

God Forsaken
Mark 15:33-37
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Well, I invite you to take your Bible and turn with me this morning to Mark's gospel. Mark 15. I've chosen today and next Sunday to step away from our study of the Book of Romans to really consider in detail the events that we celebrate during the Passion Week.

If you want to grasp God's love for you, let me encourage you to do this: contemplate what happened at the cross. This is what the Scripture itself says. In Romans 5:8, we read this: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." As one writer has well put it, "The cross was the pulpit of God's love." Nowhere has He preached to us the reality of His love for us any more clearly or profoundly than He did at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Kent Hughes, writing about the events of the crucifixion, says this: "We must invite its raw horror to assault us. Its blood, its water and glistening bone ought to go to our hearts. And our hearts ought to repeatedly respond, 'This is how I am loved.'" This is how I am loved. That's really what I want us to do this morning as we look together at Mark's account of the crucifixion. Mark 15, we're just going to look at one portion beginning in verse 33:

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which ... translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they *began* saying, "Behold, ... [He's] calling for Elijah." Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

After the arrest of Jesus Christ, the gospels record that we hear from just about everyone as they weigh in on what Jesus is and what He deserves. For example, after the arrest we hear from the

Jewish leaders. They accused Him of blasphemy. They condemned Him to be deserving of death. In fact, they said this to Pilate: He stirs up the people; He incites them to rebellion; we have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the son of God. The gospel records let us hear from the Jewish people. They said, away with this man, release for us Barabbas, crucify Him! We also hear from the Gentile leaders. Pilate said, I find no guilt in this man, and nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. And yet the gospels go on to say, wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate delivered Him to be crucified. And then there was the crowd who gathered around the cross on that Friday so many years ago. The gospel writers say this: they were hurling abuse at Him, saying, He saved others, let Him save Himself if this is the Messiah of God, His chosen One; for He said, I am the Son of God. So, we've heard from almost everyone.

But it's time to hear from someone who has not yet weighed in on that morning. It's time for us to hear from God Himself. If, like I did, you grew up in the church, you've heard all of your life what Jesus' death meant, and perhaps you've added a few ideas of your own. Now it's God's turn. That's really what we have in the passage that we just read together from Mark 15, because through a series of divine miracles that occurred that afternoon (starting at noon and through the afternoon) God the Father made His voice heard. And His voice is heard above the taunting and the ridiculing and the mockery of man, because during the final three hours of Jesus on the cross, through that series of divine miracles, God the Father provided all of us with His own commentary on the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, there were seven miracles in all that unfolded that afternoon, but I want to consider just the three that teach us what was at the heart of Jesus' crucifixion. There were three miracles that occurred that day in which God the Father punctuated what was really happening on the cross. And we need to look at these three miracles together. The first miracle that provides us a divine commentary on the cross is: *a miraculous darkness*.

John the Apostle in his gospel tells us Jesus was crucified at the third hour (in Roman thinking) which was about 9 am. During the three hours from 9 am till noon, Calvary had been a very busy place. The soldiers who had been assigned the crucifixion detail, they had carried out their

grizzly task. They had affixed Jesus to that cross (remember) lying on the ground, and then had hoisted Him attached to that cross (remember), and attached Him to the post that was permanently standing there for such purposes. Those passing by, you'll remember this was at a site just outside the city wall of Jerusalem, and it was a busy passageway. And it was Passover, and so there were many pilgrims coming and going. And we're told those passing by during those three hours had ridiculed Jesus, assuming that He deserved the punishment that He had received at the hands of the Romans. The scribes and the Pharisees were there along with the chief priests. All of the leaders of the nation were standing around near the cross of Jesus Christ. And we're told that they didn't stoop to public ridicule; instead, they quietly whispered among themselves their taunts and ridicule. There was a crowd that had gathered. Sadly, that was to be expected, because these spectacles of Roman public execution had become in the first century a crude form of entertainment. The crowd was there, and they taunted Jesus.

But during those three hours, the first three hours from 9 to noon, Jesus remained mostly silent except for three brief statements. But then at noon, after three hours on the cross, something dramatic occurs. Verse 33: "When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour." By the Roman way of keeping time, this was from 12 noon until three in the afternoon. At noon, think about this for a moment. At noon the sky became truly dark, and it stayed like that for three hours. Now, this is clearly not a solar eclipse. We know that for two reasons. One, because it lingered for three hours. But more than that, this happened at Passover, which is always at the full moon when a solar eclipse is completely impossible. So, there's darkness covering the entire land for three hours. By the way, that Greek expression "over the whole land" can mean the whole earth. It can mean the entire land of Israel, or it can mean any significant part of it. We really can't be sure. But however widely this darkness was felt, what we do know is this: it can't be explained naturally. God, instead, had miraculously covered the sun for three hours as His Son hung naked on the cross.

Now this really is remarkable when you think about it, because if you go back to His birth, you remember on the night of His birth, the night had been as bright as day with the glory of the angels. But now here at His death 33 years later there is darkness at noon. Why? Why did God send the darkness? What was the message that God intended to send through this miraculous

darkness? Well, there've been a variety of reasons that have been offered down through church history. There are those who say that it was the creation itself showing its respect for the Son of God in some sort of a poetic sense. This is like what we sing together in that beautiful hymn by Isaac Watts: "Well might the sun in darkness hide and shut His glories in, when Christ the mighty Maker died for man the creature's sin." Others say, no, what happened there with the darkness was a sign of God's disgust with the blackest of all crimes. The Babylonian Talmud taught that the darkening of the sun, even an eclipse, was God's judgment for an especially wicked sin. And what sin could have been greater? What crime could have been worse? Still others say, no, the darkness here pictured the spiritual blindness of God's people Israel who were in the middle of crucifying their Messiah.

But I think the most clearly biblical reason for the darkness was to show the judgment of God against sin. This is historically true throughout the Scriptures. If you go back, you remember, to Egypt, one of the great plagues demonstrating God's judgment on Egypt before the first Passover was darkness, a darkness so thick it could be felt. Darkness will also characterize God's judgment when the end of human history comes. Keep your finger here; turn back to Isaiah 13, Isaiah 13. Isaiah here is talking about the destruction of the Empire of Babylon that would occur in the 500s B.C. But in the middle of that description, he seems to step back and describe a far greater destruction that will come at the end of human history. Notice Isaiah 13:9: "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming [God's day], Cruel, with fury and burning anger...." This is God with fury and burning anger. Can you imagine anything more frightening than God angry?

To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises ... the moon will not shed its light. Thus [God says] I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

Isaiah, looking forward to the end when God judges this world for its rebellion against Him, says it will be marked as a time of darkness, judgment.

But darkness is not just a picture of God's coming judgment at the end of human history, at the end of what we call the Great Tribulation. Jesus often refers to the eternal destiny of those who reject Him as "outer darkness." Someone was just telling me this morning they overheard a conversation in a restaurant in which someone was ridiculing the concept of hell and talking about the wonderful party that it was going to be. Jesus said it will be a time of utter, complete darkness. No party.

So, when you have darkness here for three hours at the cross, it refers to the same reality. It speaks to God's judgment. D. A. Carson writes, "The cosmic blackness hints at the deep judgment that was taking place." William Hendriksen writes, "The darkness on the day of Christ's crucifixion meant the judgment of God upon our sins. His wrath, as it were, burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus, so that He, as our Substitute, suffered more intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation, forsakenness." And then listen to what Hendriksen writes. This is what was going on in the darkness: "Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior bore its horrors in our stead." Jesus Himself had explained that His death was His giving His life as a ransom for many.

Now think about this for a moment. If God so displayed His wrath that He had to darken the sky to say this is judgment on My Son, and if that's the only way that His wrath against our sin could be appeased, and there was no other way than punishing His only Son in the darkness, what a terrifying statement that is about how God views our sin. You know, let's be honest. None of us ever really think as seriously about our sin as we ought. But if you want to get just a glimpse of it, take yourself back to the cross and remind yourself that Jesus was getting what you deserve. From 12 to 3 pm it was dark, but it was not a solar eclipse. It was a supernatural, miraculous darkness. God the Father was making a profound, spiritual point: judgment on sin happening in Christ.

There was a second divine miracle that day. Let's call it: *a miraculous desertion*. Verses 34 - 36. Look at verse 34: "At the ninth hour." At the ninth hour. Now let me back up for a moment and just remind you of what happened during those six hours on the cross. When you put the record of the crucifixion from all four gospels together, it's clear that Jesus spoke only seven times from

the cross. These are called the Seven Last Sayings of Jesus. He spoke the first three between 9 am and noon. Here they are.

The first one is recorded by Luke in Luke 23:34. Jesus prayed out loud, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” What a remarkable prayer of grace, compassion, mercy. What’s remarkable about that prayer is it was answered six times on that very day.

The first one to come to faith in answer to Jesus’ prayer was the one who carried His cross to the place of crucifixion, Simon of Cyrene. The second one was one of the thieves on the cross next to Him. And then the gospel writer tells us, Mark tells us that the centurion comes to faith, and the other gospels tell us the soldiers that were with him. A crucifixion detail always consisted of four soldiers. So, six people by the end of that day had come to faith in answer to Jesus’ prayer that they be forgiven. And, of course, fast forward to Pentecost just 40 days later, and you have 3,000.

The second saying of Christ on the cross comes in Luke 23:43. He spoke to the repentant thief, and He said, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” What an amazing display of grace. Here’s a man who in the final hours of his life has been mocking the Son of God on the center cross (because the gospel records tell us he joined with the other thief), and then he comes to realize who Jesus is. How? Through the taunts of the people standing in front of Jesus. He hears that He’s claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. And he watches as He dies. And through an amazing display of grace, that thief comes to know Jesus as Lord, as Sovereign. “Remember me when You come into Your kingdom,” he prays. You’re the King! I recognize that, and I recognize I don’t deserve to be there. There was repentance. There was faith. And in response, Jesus says, “Today you ... [will] be with Me in Paradise.”

The third word from the cross comes in John 19:26 and 27. It’s when Jesus said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your Son!” And then He said to John the Apostle, “Behold, your mother!” You see, Joseph had died early in Jesus’ life, probably shortly after the account when He was 12 at the temple. Jesus became the man of the household. He took care of Mary, and now He’s dying. And so, as a perfect son would, He’s concerned, even in the moment of His suffering,

about making sure that His mother, who's a widow, is cared for, displaying perfect love and perfect conformity to God's Law. All of that happened in the first three hours.

The next time Jesus spoke was 3 pm. So, He'd been silent for at least three hours and maybe four or more. At noon that darkness had fallen covering the whole land, and we're told nothing that transpired during those three hours of darkness. But suddenly around 3 pm, out of that strange darkness, Jesus shouted the fourth saying from the cross. It is a prayer to God. Notice verse 34: "At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice." Now this wasn't too uncommon. I mean, crucifixions were usually punctuated by the screams of those who'd been crucified. Normally those screams would have been in rage, in curses at those who had done the act of crucifixion and those who had gathered around and were ridiculing them. But Jesus was different. Literally the Greek text says, "Jesus shouted." And it uses a Greek word that we have an English equivalent for. Literally it says, "Jesus shouted with a mega-voice." What did He say? "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" Jesus apparently (according to Mark's gospel who records it all in Aramaic) spoke these words in Aramaic, the common language of Israel in the first century. Now, we know from the gospel records that Jesus also knew Greek, and He knew Hebrew. But in His first language, the language that He grew up speaking in His home, He shouts out the words of Psalm 22:1.

Why Psalm 22? Well, if you know that Psalm at all, you know that it's the cry of the righteous man who suffers without cause, and so in that sense it's fitting. It shows Jesus' familiarity with Scripture. But it shows something more. Think about this. In the moment of His greatest suffering, Jesus instinctively expressed His feelings to God in the language of Scripture. There's a lesson about our prayers here. You want to learn to pray like Jesus? Use the language of Scripture like Jesus did. We see it throughout His life. We see it at the moment of His death. We see it in the pattern of the apostles in the New Testament church as well. They prayed the Scripture. And Jesus does that here. It shows that He drew His strength from the Scripture, but it also expresses the depth of His anguish of heart.

But why Psalm 22? Why not some other Psalm? It's because this is the one Psalm that most clearly details the suffering of the Messiah in the crucifixion. Although the crucifixion, the

execution by crucifixion, that very act, had not yet been invented. David captures the reality of what crucifixion would be like so powerfully. I think, personally, and I can't prove this to you, but I think when Jesus slumped back down on that cross, He continued to express to the Father His prayer in the words of Psalm 22.

Jesus didn't have to say this first verse of Psalm 22 out loud. He could have expressed it from His heart as a prayer to the father. But He didn't do that. And I think that's meant to show us that there is a testimony in this prayer to us of what was happening between Him and the Father during those dark hours. Notice Mark translates it for his Roman readers who wouldn't have known Aramaic. He said, "Which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" "My God." This is the only time during Jesus' earthly life that He addressed God as anything other than Father or My Father. He remains loyal to God. He calls Him "My God." But by choosing that expression, Jesus is showing us that He was painfully aware that during those hours the Father and He had a different relationship, that the Father had forsaken Him. Look at that word *forsake*. It's a Greek word that means, literally, "to abandoned; to desert."

This, by the way, is what had troubled Jesus so much the night before in Gethsemane when He prayed, Father, if it's Your will, let this cup pass from Me. Jesus wasn't praying about the physical suffering. If so, He would have been less a man than many of the church's Christian martyrs who'd gone to their death and gone to physical suffering with their whole heart. No, what Jesus was asking was about this. It's the cup that He asked the Father to remove. It wasn't the physical suffering. What is the cup? Well, if you trace that concept through the Old Testament, you will find that the cup is often the symbol of divine wrath against sin, and to drink the cup is to endure all of God's wrath against sin. Sometimes sinners are described being forced by God to drain the cup of His wrath to its dregs. It's to be separated from God. That's what Jesus endured. Abandoned by God.

Martin Luther, the Reformer, once set himself apart to try to think his way through this saying of Christ from the cross. It's recorded by his biographer like this:

For a long time, he continued without food in deepest meditation and in one position on his chair. When at length he rose from his thoughts, he was heard to exclaim with amazement, “God forsaken of God. Who can understand that?”

We certainly can’t. We can never plumb the depths of all that this means. I mean after all, if Jesus Himself cried out why, then who are we to think we can fully understand it? And yet there are things here for us to understand.

First of all, by telling us that this was a loud cry, the gospel writers want us to know that Jesus still had a significant reservoir of physical strength. They also want us to know that this was the deepest, soul shattering cry of misery you can imagine. And the fact that He shouted it with a great voice tells us that Jesus intended for it to be heard not only by His Father, but also by those who had gathered around Him that day, and by us as well, because there is a message in that cry, a message from the Father about why Jesus was dying on that cross.

Abandoned, forsaken: we use that word, don’t we? We refer to a place that is utterly barren, that’s undeserving of human occupation. On occasion you’ll hear it referred to as a godforsaken place. That day, Jesus was God forsaken. Or to change the phrasing slightly, not only was He God forsaken, He was God, forsaken by God. Maybe you know what it’s like to be abandoned. Maybe you know what it’s like to be abandoned by a spouse, or by a parent, or by a child, or by a friend. Try for a moment to imagine how deep the sense of isolation that must’ve belonged to Jesus Christ in this moment. From eternity past He and the Father had known the most intimate relationship, in fact, the relationship that is the perfect model of all human relationships. And then as He entered this world as a man, and we’re told that when He began His ministry (in Matthew 3:17) a voice out of the heaven said this is My Son I love, listen to Him, I’m well pleased with Him.

At the transfiguration just a few months before the crucifixion, Matthew 17:5 says while Jesus was speaking, “A bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is [the Son I love], with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’” And just the night before, after the Last Supper, in John 16:32, we read this: Jesus said, “Behold, an hour is coming,

and has already come, for you [the disciples] to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone.” And then He added this: “Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” But that changed during those dark hours. In a miracle of divine love toward us, for the three hours that Jesus hung on that cross in darkness, the fellowship and communion that He as a man had experienced with the Father throughout His earthly life was suddenly and completely severed. Jesus, abandoned by God; deserted; left completely alone.

The Father abandoned His Son’s human nature [listen to this] in the same way that He would’ve abandoned us forever. Why? Well, the words Jesus uses in this cry come from Psalms 22:1: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” I think the answer comes two verses later in Psalm 22:3, which says, for “You are Holy.” For “You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.” You see, during those dark hours, Jesus took on our sin. He became the sin-bearer. In Isaiah 59:2, we read this: “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.”

What causes God to abandon someone? It’s sin. In the case of Jesus Christ it wasn’t His own sin, He was perfectly sinless. Unlike those heretics who teach on television, Jesus did not become a sinner on the cross. Instead, what happened, according to the Scripture, is God the Father credited to Jesus, He put into Jesus’ account, all of the sins (plural) that would ever be committed by everyone who would ever believe in His Son. And then the Father abandoned Him because of those sins.

Romans 3 puts it way. Romans 3:25 and 26. God publicly displayed Jesus as a [listen to this] “propitiation.” That word propitiation means a satisfaction of His wrath. God publicly displayed Jesus as the satisfaction of His wrath in His blood, that is, in His death. And that becomes ours, the propitiation becomes ours through faith.

This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? At the cross God abandoned His Son, because He publicly displayed Him as the object of His wrath against the sins of everyone who would ever believe in Christ. Or as Paul puts it in Galatians 3:13, He became “a curse for us.” Or Peter in 1 Peter 2:24: “He Himself bore our sins [plural] in His [own] body on the cross.” Listen, every wicked thought, believer, you have ever had, every godless word you have ever spoken, every wicked action you have ever made, was credited to Jesus. And during those three, dark hours, God treated Him as if He had committed your sins. God abandoned Him, because that’s how you and I deserve to be treated by God.

Why? Why abandonment? Listen carefully. This is very important. Because the essence of the eternal judgment that you and I deserve because of our sins is separation from the presence of God. And that means separation from everything that’s good, everything that is beneficial and enjoyable in life and eternity. Separation from God, that is the essence of eternal punishment. In fact, here’s how Paul puts it in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. And by the way, let me just say, if you’re here this morning, and you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, please hear this. This is Christ’s word to you through His apostle. This is what the future holds for you. “These [that is, those who refuse to believe in Jesus] will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

Never will you enjoy the presence of God your Creator, nor will you enjoy any of the good things that are yours because of His grace in today’s life, because of His common grace. All of the provisions that enrich your life, they’ll all be gone, because you will be banished from the presence of blessing of the Lord Himself. That’s the essence of eternal judgment. That’s what awaits every person who refuses to believe in Jesus Christ. And that is what Christ experienced on the cross. On the cross He endured the separation from God that you and I deserve to experience for all eternity. In fact, let me put it to you this way. Let this grip your soul.

If Jesus had not died for us, if He had never saved us, this fourth word from the cross would’ve been our cry for all eternity. My God, my God, why have You abandoned Me? That would’ve been our cry, forever. But God abandoned Him so that we would never be separated from God.

Notice the crowd's response to this deeply disturbing cry. Verse 35, "When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, 'Behold, [He's] calling for Elijah.'" Now, it's possible here that they misunderstood Jesus and thought He was, in fact, calling for Elijah. More likely however, in the context, they were probably just continuing to mock Jesus, even—think about this—even as they're shrouded in this miraculous darkness. They can't stop being who they are, and they just keep ridiculing Jesus.

Now why Elijah? Well, Jesus has just said "Eloi" in Aramaic. It sounds a little bit like Elijah. Elijah didn't die. Elijah, the Old Testament tells us, was taken directly into heaven. And so Jewish tradition (not the Scriptures, but Jewish tradition) had said that he would respond to the cry of the righteous in the time of their need. And so, they say Jesus is calling out Eloi. Maybe He's really calling for Elijah. Let's see what happens. In other words, these men turned the infinite suffering of the Son of God into a cheap joke. As one commentator puts it, they were saying something like this: "This poor deluded Messiah thinks Elijah will come to His rescue."

Now at some point right after this cry, the cry of abandonment by God, John tells us that Jesus spoke the fifth word from the cross which is "I thirst." In response to that cry, someone apparently is moved with sympathy and compassion. We aren't told who this is. He's just referred to as "someone." But likely, putting the context together, it was one of the soldiers.

"Someone ran and filled a sponge [verse 36 says] with sour wine, [and] put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink." According to John the Apostle, near the cross was a jar of cheap, sour wine or vinegar diluted with water. This was the common beverage of soldiers and laborers, because it was quick to assuage one's thirst better than water alone. This compassionate person fills a sponge with this cheap, sour wine diluted with water (puts a sponge in that jar, fills it up), puts the sponge on a short reed. The other gospel tell us it was a hyssop reed. So, it wouldn't have been longer than 18 inches. That's about as long as they grow. And He puts the sponge on that reed of the hyssop plant and extends it upward toward Jesus' mouth. Now that tells us, by the way, that Jesus wasn't, like some of the drawings, crucified really high up on a high cross where no one could reach Him. You got a man, his arm, and about 18 inches. That's about how high Jesus' mouth was above the ground.

The others around weren't very happy about this compassionate intervention. In fact, Matthew's gospel, in Matthew 27:49, says the rest of them said, literally, "Let Him alone." And they're addressing—in the Greek language they're addressing it to this individual who's giving Jesus something to drink. "Let Him alone. Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." In other words, they're saying to this guy, "Stop giving Him something to drink, and let's see if Elijah shows up to help Him." But here in verse 36, the person who's giving Jesus something to drink says, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." In essence, this guy is saying, "Let me alone. Allow me to give Him something to drink, and we're going to see whether Elijah's going to come to take Him down." That's probably the best way to put the gospel records together.

This was a miraculous desertion. God abandoned His Son. And God told everyone there that day that the death of His Son was about divine separation from sin and sinners. How did He do that? Through the very cry of His own Son: My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?

The Father gave His commentary on the cross through a third miracle. We've seen *a miraculous darkness* and *a miraculous desertion*. Notice thirdly: *a miraculous death*. Verse 37: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry." That expression is very instructive, because usually death by crucifixion was a death of slow suffocation. That's how you died from crucifixion. It wasn't blood loss. It wasn't pain and suffering. It was suffocation. And on average historians tell us that those who were crucified by the Romans took about 36 hours on average to die. Here's how it worked.

You were attached to the cross: suspended by nails in your wrists, the supporting points of the bones that come together to form your wrists; and then nailed through your feet. And because of the weight of your body, you couldn't keep your body weight pulled up, so you would slump down on those wounds. But as you did that, as long as you did that, with each breath you were able to gather less and less oxygen from the air that you breathed, because your lungs were constricted. And so there would come a time when you would have to push up on your feet and pull up on the nails in your wrist, rub your bare back against that timber, in order to pull your frame up high enough to gasp a breath of air, get the oxygen that your body was so desperately

craving. And then the pain would become too great in your wrists and in your feet, and you would drop back down, slump back on those nails. And this relentless process happened minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day—36 long hours on average. What happened is with each desperate lunge of the body upward to get air, as time went on less air was received in the lungs. And with each hour closer to death, the victim became weaker and weaker and couldn't pull himself up quite as far as before in order to get the air that he so much needed. Before death mercifully came, eventually the person was unable to gain enough air to speak or to even whisper. Sometimes the victim (for lack of oxygen) even became unconscious.

So, when Jesus cried out again with a mega-voice, it was a sign to everybody who knew anything about crucifixion that death was nowhere near for Jesus. Now, we can't be sure which of the seven sayings of the cross He spoke here in verse 37, but it's probably the sixth, recorded in John's gospel. John 19:30: "Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!'" The work that the Father had given Him had been fully completed, fully accomplished. He had given His life as a ransom for many. He had endured the separation from the Father that you and I deserved.

Then according to Luke, Jesus immediately spoke the seventh and final word from the cross. Luke 23:46: "And Jesus, crying out [again] with a loud voice, [don't miss that] crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" He entrusts His spirit to the Father. And then Mark here describes Jesus' actual death (notice in verse 37) with these words: "Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last." Matthew says He "yielded up His spirit." That's an interesting expression, because the word Matthew uses for "yielded up" literally means in Greek "to send away." He sent away His spirit. In fact, the word is used in the New Testament for divorce, to send away one's spouse. John puts it this way in John 19:30: "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Don't miss the point that the gospel writers are making. This is a hugely important point. Jesus was sovereign over His own death. No one took Jesus' life from Him. He gave it when He chose. Jesus didn't die because He'd been crucified. Get it out of your mind that the Jews killed Jesus. Get it out of your mind that the Romans killed Jesus. Get it out of your mind that the

leaders of the Jewish nation killed Jesus. Get it out of your mind that you killed Jesus. Nobody killed Jesus. Jesus didn't die because He'd been crucified. He could've endured many more hours. He died because He chose at that very moment to lay down His life for you and for me. It was a completely voluntary act of His will.

During His ministry Jesus made this clear. Look over at John 10. He wanted us to get this. He wanted us to understand this. John 10:17: "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again." Now watch verse 18. It couldn't be clearer than this. "No one." "No one has taken [My life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down ... I have authority to take it up again." You say, where did the human Jesus, Jesus incarnate, God incarnate, where did He get authority to do that? He says the Father gave Him that authority. The Father gave it to Him.

In one sense, it's legitimate to speak of the murder of Jesus. And in fact, the apostles in the early chapters of Acts talk about the Jews responsible for killing the Prince of Life, because that was their intention. That's what was in their heart to do. But the reality was far different. The reality is that Jesus died when He chose to die. He laid down His life for us.

You remember that Pilate, when he heard of Jesus's death, was surprised that He was already dead. It was too soon for the death of crucifixion, the death of slow suffocation. In fact, you remember that on that Friday afternoon after three o'clock when Jesus died, to hurry the death of the two thieves crucified on each side of Jesus so they could get them off the crosses before the Sabbath began at sundown, the Roman soldiers went and did what was typical for crucifixion when they wanted to hasten the death of those who'd been crucified. And that is they took a heavy, wooden mallet or an iron bar, and stood back, and with a heavy swing shattered the bones of the lower legs of those thieves. Why? So that they could no longer push themselves up and receive the breath that they needed to continue life. And so, suffocation quickly followed.

But when they came to Jesus, He was already dead. Why? Because His was a miraculous death. He had sent away His spirit. He had laid down His life for us. First John 3:16 says, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us." God wanted us to know. He wanted everyone to

know that Jesus' life wasn't taken. The Jews didn't kill Jesus. The Romans didn't kill Jesus. You didn't kill Jesus. Jesus volunteered to die. And He was completely sovereign over His death. He chose the very moment of His death. And He sent away His spirit. "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Why three o'clock in the afternoon? Because it was the time of the afternoon sacrifice. And on that day, Passover, it was the day of the slaughter of the Passover lambs. It was the time of the slaughter of the Passover lambs. And He was our Passover lamb. At the exact time those lambs were being killed at the temple, Jesus sent away His spirit. Jesus' death was truly miraculous.

He died when He chose to die. And He did it voluntarily. Think about this, Christian. Jesus knew for whom He was dying. He says in John 17, it's for those, Father, You gave Me in eternity past. He knew exactly for whom He was dying. He had you in mind. And at three o'clock on that Friday 2,000 years ago, when He had fully and completely endured the wrath of God against your sins, when He had suffered the abandonment that you and I deserve for eternity, He voluntarily laid down His life for you. That's what we celebrate this week. Those three miracles.

There're other miracles as well. We read the passage, but we didn't have time to deal with them. But these three miracles—the miraculous darkness, the miraculous desertion, and the miraculous death of Jesus—together give us God's commentary on the cross. Think about what they tell us. They tell us that the cross was a place of divine judgment. That darkness, just like the darkness in Egypt, just like the darkness that's coming at the end of the Great Tribulation, just like the eternal darkness that all sinners will endure, showed that God was pouring out His judgment on Jesus Christ. He deserted Him. He abandoned Him.

That's why we have this fourth word, and it's the very expression that would be ours for all eternity if Jesus had not endured it for us. Abandoned by God, like you and I deserve to be. And then there was His miraculous death. Because you see, the other two miracles show us God's perspective, His judgment against sin; His hatred of sin, and His need to abandon sinners. But in the death of Christ we see the love both of the Father, who gave His Son for us, and the love of

Jesus Christ, who gave His own life for us, Who laid it down for us. He said no greater love has any man than this, that he lay down his life (what?) for his friends. For his friends. This is what was going on at the cross.

And yet I have to tell you, I think sometimes the reality of these things don't grip us like they should grip us. We sit here 2,000 years removed on the other side of the planet, and it's very easy for this to become a kind of fiction, a kind of fairy tale, a kind of story that has no attachment to history. Listen, I want you for a moment to picture the scene that Mark has just described for us. Let your imagination picture this strange crowd assembled that day just outside the city walls of Jerusalem on that April day 2,000 years ago.

Look at the three crosses on that little bump, that little hill, that little raised area of limestone quarry. And there on the center cross is Jesus of Nazareth. And unlike the polite pictures our artists have drawn for us (and understandably they've done it that way) but understand that that day He was crucified just like every other Roman prisoner was executed by crucifixion. In an act of utter humiliation. He was completely naked. His naked body covered that day only with dried blood and crawling flies. His hands and His feet cruelly nailed to that Roman instrument of torture and execution that we call a cross.

Do you understand folks, this really happened? Jesus was a real man. He really lived. He lived in a real place you can still visit. You can go and visit where He was born. You can visit the streets He walked. You can go to the place He died and was buried and was raised from the dead. He was a real person, as much a person of history as any other person you have ever heard about or read about; as real as you are. He really did die on a cross as the gospel writers describe it.

Think about that scene for a moment, and then consider this. The death of that man is your only hope for redemption. The death of Jesus of Nazareth is your only hope of being right with God, because apart from Him you will face exactly what Jesus faced on the cross. You know, a lot of people think, you know, God is a God of love, how in the world could anybody believe He's ever going to judge sinners? Let me plead with you to look at this passage again and remind yourself

what God did to His own Son when He bore the sin of sinners. This is exactly what God will do to every person outside of Christ. Remind yourself as you look at that scene that the only way that this saying from the cross doesn't become your cry forever is if Jesus drinks the cup of wrath for you. The only way that you will avoid eternity of suffering is if His death pays the penalty you owe. The only way you will ever be rescued is if He initiates that rescue, and if you put your trust in what He is and has done, alone.

You must, in the words of the gospels, you must repent from your sins. You must be willing to turn from what you know is sin. And you must renounce all of your own efforts and all of your own merits and all of your own doings of anything, and you must put your trust in Him alone as your Lord and your Savior and your God. If you're here this morning, and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, I plead with you to do that even today. He is your only hope. He's God's means.

If you're already a disciple of Jesus Christ, then this week as we celebrate Good Friday and as we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, I encourage you to come back to this section often and remind yourself, in the words of Jesus' own cries, what was really going on, on that Friday 2,000 years ago. Remind yourself of the profound truth that these words teach us. I think the truth this saying gives us is captured beautifully in the words of the song that we often sing. Remind yourself of this, "His robes for mine; such anguish none can know." We can't fully plumb the depths of what was going on when Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You ... [abandoned] Me?" None can know. "Christ, God's beloved, condemned as though His foe."

Like we saw in Romans 8, God condemned our sin in Jesus' humanity. "God's beloved, condemned as though His foe." And then I love the way the poet puts it here. "He, as though I, accursed and left alone." Abandoned by God as if He was getting what I deserved. But "I, as though He, embraced and welcomed home!" That's the truth of the gospel. And that's what we celebrate. That's what was being accomplished on the cross of Jesus Christ. "My God, My God, why have You [abandoned] Me?" And the answer, brothers and sisters, is you and me.

Let's pray together.

Father, it is so true that we cannot plumb the depths of what our Lord has said here, and yet I pray that You would use our study to enrich our understanding. Lord, we need to understand these things. We need to grapple with them. We need to, in some way, come to grips with what was happening on the cross that day during those hours of darkness. Father, how can we ever thank You that You allowed hell itself to reign down on Christ that day, that in our place He experienced what we would have experience forever, Your abandonment, and in His cry we hear the anguish that would be ours.

But Father, we thank You that in grace and mercy that is not true now and never will be, that because Christ was abandoned by You, we will never be separated from Your love. Not one single moment will we ever know separation or abandonment.

Lord, this week, for those of us in Christ, help us to reflect on these truths. Help us to think about what we've studied together, and help us to have a heart of love and gratitude and worship in response. And open our lips to tell others the good news that Jesus was abandoned by You so we never have to be.

Father, I do pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ, who are not followers of His, whether they came in knowing that or whether by Your Spirit You've opened their minds to see that even through Your Word as I've taught it this morning. Regardless, Lord, my prayer, the prayer of my soul would be don't let one of them leave here without being gripped by the truth of Your Word. And if it pleases You, Lord, bring them to truly know You. Bring them to true repentance. Bring them to true faith. Help them to stand at the foot of the cross and see what Christ endured and to cry out to You to make that theirs, the forgiveness that He purchased. Lord, may You do it even today by Your Spirit.

We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.