



Speaker:  
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## The Abandonment

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 55 of 55

7/4/2021 (SUN) | Bible: **Mark 15:33-36**

And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, “ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” which is, being interpreted, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, “Behold, he calleth Elias.” And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink saying, “Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.”

This will be the third week we’ve spent looking at the event of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Next week, God willing, we’ll look at what happens at his death. We considered last time how it was he couldn’t save himself. What we mean is, because of his absolute obedience to the father and his great love for us his friends, abandoning his mission was not an option.

Today’s passage covers a three-hour period, probably from midday to mid-afternoon. It’s believed this is the time when Jesus is treated by God as if he were the epitome of sin. A supernatural darkness comes upon the land.

Jesus shouts to the heavens as he searches for God his help but finds himself abandoned.

I’ve always found this cry of Jesus to be at least as shocking and heart-breaking as his prayer in Gethsemane. It’d be a mistake to think Jesus went to the cross and with strength and confidence anticipated the punishment he must bear.

If instead you tend to think this is your friend Jesus, and he’s suffering beyond belief, that’d be closer to the truth. For three hours, he experienced darkness, anguish and death consuming him. *My God...my God...why have you abandoned me?* This cry is so tragic it dominates this passage, and this is why I chose to place it at the centre of my message today.

This three-hour darkness likely covered the land of Judaea rather than the whole world. Had it been worldwide, we’d expect references to it in other cultures.

People have guessed how the darkness was generated. Some assume it was an eclipse. This occurs when a new moon moves in front of the sun. The precise sizes God made the sun and moon, together with the precise distance he placed each of them from Earth, brings about his stunning display of a perfect eclipse. However, we know the time when Jesus died, and the full moon at that time makes the idea of an eclipse impossible.

Others have suggested a giant sandstorm, seeing as these are often so dense, they blot out the sun. But again, it was the wrong time of year for that type of phenomenon. A more likely explanation is extremely dense cloud cover.

When Jesus became very thirsty, someone soaked a sponge so he could drink from it. It was essentially a very cheap and nasty wine they soaked it in—better than water but only used by the lower classes.

Some of them claimed Jesus was crying out for Elijah to help him. We're not sure whether Jesus was shouting out in Hebrew or Aramaic. Assuming the people weren't deliberately misrepresenting him, it seems they were giving him a drink to prolong his life so they could see whether Elijah would come and rescue him.

We again look back to the ancient Psalms and see this tiny detail as yet another fulfilment of prophecy:

They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.

**Psalm 69:21**

What I'd like to do today is propose some answers to Jesus's question. He did ask a question. *For what purpose have you been hiding yourself from me?* I'd like to suggest three answers.

## Because God cannot tolerate sin

We remember God is holy. He is unique. He is separate from his creation. He is greater than all things. He is the all-wise king of both the material universe and spiritual realm.

One of the pictures we have of God's dwelling place is of angels encircling his throne saying,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory."

**Isaiah 6:3**

Suitably for a triune God, the angels describe him in this threefold way. HE IS HOLY, AND THE WHOLE WORLD IS FULL OF HIS GLORY.

The psalmist tells us God's very *reputation* as one of entire holiness:

The LORD is great in Zion, and he is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name, for it is holy.

**Psalm 99:2–3**

His holiness is beautiful to his friends but terrifying to his enemies.

One characteristic of this holiness is it prevents God from having anything to do with sin:

- He can't commit it
- He can't condone it
- He can't ignore it
- And he can't have it anywhere near him.

One way the Bible tries to get this idea across to us is by saying God cannot even *look* at sin:

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...

**Habakkuk 1:13**

Now if you're familiar with the gospel, you'll no doubt be aware that Jesus was counted as a sinful creature and suffered under the hands of his father as a result. And when God counted his son as sinful, it was so real he couldn't even "look" at him.

And this gives us our first answer to the question Jesus posed. **God abandoned Jesus because he cannot tolerate sinfulness.** He cannot be in its presence and he cannot fellowship with anyone who is guilty of sin.

As I thought about this, a comparison jumped into my head. I thought about some of the things that we find repulsive. If we see a person or an animal that's been badly hurt in some sort of accident, and maybe there's a limb or half their head missing, we can't bear to look at it. Some people are like that when they see surgeons on the TV opening people up.

In our house, I can think of one thing that no one can bear to even look at: it's when one of the dogs vomits. That's when I get called on to clean it up. I do it because I'm the only one who will, but I find it just as revolting as they do!

When we say **God** can't look at sin though, we must realise it's a figure of speech. We know quite well God sees us when we sin. He sees our sinful thoughts. In other words, he *can* look at sinful things. So when the prophet Habakkuk says God can't even look at sin, what it really means is he must remain separate from it.

I'm unable to grasp the immensity of the love of God whereby the father would knowingly ordain his son to be in a state of sin which would require this separation. I say love because all this was done for the benefit of others.

Only the son was on the cross. Some Christians believe, based on their understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, the Father and the Holy Spirit must have suffered at Calvary too. Now these people are no different from us; they're trying to grapple with the mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation. But I think they make a mistake here. The son suffered on the cross alone. Still, the father suffered too in carrying out the punishment, and we might say the Holy Spirit suffered as he deliberately withheld help from the son. In that sense we can say the Trinity suffered that day.

## Because God needs to be appeased

God doesn't merely steer clear of sin; he has to respond to it. **It angers him.** And make no mistake: when he looked down at the figure hanging on that central cross at Golgotha, his anger burst out like a flood.

This darkness over the land we mentioned was real, but it was still symbolic of something. **The darkness over the land mirrored the darkness within the soul of Jesus during those intense three hours.**

This darkness may cause you to recall the darkness over the land of Egypt shortly before the Passover. And it's right you should connect the two. The curse of God on the whole of unbelieving Egypt is now the curse of God on the head of Jesus Christ. The slaughter of thousands of lambs to spare God's people from God's wrath has now become the slaughter of the holy lamb of God, also killed to save others—this time eternally.

This theme of darkness is seen all over the Scriptures. Look at this reference in Zephaniah:

That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness...

**Zephaniah 1:15**

You can rightly think of this as a description of the internal state of the soul of Jesus when he took our place. He felt wrath...trouble...distress...wasteness...desolation...darkness...and gloominess. He chose to exchange the peace, comfort and beauty of the heavenly realm for this wholesale misery of soul. And if you're a believer today, **he did it for you.**

Darkness in the skies and darkness in his soul. Dumped by his earthly friends and abandoned by his heavenly family. Utterly alone. And that's how it had to be.

*Why have you abandoned me?* This cry wasn't a pretence. It was a genuine expression of severe anguish. Speaking physically, many people have suffered more than Jesus did on that day. But no one has, or ever will, experience the grief of soul he did.

There was this tradition, you know, that Elijah would help the Messiah. I'm sure the Jews would have been exhilarated to see Elijah come down and help them—even if it'd be quickly followed by the realisation they'd killed their own king.

Jesus knew Elijah had *already* come. What we mean is Elijah himself never was coming back. The one who was to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah was John the Baptist, and he came in the spirit *of* Elijah, not as a reincarnation of him.

We can't know what was going on in the mind of Jesus at this time. But I expect the knowledge there wasn't even Elijah who he could expect to come and help him would add to his torment, add to that state of loneliness experienced by no other man. And it was in this loneliness Christ had to drink the full cup of God's judgement, right to the very last dregs.

I'd like to read the Psalm which is referred to so much here. Psalm 22 is seen as prophetic of the sufferings of Jesus, and it reads as follows:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime but thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee. They trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee and were delivered. They trusted in thee and were not confounded. But I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the

LORD that he would deliver him. Let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb. Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb. Thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me. Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd. And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws, and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me. The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones. They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture.

**Psalm 22:1-18**

Many sermons could be written on this first half of Psalm 22 alone. But hidden in that reading, by way of reminder to us, are the words, "...THOU hast brought me into the dust of death". The apparent chaos of his predicament was ordained by God. And all the suffering was for this purpose: **that God would be appeased**. That his anger would come to an end.

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, one who has approached God in all humility and begged him to be merciful to you, you never have to fear the wrath of God will come your way. The fury that should've come your way was diverted to Jesus. It saturated HIS soul instead of yours, so that God's attitude to you now and forever will be one of peace and love.

## Because God intends to bless

Today's message is nothing less than the gospel:

- God is holy, and cannot tolerate sin
- We sin, and the wrath of God rightly hangs over our head
- For his own glory, God chose to create a people to save from sin
- The son agreed to be their substitute and suffer in their place
- And all those people receive:
  - Forgiveness of sins
  - Adoption into the family of God
  - And a place with all the other children of God in his wonderful paradise.

We talked a lot about suffering today. The suffering of the saviour, Jesus Christ. But it was to this end: **that God would save people and bless them with all spiritual blessings**.

It's true to say God does all things for his own glory. But that doesn't mean he does all things *only* for his own glory. Delivering his people from their sin does bring him glory, but he also *delights* in them. He delights in *us*. If you belong to him today, he takes delight in *you*. He takes delight in *me*. Despite the ugliness within us which causes us to disappoint God, we make him happy!

Listener:

- If you don't belong to God right now
- If you believe he exists but don't obey him
- If you accept Jesus died on the cross, but you don't daily pick up your own cross
- If you struggle to be righteous but haven't realised what you need is found in Jesus
- Or if you crave true faith but haven't been to God to get it...

...we urge you today to **surrender**. You need to stop in your efforts to please God because you can't! You need to speak to God and ask him for mercy. Confess your sinfulness.

And don't hold back! The perfect perception God has sees your sins as more serious than you can imagine. You should convince yourself you're the worst sinner this world has ever known, because that's the sort of attitude God delights to see in sinners coming to this place of repentance.

How do you know you're one of those for whom Christ died? **By your repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ**. By your sincere approach to him, you reveal yourself to be one of those earmarked for salvation before the world existed.

All the prophecy of the Old Testament pointed to Calvary. The salvation they spoke of has at its core this day of great darkness and glory.

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

**Acts 3:18**

Sinner: are you ready to do what we did? Is this the day—Day One of your new life? When this message has finished—or straightaway if you like—go to him. If you prefer to have someone with you when you approach God, find yourself the nearest Bible believing, evangelical Christian. If they're genuine, your request for help in this way will turn out to be one of the highlights of their life.

If you don't think you can find someone, you can always use me. If you contact me by email or through social media, I'll give you a call and pray with you over the phone. I can't tell you the joy it brings us to lead people to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was abandoned because of the offence caused by the sinfulness he'd taken on himself. He was abandoned as a necessary part of the atonement by which God's wrath would be quelled. And he was abandoned, ultimately, to save sinners like you and me.

What I've tried to do today is present the harsh reality of Jesus's abandonment. I want to avoid saying anything which would lessen the awfulness of what he went through.

But there is a detail I feel I ought to finish with. When we think about the extreme state of soul Jesus experienced, we shouldn't think it amounted to complete despair. Now I may have described Jesus's situation in that way—I can't remember. But what I mean now is, even at the height of his suffering, *Jesus was not without hope*.

It's not as if he doesn't know what to do. He hasn't lost his mind. He does the right thing: he directs his conversation towards God. And he's sure his suffering will come to an end.

Once again, I find myself lacking in confidence that I understand what went on here. I have the wonderful light of the Scriptures, but I come to them with dullness of heart and mind.

For what it's worth, I'm inclined to think that, for those three hours, the human nature of Jesus Christ refused to draw on the comfort of his divine nature, and it's Jesus in *that condition* who breaks out with the question of why he's been abandoned.

Psalm 22 which I read from earlier began with this tortured question. But the tone of the psalm changes. It encourages us to believe that, despite his intense suffering, Jesus still had trust in God. That is, he still trusted his deliverance was certain and would soon come. Let's read a little bit more from that Psalm:

But be not thou far from me, O LORD. O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth, for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren. In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him. All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him, and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. Neither hath he hid his face from him. But when he cried unto him, he heard.

**Psalm 22:19-24**

What a great saviour we have! I'll finish with this quote by BB Warfield:

"We have but one Saviour; and that one Saviour is Jesus Christ our Lord. Nothing that we are and nothing that we can do enters in the slightest measure into the ground of our acceptance with God. Jesus did it all. And by doing it all He has become in the fullest and widest and deepest sense the word can bear—our Saviour."

Amen.