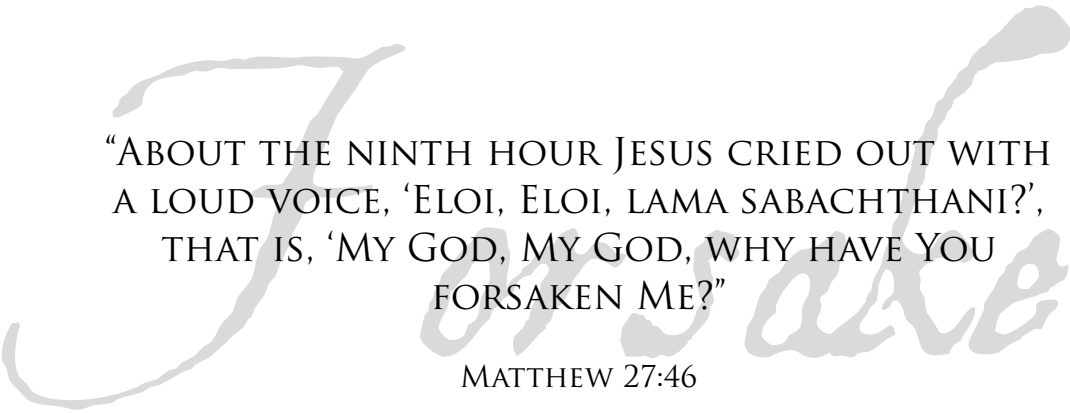


My God
MY GOD, MY GOD
WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

A Holy Week Meditation

Jay C. Wingard



“ABOUT THE NINTH HOUR JESUS CRIED OUT WITH
A LOUD VOICE, ‘ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?’,
THAT IS, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU
FORSAKEN ME?”

MATTHEW 27:46

OUR LORD NEVER LEAVES SCRIPTURE

Let us be amazed at the passion of Christ. Throughout the entire life of our Lord he never, ever leaves Scripture - even during the final hours as He is nailed to a cross. As He cried from that cross every moment of His life is a fulfillment of the majestic promises of Scripture and the fulfillment of all that was planned before the foundation of the world. The spotless Lamb of God came to die - all the while knowing that we would sin and heinously rebel against Him, and "yet while we were yet sinners, Christ Jesus died for us." This is truly amazing grace! Time and time again we read in Holy Writ that Jesus does things and says things "so that the Scripture will be fulfilled." He is the Word of God - the very Word that became flesh and tabernacled among us.

THEN BEGINNING WITH
MOSES AND WITH ALL THE
PROPHETS, HE EXPLAINED
TO THEM THE THINGS
CONCERNING HIMSELF IN
ALL THE SCRIPTURES.

LUKE 24:27

As two disciples were walking the road to Emmaus we see the amazing truths that the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the glorious truth that everything - absolutely everything was fulfilled in Scripture. Let us recall in Luke 24 how Jesus told the disciples that everything written in the Law and the prophets pointed to Him - the Christ, the Messiah.

My intention in this study is to show from one glorious statement heralded from the cross that every word of Scripture points to Christ. I also seek to challenge a common teaching in Evangelicalism today that teaches that the Father "abandoned and turned away" from His Son on the cross.

Let us explore together the majestic wonder of our Lord and Savior as we look at only one of the seven sayings of Christ on the cross.

THE HINT OF RABBINICAL TEACHING

As the High Rabbi and teacher of all things, many Bible scholars believe our Lord used a technique known as remez from the cross. Remez is a Jewish rabbinical technique that gives only a section of Scripture while assuming that the student will know all of the Scripture around that line. It is thought that Jesus used this many times throughout His life on earth. For example, the name "Son of Man" is an obvious remez to Daniel and even Christ writing in the sand is a possible remez to Jeremiah 17:13. We must remember that Christ is the word - the Word made flesh. He is all that Scripture points to and everything He did was tied to Scripture. So it is no surprise that the sayings of Christ from the cross are all tied to Scripture.

We even use a form of remez today. For example, if a pastor stands up before his congregation and begins with, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." the congregation will know exactly the verse, passage and the remainder of the Scripture and will begin speaking the passage aloud. This is the same technique used in early Jewish teachings.

Remez also illustrates to us the utmost importance of knowing God's Word. Christ knew it, lived it and never left it - even while hanging on the cross. Every true Christian desires to be more like Christ and the saturation of the Word of God in their life is one way to imitate our Lord and Savior.

Let us examine one of the most intense sayings of our Lord on that tree. A saying that has been interpreted many ways - often to the point of reading into Scripture instead of allowing Scripture to speak for itself. My goal is to approach from the latter by following the thought that Jesus utilized the Jewish technique of remez while on the cross. It is my prayer that this will open up some of the deep depths of the glorious truths of what took place on that cursed tree.

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MATTHEW 27:46

WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

These words of Christ are recorded in Matthew and Mark. They are words that I believe have been misused for many years to paint an unbiblical account of what Christ is experiencing on the cross and a false understanding of what God the Father is doing.

The word “forsake” all through Scripture rarely means to “abandon”. Yet that is most often how this word is interpreted among Evangelicals over the last few decades. In Scripture, “forsake” almost always means that God allows His children to fall into the hands of enemies (all under His sovereignty). So to forsake Biblically implies more of coming under judgement than the idea of turning away. However, we must also understand that in a sense God did turn away - by turning all His goodness away from Christ but focusing intensely all of His righteous wrath fully on Christ. This is no doubt an accurate picture of hell.

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To understand Christ’s cry as God completely abandoning His Son on the cross is a poor handling of Scripture in my opinion. Many teach that God cannot look on sin. This is not a Biblical statement. God goes eyeball to eyeball with sin in Satan as clearly seen in the book of Job. Looking on sin is not contrary to God’s holiness. Not dealing with sin, not hating sin and not punishing sin would most definitely be contrary to who God is. This is clearly demonstrated at the cross!

Let us consider carefully that God not once abandoned Christ in the sense that many believe as a separation between the Father and the Son. The moment that would have happened the eternal Trinity would no longer be eternal. This poses critical theological issues. Muslims use the errant interpretation that God abandoned Christ at the cross to attack Christ’s deity saying that if God abandoned Christ then Christ could not be one with God, therefore He could not be God. Even the pagan world can see the error in this interpretation yet most of Evangelicalism misses this.

Let us pause and allow Scripture to systematically teach us truth and not speculate or fall victim to the error of reading into Scripture and not allowing Scripture to speak.

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS JESUS SAYING?

We know that Christ taught up to His dying breath and then at His resurrection and ascension continues to teach through His Holy Spirit. From that cross the Father did not abandon Christ or turn away as many understand. What the Bible tells us took place is all the wrath and anger of God that we deserve was focused on Christ on the cross. The Father was pouring out the wrath we deserve on His Son as the darkness of judgment fell on the world. All the while Christ relied on the Father and knew that He was with Him even though He walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

The cross is the ultimate display of perfect holy love and perfect holy justice. We can turn the diamond of the cross over and over and never ever exhaust every facet of goodness, love, mercy, wrath, grace, justice and all that is God Almighty.

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY
HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?
FAR FROM MY
DELIVERANCE ARE THE
WORDS OF MY GROANING.

PSALM 22:1

So if our Lord's cry does not mean that the Father abandoned Him what does it mean? Let us recall the rabbinical technique *remez* and the Biblical illustration of Christ never, ever leaving Scripture. Even when Christ did not tell His disciples that what He was doing was to fulfill Scripture they are opened to that truth after His death and resurrection. Scripture makes every effort to point this fact out.

Our Lord, even from the cross, is teaching. He is showing the glory of God's planned gracious event in history. I believe that Christ is using *remez* to point to a set of Psalms - to be sure it is Psalms 22-24. History teaches us that the early Jews considered these three psalms as a connected set.¹ Christ's cry of being forsaken would have immediately brought to mind the teachings and content of these three powerful psalms.

Let us review those three Psalms to see what Christ is teaching us as He hangs on that cross becoming a curse for us, for "cursed is the man who hangs on a tree." (Galatians 3:13)

¹ Doug Greenwold, Preserving Bible Times, #506

PSALM 22 - A CRY FROM THE MESSIAH

Jesus' cry from the cross is the very first line of Psalm 22. As we have learned, this is likely a technique called *remez*. We have also learned that the Jews held Psalm 23 and 24 in tandem with this psalm so we need to keep that into consideration but our focus in this section will be on Psalm 22. This is one of the most powerful and prophetic Messianic Psalms in the Old Testament. It gloriously describes what Christ experienced on the cross as our Messiah. Here we see almost an exact detail of the events that took place hundreds of years later. It is as if David were there at Calvary as a witness to the entire event. This is a testimony to the glorious truths of God's Word and that it is truly inspired and perfect in every way.

This psalm shows Christ being reproached and despised by men (Isaiah 53:3) and how the Jews and Gentiles mock Him while on the cross. Verse 8 is a direct tie to Matthew 27:43 where the leaders actually quote Psalm 22 in mockery of our Lord! It shows how blind they are to the truths of Scripture as Jesus told them that they search the Scriptures thinking that in them they will have eternal life but that it is the Scriptures that tell about Christ.

Let us be reminded that all of this is what Christ wanted us to hear from that one cry from the cross. Let us take notice from this the importance of knowing, studying and memorizing God's Word. But oh, that is not all that was heralded from that one *remez* - there is more in Psalm 22 that we should heed.

The psalmist continues with utter reliance and dependance on God from peril - and of course this is ultimately fulfilled in the passion of our Lord. Oh what our Rabbi teaches us here - to trust and rely on God and His glorious goodness always. (Romans 8:28)

All of this causes the psalmist to burst into a charge of praise to God - to stand in awe of Him! God's perfect holy love and justice at the cross - at the very event unfolding to those in earshot of Christ and His cry of Psalm 22 should cause us to break forth in absolute praise and adoration. Notice in verse 24 we see that God at no time turned from Christ or turned His face from Him. At the same time God looked intently at His Son pouring out divine wrath He never left or abandoned His Son - the second person of the eternal Trinity.

This Psalm ends with all focus on God - that He alone gets the honor, glory and praise because He alone has graciously provided salvation through His Son. All of creation will remember the most important event in history of all time. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. You will either bow in adoration as a Christian or you will be forced to bow in honor or the great Judge and Lord who you have rejected. As our Lord's last words, "It is Finished!" ring across Calvary, the psalmist echoes the same words of completion that God alone has done it and it is truly finished!

PSALM 23 - ETERNAL TRUST IN THE FATHER

As we recall that the Jews traditionally treated Psalms 22-24 as one unit it brings even greater insight to one of the most beloved psalms - a perspective that puts our Lord Jesus in the focus of Psalm 23.

As we read through this psalm we are reminded that the entire time Jesus was on the earth He was constantly following and trusting in His Father. He equally taught us that we should be as dependent - not storing up treasures but looking to Him. Reminding us that if our heavenly Father so clothes the lilies of the fields He will surely care for us. Christ was hoping and trusting in the Eternal Father while on the cross - knowing that He was fulfilling the eternal plan of the Trinity long before the foundation of the world.

All that is done is done for His glory! Let us be reminded of the thundering voice from heaven in John 12:28 of the Father's response to Jesus' request for the Father to glorify His Name! God is glorified in all that He does and deserves proper worship, trust and obedience - the epitome of the life of our Savior who perfectly obeyed the Father without fail!

Again, this psalm shows us that at the cross the Father never leaves or abandons His Son. Christ will fear no evil for the Father is eternally with Him and that bond cannot and will never ever be broken. In the same way that God did not abandon His Son on the cross He will not abandon His elect who are in Christ in the valley of the shadow of death. Oh what a loving, merciful God we have!

EVEN THOUGH I WALK
THROUGH THE VALLEY OF
THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
I FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU
ARE WITH ME; YOUR ROD
AND YOUR STAFF, THEY
COMFORT ME.

PSALM 23:4

Oh how the last words of our Savior before His death on the cross should bring us comfort, awe and humility and cause us to dip our finger into the unfathomable riches of grace and love that is exemplified in the cross of Christ. No matter what we go through, Christ suffered more! Because He suffered, those in Him will never experience the ultimate suffering - that of the wrath of God. (Romans 8:1) Let us learn from our Great Rabbi to rest fully on Him as our Great Shepherd and be not in want - for He is our All in all.

PSALM 24 - WHO IS THIS KING OF GLORY?

Now we move to the glorious resurrection of Christ and His triumphal entry into heaven. We have many other Scriptures that tell of the Messiah's resurrection including Psalm 16 that is quoted by Paul in his sermon in Acts 13:30-37. Paul uses this text to show that God had planned before the foundation of the world not to allow His Holy One to undergo decay.

In Psalm 24 we have the triumphal entry of Christ into the throne room of God - likely at His glorious ascension after walking on the earth 40 days after His resurrection.

This psalm is profound. It begins with a proclamation that everything is God's. God created everything and is over everything. It begins with God and focuses on who He is - all of His glory and majesty as the Creator of all things. It begins where we must always begin and end - with God. Given who God is - that He is perfect and holy, who

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O
GATES, AND BE LIFTED UP, O
ANCIENT DOORS, THAT
THE KING OF GLORY
MAY COME IN!

PSALM 24:7

can possibly come before Him? What human can possibly enter the threshold of His throne room? The psalmist tells us that only one with a pure heart and clean hands - one who is spotless and perfect. Only one Man fits this condition - the God Man Jesus Christ.

Verses 7-10 paint a profound and awesome scene. Here we have Christ - fully man and fully God approaching the threshold of God's throne room. The psalmist seems to write envisioning a throng of angels asking boldly, "what man dare approach the throne of the Almighty? No man has dared approached God!" But oh the gloriousness of the immediate verse that this King of Glory is not only man but fully God - the Lord strong and mighty! Take in the beauty of this scene - our representative in heaven as fully man and our righteousness as fully God walking victoriously into heaven as the first fruits presenting Himself as the perfect sacrifice completed while throngs of angels proclaim that Jesus Christ is the King of Glory!

The very Lord of Hosts is the King of Glory - God in the flesh who sits at the right hand of the Father living forever to constantly intercede for us that we may be saved to the uttermost! (Hebrews 7:25)

Oh how Scripture is so true with, "My ways are not your ways"! Those in Christ who will live forever with Him will for eternity never exhaust or be in awe of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. Eternal life is truly to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent! (John 17:17) Amen!

TAKING IT ALL IN...

It is my prayer that this study will cause a yearning to delve deeper into the glorious truths of Holy Scripture. Sadly, the god of this world blinds the minds of people so that they cannot see the truth and come to the Light. No doubt this is what was occurring at the cross of Christ as crowds hurled insults at the uncreated Creator who became the creation and mocked Him as He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf so that we may have the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21) The truth of knowing that we too are just as hostile to God further causes us to glory in the grace of our God who causes us to be born again and grants us the gift of faith to open our eyes to His glory so that we run to the cross as our only hope. To be saved means that God alone has done it all. As the psalmist penned in the 22nd psalm, "He has done it!"

This study is one that overwhelms me for in one sentence our Savior points to the entire Gospel in three Psalms. The description of the suffering Messiah whose hands and feet were pierced, Christ's trust in the Father while on the cross and the triumphal entry into the threshold of the throne room of God is all part of Holy Week and should be a part of every thought of the true believer as they live a gospel-centered life every day of our lives. May we seek to purify ourselves as we wait expectantly for the King of Glory to return to collect His elect from the four corners of the earth.

It has been said that Psalm 22-24 is the fifth gospel. These three psalms together offer us an astounding account that would make most believe that the psalmist was actually there witnessing the entire event.

This Holy Week may we be reminded of the truths of Scripture and all that our Savior endured for us - both physically and spiritually and all that He provides for us in His atoning and substitutionary death, resurrection and ascension.

Let us be reminded of the importance of studying and memorizing Scripture so that we will have a truthful understanding of the things of God and let what Jesus said from the cross and the expectations He had for those around Him to understand press us to delve deep into the Scriptures.

May we be reminded of who Christ is as we meditate this Holy Week on the unmerited and undeserved grace and mercy to us by our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him by the glory forever! Soli Deo Gloria!

He is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed!

