁷*I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;*
¹⁸*they divide my garments among them,*

and for my clothing they cast lots.

Psalm 22:1–18

We need to stop at this point and look at the description in this Psalm in light of what Jesus went through on the cross. He was mocked by his enemies for his faith as in verse 8. His hands and feet were pierced as in verse 16. The soldiers divided his clothes, even casting lots for his row as in verse 18.

Is it any wonder that the early church thought of Jesus when they were reminded of this Psalm?

When the Lord cried out, he reminded them of the message of this portion of the word of God.

The Call

19But you, O LORD, do not be far off!

O you my help, come quickly to my aid!

20Deliver my soul from the sword,

my precious life from the power of the dog!

21Save me from the mouth of the lion!

You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

Psalm 22:19–21

This section is full of rich imagery as it describes the dangers as that of the sword, the power of the dog, the mouth of the lion, and the horns of the wild oxen.

The great transformation comes in verse 21. His cry goes from the imperative, “save me,” to the cry of relief, “you have rescued me.” In an instant he has gone from feeling forsaken to being saved.

This Psalm, by King David, hundreds of years before Jesus came was not written by a man in despair. Instead it was written by one who had passed through despair into certain hope. Nothing in the circumstances changed, but he pressed forward with confidence in God’s deliverance.

Nothing in the circumstances of your life may change when you trust Jesus, but everything changes. You pass from death into life, from sinner to saint.

The Consequence

*22I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
23You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*

When you are saved, you must tell. Our testimony to the working of God in our lives is an essential part of the plan. Others who may be struggling must know that the Lord God hears the cry of those who trust in Him.

*24For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.*

Here is the definitive answer to the question, “Did God turn His back on Jesus when He was dying on the cross?”

The answer was not deliverance of the soul, the life from immediate death. It was not postponement, but eternal victory. Jesus showed the way to eternal life.

*25From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
26The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!*

The word needs to get out that God has not despised or hated the afflicted. God did not turn his back on Jesus, but delivered him through the grave.

This is great encouragement when we are afflicted.

*27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.*

*28 For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.*

*29 All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.*

*30 Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;*

*31 they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a
people yet unborn,
that he has done it.*

Psalm 22:22–31

The message of Jesus, his sufferings and victory, must be told worldwide throughout the generations.