

Our Lord's Abandonment

Psalm 27:10 ¹⁰ When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.

I. Forsaken By His Disciples

Mark 14:43-52 ⁴³ And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely." ⁴⁵ As soon as He had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him. ⁴⁷ And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? ⁴⁹ "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ Then they all forsook Him and fled. ⁵¹ Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, ⁵² and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

Mark 14:66-72 ⁶⁶ Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. ⁶⁷ And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed. ⁶⁹ And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them." ⁷⁰ But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it." ⁷¹ Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!" ⁷² A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And when he thought about it, he wept.

King David records the bitter pain of being forsaken by those close to you:

Psalm 55:12-14 ¹² For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. ¹³ But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. ¹⁴ We took sweet counsel together; And walked to the house of God in the throng.

Jesus had spent years with these men, putting up with their failures, their quarrels, their naïve questions, their vain ambitions. They had seen first-hand, more miracles than anyone else in all Israel. They had heard more hours of instruction from Jesus than anyone else in all Israel.

And after all that time spent mentoring, shaping, leading, all twelve forsook Jesus at the critical moment. They did so in three ways – betrayal, cowardice and denial.

Judas forsook Jesus through betrayal. Who knows at what point Judas' heart had given in to his lusts for power and wealth? But at some point, the man decided to cut his losses, and at least get some cash from the deal. And no handsome sum, either - Thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave. After leaving the Upper Room, Judas had gone to the Sanhedrin and returned with soldiers. No doubt they went to the Upper Room, found it empty, and Judas knew of the private Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus often went when in Jerusalem. Since some of the soldiers may not have known Jesus by face, he arranged a sign to identify Him - a sign satanic in its cruelty – by walking up to Jesus and kissing him, he marked him for arrest and crucifixion.

What must it have been like, to see a man you preached to, discipled, fed, cared for and, to the last moment, offered the best part of the Passover meal, standing on the side of your enemies, pointing you out? He didn't just duck out, run away, give up on Jesus, he became an accomplice, an informer,

an agent for Jesus' killers.

While Peter showed some impulsive bravery with his sword, when it became clear that this large group of soldiers were armed to the teeth and ready to arrest and try Jesus and His disciples; the disciples' hearts caved in. Cowardice takes over. They had all pledged to never forsake Him, but the real threat of arrest and death drained all their stated bravery, and they ran away.

Though Peter and John spied on the trial from a safe distance, we have read the painful account of Peter forsaking Jesus through his denials – three of them. Though some of the disciples stood by the cross; when it counted, when the time came to defend him, they each forsook Him.

II. Forsaken By Religious Leaders

Mark 14:53-65 ⁵³ And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. ⁵⁴ But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' " ⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree. ⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" ⁶¹ But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." ⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses?" ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophesy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.

The religious leaders are supposed to be the shepherds, the providers and protectors of the nation. These people are the ones you expect to run to when in danger. Throughout history, people have sought refuge in places of worship, seeking protection and help from these leaders. But what did these leaders do? They forsook Jesus. These men who were supposed to protect the sheep of Israel, became its butchers, and brought horrific judgement to their own nation.

They did this in three ways: they accused him falsely, they tried him dishonestly, and they condemned him unjustly. Verse 56 shows these people hired false witnesses to come up with statements against Jesus. But even in their kangaroo court, these witnesses contradicted each other and Jesus should have been released when the witnesses disagreed.

The whole trial was dishonest. The trial was conducted in a private house, rather than in a public place, such as the Temple, where witnesses could be called. They arrested Jesus at night, tried him at night, and condemned him at night, so that they could get him to Pilate, and get a death sentence before the population could wake up. What was supposed to happen is that anyone who was going to be tried for a capital crime had to have his charges announced to the population for forty days, so that anyone who could come to his defence could do so during that time. These men were trying to get this man killed before the sun was high in the sky.

Finally, the only way they get to condemn him is by asking Him if He is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus replies that He is. And as if they were the official committee to select the Messiah, they charge Him with blasphemy and condemn Him to death.

If anyone should have recognised Messiah, it should have been the rabbis. If anyone should have been standing with Jesus, it should have been those expert in the Word of God. Instead, these men

became His accusers and prosecutors.

III. Forsaken By The Nation

John 18:39 - 19:15 ³⁹ " But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber. ^{NKJ} **John 19:1** So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. ² And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. ³ Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him." ⁵ Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!" ⁶ Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." ⁸ Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, ⁹ and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." ¹² From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." ¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgement seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" ¹⁵ But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"

The nation of Israel, particularly the men, are all gathered up at Jerusalem at this time. By Law they had to come up for Passover. With some absentees, the nation has been gathered and from the previous Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem, went straight to the Temple, cleaned it out, sat in the place of authority and offered Himself for inspection as King and Messiah. This He did on the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday is a silent day, and Thursday is the Passover. By Friday morning, the crowd that shouted Hosanna on Sunday, is saying something different on Friday.

What happened? Probably in the days in between, the people began working out what following Jesus would mean. They realised it would set them against the synagogue – the centre of their lives. They realised it would mean a life of taking up the cross. And they concluded that they would prefer the status quo over Jesus.

So what do they do? They disown Him. They say, we have no King but Caesar. Jesus is not our King. We recognise Caesar as our king. They call for His death. They call Him a blasphemer, and cry out for the death penalty. When Pilate tries to find a way to release him by appealing to the Passover custom of the release of a prisoner, they call for the release of a convicted criminal, Barabbas over Jesus.

Then, they blackmail Pilate. They say, this man is a political revolutionary. If you do not put Him to death, then you are not loyal to Caesar. And if there is one thing that would have sent chills down the spine of a Roman ruler, it was the accusation of disloyalty to Rome, of not speedily dealing with revolt and rebellion. By claiming that Jesus is hostile to Rome, the nation is blackmailing the Roman ruler.

This is Jesus' own nation. His people, through Mary. His people, through covenant with Abraham. These ones who swore obedience to Him at Sinai; these ones that He humbly entered into, spoke their language, attended their synagogues, upheld their distinctiveness over the Gentiles, they are now turning on Him. He healed their sick, cast out their demons, raised their dead, fed them, and

taught them with authority, and now, here they all are – representatives from all over Galilee and Judea, and they say – Away with Him!

IV. Forsaken By Human Government

Matthew 27:11-26 ¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" So Jesus said to him, "It is as you say." ¹² And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. ¹³ Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" ¹⁴ But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. ¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. ¹⁶ And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. ¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." ²⁰ But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" ²² Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" ²³ Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" ²⁴ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." ²⁵ And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

When you have been unfairly treated by your own friends, by religious leaders, and by the general population, there is one more human institution you look to – human government. Since the Flood, God instituted human government as a common grace, a means of stemming the tide of evil, and bringing some kind of order to the world. Human government is supposed to enforce justice, rightly judging between good and evil, so that society doesn't devolve into the anarchy of warring tribes, feuding families and rival gangs.

So after the trumped up and illegal religious court, Jesus is not brought before the secular court, so to speak. Pilate is his last chance of being delivered from these evil doers. They cannot crucify Jesus without Pilate's consent. If Jesus is crucified, it's because Pilate says *yes*, if Jesus is not, it's because Pilate says *no*. And if you trace the account, all along Pilate can see that there is no case here for the execution of Jesus. But Pilate does not have the willpower to simply oppose the growing angry crowd, even with soldiers, if he needs to.

So he tries all kinds of other methods. He hears Jesus is from Galilee, and sends Him to Herod, ruler of Galilee, who sends him back mockingly clothed in a royal purple robe. He offers the Passover custom to see if this is perhaps a justice issue, and the crowd will be satisfied to choose Jesus over a thief. He has Jesus physically beaten and scourged to where Jesus is physically half-dead already, to see if it will satisfy them.

But all of this is a delay tactic. Pilate has to make a yes or no decision. He will either protect the prisoner's rights, as Roman law required him to, or he will forsake Jesus for his own political advantage. So he does this hand-washing ceremony, disclaiming responsibility, which is besides the point and irrelevant. Pilate must give consent to Jesus' execution or withhold it. Whether or not he thinks himself guilty or innocent of His blood is besides the point. He gives consent. He is scared of a riot. He is scared of trouble. He is scared that this will turn nasty, or that he will be accused of being disloyal to Rome. He is being bullied, intimidated, and he will not stand up to it. He will also forsake Jesus.

At every turn, Jesus has had some other group forsake Him. First, his disciples. Then the religious leaders. Then the nation Israel. Then the human government of Rome. The only one who has not forsaken Jesus is God.

V. Forsaken By God

Matthew 27:45-46 ⁴⁵ *Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.* ⁴⁶ *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

Each of the four groups we have studied forsook Jesus out of cowardice and malice. The final Person that we will consider, forsook Jesus out of justice.

David said that even when father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take care of me. The Lord Jesus is the one Person who could not say that, on the cross. His disciples forsook Him, His nation forsook him, the religious leaders forsook Him, the justice system and human government forsook Him, but all along, He had been sustained and supported by His intimate communion with the Father.

Let every man on earth forsake me, if God is with me!

But the Lord Jesus, for three hours, could not say that.

What happened? There was a physical sign – the darkness. Throughout Scripture, darkness meant judgement, like when God judged Egypt with darkness. It was the opposite of God's blessing, as in Numbers 6:25, where the blessing reads: **Numbers 6:25** *The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;* This is the sign of a curse, of wrath, of displeasure, of anger. It is the sign that God is not favouring, but disfavouring, not blessing, but cursing, not abiding, but forsaking.

After these three hours, Jesus breaks the silence. Jesus cries out in Aramaic, which was the spoken language in Israel of the time, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. Jesus was quoting a well-known Scripture – Psalm 22:1.

What was happening to Jesus during these hours? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God, "...made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God regarded Jesus as sin. For these three hours, God placed all the sin of the world on Jesus. Jesus was perfectly holy and hated all sin. Here, for three hours, He was taking in His own breast all the sin of the world. It is not that He was becoming sinful Himself, but He was being charged with all the sin of the world; sin charged to His account- feeling the liability, the shame, the remorse, the ugliness, the corruption, the loss that sin brings.

But it was not only the weight of the sin He felt, it was what that meant between Him and His Father. The Father had publicly declared that Jesus was the Son He loved, in Whom He was well-pleased. But as Jesus was charged with all our sin, the Father could have no fellowship with the Son. Habukkuk 1:13 says: *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.*

It is said that 16th c. theologian Martin Luther once sat in his study for hours to meditate on this passage. For hours he sat oblivious to the world around him. Finally, someone heard him say, "God forsaking God . . . no one can understand that" and he went on about his business.

What He went through, no one can know. What we can see is it was more awful than what Jesus had envisaged while praying in Gethsemane. His prayer seemed unanswered during these hours – no token of the Father's love, no assurance that it would soon be over. And in the silence, the cruel taunts of Satan's servants.

The Son lost his sense of being the Son. Right up to this point, He calls God as Father. But now, He is only aware of God as Holy Judge. He is no longer Son, but Sin, not the Beloved One, but the cursed One.

No one in all the universe could have been less prepared for abandonment from God. When Jesus spoke to people, He always spoke of the union and love between Him and the Father. He had approached the Cross, like Abraham and Isaac had gone up Moriah, as Father and Son. But now, in His moment of deepest need, there is no voice saying, “You are my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” There is no grace, no favour, no comfort. The Scriptures teach that God actively poured out intense anger and hatred upon Jesus as the sin bearer. Jesus became a lightening rod for all the fury and indignation over sin that God had stored up since the beginning of the world. God set Jesus up as the bulls-eye of His target for sin, and shot Jesus through with every arrow He had. And for that time on the cross Jesus felt the wrath of God, His infinite hatred of sin, crashing into Him. How long could you bear to face the fury of another person? A minute? Two? Ten? For Jesus, it was not 10 or 20 minutes of God's fury. It was three hours. Wave after wave of fury. Arrow after arrow. Blow after blow. Punishment after punishment.

I want to suggest to you that no human or angel could have survived the wrath of God for three hours. Only the God-man could survive that. And only an infinite Person could be punished for three hours, and pay an infinite debt.

For those hours, Jesus was in outer darkness. He was banished, derelict, left in the black hole where no light from God comes; away from order, from beauty, from life and light, the very things that He always was.

Calvary is chaos. The innocent One becoming the most guilty one. The Father forsaking His own Son, and treating Him as the Sinner of sinners. Most perfect love replaced by most perfect hatred. It is horrible, ugly, bloody, gory, chaos.

Why? Because the Creator loved His creatures so much, as to hurt Himself to restore fellowship. God had forsaken Jesus for those three hours, so that He could have eternal fellowship with those who come to Him through Jesus. Sin is what causes God to forsake man, but those who accept Jesus as their sin-bearer will never be forsaken by Him. God has poured out anger and judgement on Jesus; those who are in Jesus will never face that again.

Jesus endured all that abandonment for the joy of future fellowship. He endured the forsaking of friends, religious leaders, the nation, the State, and finally by the Father Himself.

The sun came back out on that same day. The abandonment was over. God's pure justice was satisfied. Payment had been made. So the Son could shout with victory, “It is finished!” His last words were not words addressed to My God, but to Father, “Into your hands, I commit my spirit”.