

Mark 15:34

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"WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"

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TEXT: Mark 15:34 "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Of all the words spoken from the cross, surely these are the most difficult for us to understand. Not the words, themselves, of course. They're plain enough. What concerns us is how Jesus could ever have said them and why.

With His other words we have no such problems. Consider, for instance the first: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." What could be more beautiful? What could be more Christ-like? Compassion toward His tormentors, even from the cross, was but following his own teachings in Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. . . ." We might wonder whether we could ever do that, but we can certainly see how Jesus might.

1-B

And the same is true of that second word: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Again it's a word of compassion and forgiveness, this time, not toward His enemies, but to one of those being crucified beside Him. How like Him it was. It brings to mind that passage from John's Gospel where His

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enemies confronted Jesus with a woman "caught in the very act of adultery." Perhaps you remember how He confounded her accusers by saying, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And then, when they had all gone away, He turned to her and said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again."

And so it is with all the others. "Woman behold thy son!" "I thirst!" "It is finished." And that magnificent final word: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" All of them seem ^{thoroughly} appropriate, ~~enough~~. We may find ^{some of} them hard to imitate, but not to understand. And it's easy enough to believe that Jesus really said them.

But this fourth word is different. Here is Jesus, who always taught his disciples to trust in God. Who said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake" And now we find Him asking, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The same Jesus who said to His disciples, "Do not fear those who kill the body but can not kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." And yet, when His own life is in danger, He cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It just doesn't wash. It doesn't make sense.

2-B

We would like to believe that He didn't really say it at all. And, yet, He must have. For who would have put such words into His mouth? His enemies, perhaps, but Mark's account is not

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from them. It's from from His friends, quite possibly from Peter, himself. Jesus must have said them. But, why?

Well, over the centuries, all kinds of answers have been suggested, most of them having something to do with Jesus' humanity. "This is the human side of Jesus' nature," we are told, crying out as any mortal might. But that seems a strange theology. As I understand it, the doctrine of the Incarnation means that, in Jesus, the human and the divine were miraculously fused together. Not that He was now one and now the other, in a kind of theological schizophrenia. Nor even that His two natures, on any given occasion, could act independently of one another. His was not a split personality, but a uniquely integrated one. So we can't explain this difficult saying by resorting to unacceptable theology. Besides, it isn't necessary.

3-B

There is, you see, a much easier and far more acceptable answer. Our problem comes, not from the fact that Jesus said what He did, but from our own inability to understand why. And we don't understand why because we and Jesus don't speak the same language. By that I don't just mean that Jesus spoke Aramaic and we speak English. While true, that isn't our problem. I mean that Jesus and His generation were deeply immersed in the Old Testament while, let's face it, most of us are Biblically illiterate. We may know a few passages here and there, but, for the most part, the Bible is foreign ground to us, especially the Old Testament.

4-A

Imagine, if you will that, instead of My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," Jesus had said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." What would you have thought of that. Would you have wondered what He meant? Of course not. You would simply say to yourself, "Aha! He's quoting the 23rd psalm." Because, you see, we know that one. Hanging as He was, breathing was almost impossible, and words would necessarily be few. But, had he been quoting psalm twenty-three, He wouldn't have needed many. Just the first verse, and we would all have known exactly what He meant.

But He wasn't quoting the twenty-third psalm. He was quoting the twenty-second. Listen, if you will, to a few selected verses.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

"But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; 'He committed his cause to the Lord; let Him deliver him,

"A company of evil doers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them; and for my raiment they cast lots."

4-B

What could be a better description of the scene being played out at that very moment? And what better way for Jesus to turn away their scorn? To say to them, "Deride me if you will, but remember what the psalmist said. And remember, too, that the man in that psalm was blameless, that it was his tormentors who were in the wrong. And, most of all, remember those closing verses:

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before Him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations.

"Yea, to him shall all the proud of the earth bow down; before Him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and he who cannot keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve Him; men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation, and proclaim His deliverance to a people yet unborn, that He has wrought it."

All that, of course, was too much for Jesus to say, for anyone to say when the stretching of his body made it almost impossible to breath. And yet, to a people steeped in the Old Testament, he didn't have to say it. He need only quote that familiar first verse.

So, you see, when Jesus said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," He wasn't complaining. He was showing any lack of faith, nor even letting His human nature be human. He was making the strongest possible kind of a statement. They were not words of despair, but words of victory. "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before Him . . . Posterity shall serve Him; men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation, and proclaim His deliverance to a people yet unborn . . ."

S-B

And He was telling us, too, that things are often not what they seem. That God is in command, even in the awfulest of circumstances. That the worst the world can do to us cannot overcome those who put their faith in God. That love is stronger

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than hate and life more lasting than death. That, no matter what happens, God is for us, and, in the end, His love wins out.

The cross was a terrible thing. It's torture is not to be under-estimated. But it wasn't the last word. The last word was, and always is God's. And that is Good News, indeed.