

A Dark Friday That Was Good

A Study of Matthew 27:46
(Good Friday Service)

Characteristic of Completeness: Salvation by Grace

Big Idea: God forsook His Son so that He wouldn't have to forsake us.

Introduction:

(Each attendee is to pick up a nail upon entering the auditorium.)

Isaiah prophesied that there would be trouble. Isaiah said the coming One would be . . .

^{NIV} **Isaiah 53:3** . . . despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. . . .

I. Jesus the Christ was indeed forsaken.

A. Jesus was forsaken by His hometown. The people of town of Nazareth did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Incredulous, they said:

^{NIV} **Mark 6:3** “Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

B. Jesus was also forsaken by His disciples.

1. Tradition holds that Jesus came into Jerusalem on a Sunday. It was the week leading to the Jewish Passover holiday that would become the first Easter, when Jesus would die and rise again. He rode into town on a donkey. The people greeted Him as the coming Messiah, the King of Israel.

^{NIV} **Mark 11:9** Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”¹⁰ “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”

2. On Thursday of that week, Jesus had his last supper with His disciples. By the wee hours of Friday morning, Judas Iscariot had betrayed Jesus into the hands of Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers who were seeking to have Him killed. It was then that all the disciples abandoned Jesus.

^{NIV} **Mark 14:50** . . . everyone deserted him and fled.

C. Jesus was also forsaken by the crowd in Jerusalem—the same crowd that was shouting “Hosanna!” just a few days before.

1. After Jesus was arrested, six trials were held early Friday morning. First, three Jewish trials. Then, three Roman trials.
 - a. Under questioning during the Jewish trials, Jesus affirmed that He is the Son of God, the Messiah. As such, He was convicted of blasphemy and sent to the Roman authorities to carry out the death penalty.
 - b. During the Roman trials, Pilate found no guilt in Jesus. It was the custom of the day for Roman authorities to release one Jewish prisoner during the Passover. The Jewish people chose for themselves which prisoner was released. Finding no guilt in Jesus, Pilate suggested Jesus. But, the crowd forsook Jesus and chose the criminal, Barabbas, instead.

^{NIV} **Mark 15:15** Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

- c. Roman flogging was brutal.
 - d. Roman crucifixion involved stripping Jesus of His clothing and nailing His hands and feet to a cross. Jesus was nailed to the cross at about 9:00 a.m. on Friday morning. He would hang there for 6 hours.
- D. Being forsaken like this would have been exceedingly difficult. Forsaken by His hometown. Forsaken by His disciples. Forsaken by the crowd. And now flogged and hanging on a cross unjustly. As difficult as all these things were, they were nothing compared to what was to come.

(Musical interlude)

- E. Jesus was forsaken by His hometown. Forsaken by His disciples. Forsaken by the crowd. Flogged and nailed to a cross. And then came the worst. For three hours, Jesus was forsaken by God, the Father.
1. This is an enigma. Jesus is God. Jesus and the Father are one. So, how could God forsake Himself? I can't really explain it. Perhaps the best I can say is that in His human consciousness, Jesus felt the deep, furious wrath of an infinite God poured out on Him—the only innocent person who ever lived, taking the blame for all of us.
 2. That the Father forsook the Son is evidenced by darkness.

- a. Jesus had hung on the cross for three hours from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

^{NLT} **Mark 15:33** At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock.

Three hours of darkness. Midnight at midday.

- b. It was not a natural lunar eclipse of the sun.¹
- c. It was a supernatural darkness signifying God the Father forsaking Jesus the Son.

(1) In the Bible, darkness is often used to symbolize sin and judgment.

(2) This is in contrast to light which often symbolizes the righteousness, holiness, and purity of God.

(3) The darkness symbolized God's turning away from Jesus in judgment.

3. The abandonment of God which was hinted by the darkness was confirmed by the lonely cry of Jesus.

(Play ► video "Forsaken Dark" here.)

^{NLT} **Matthew 27:46** At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Jesus was not mistaken. He was not delusional. God did forsake Him. To forsake means to leave, to abandon, to desert.

Jesus' words here are significant because this is the one and only instance recorded in the Bible where Jesus addressed a prayer to God and failed to use the term, "Father."²

Why? I think, at that moment, Jesus regarded His relationship with God as judicial, not paternal. He saw Himself as a man before God, not as the eternal

¹ The Passover was celebrated at the time of full moon, when the moon is opposite the sun, J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1952, 1971), 187.

² S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Death of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 125 (Jan. 1968): 14.

Son before His Father. He saw God as His judge, not as His “Abba, Father.” His perception was grounded in the reality that God had stepped away from Him in judgment.

4. The abandonment of God was the most painful abandonment of all.
 - a. Jesus had experienced unbroken communion and closeness with His Father from eternity past.
 - b. And then, three hours of darkness. Completely alone. Completely forsaken. I imagine it was largely silent during the darkness. Everyone would have been stunned and afraid and just waiting to see what would happen next.
 - c. Jesus pierced the darkness with His cry. (Play ► video “Forsaken Dark” here.) “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” It reflects the bottomless pain of absolute abandonment.

5. Thankfully, the abandonment of God was temporary
 - a. The darkness lifted at 3:00 p.m.
 - b. The judgment was over. Christ’s relationship with the Father was restored.
 - (1) ^{NIV} **John 19:30** . . . Jesus said, “It is finished.” . . .
 - (2) Once again Jesus addressed God as Father:

^{NIV} **Luke 23:46** “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

- II. Why would God allow this abandonment? Why would a loving God forsake the only completely good person who ever lived? Why would He allow the brutal torture and death of the only innocent person in history?

There is a reason. The reason is Christ’s abandonment was a payment. Christ was our substitute. Christ was made to pay for our sins, for our wrongdoing. He died in our place. Every human sin that has ever been or ever will be committed He bore Himself on the cross. It’s confirmed in Scripture.

^{NIV} **Isaiah 53:6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

^{NIV} **2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

Christ’s abandonment was a payment. Christ took our place. He is our fall guy. It is absolutely clear.

We all face spiritual bankruptcy. We can’t possibly pay. We’re in way too deep. Christ wipes out our debt. The weight is lifted. By Christ’s payment we are completely debt-free.

But, why? Why was payment necessary at all? There are at least three reasons.

- A. First, Jesus satisfied the demands of God’s holiness.
1. To be holy is to be separate from all that is sinful, impure, or morally imperfect. God is holy; we are not—not apart from Christ.
 2. Some of the most righteous, moral, faithful people who ever lived testify that God is infinitely holy, and they are utterly sinful by comparison:
 - a. So holy is He that when He spoke to Abraham, Abraham was compelled to say,

^{NIV} **Genesis 18:27** “. . . I am nothing but dust and ashes . . .”
 - b. So holy is He that when He spoke to Job, Job was compelled to say,

^{NIV} **Job 42:6** “. . . I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
 - c. So holy is He that when Isaiah had a vision of His holiness, he was compelled to say,

^{NIV} **Isaiah 6:5** “Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips . . .”
 - d. So holy is He that when Daniel had a vision of His holiness, he explains,

^{NIV} **Daniel 10:8** “. . . “I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.”

e. So holy is He that the prophet Habakkuk says to God,

^{NIV} **Habakkuk 1:13** “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong . . .”

3. Because God is holy and we are not, something had to be done. That which is holy cannot have communion with the unholy. Light and darkness cannot coexist in the same place. That which makes us unholy must be paid for; it must be cleansed; it must be taken away in order for us to be with God. Jesus did that. His life was the payment required.

4. Jesus satisfied the demands of God’s holiness.

B. There is a second reason Jesus died for us. It is this: Jesus satisfied the desire of God’s heart. God wants to be with us. God wants to spend eternity in our presence. God wants to have a relationship with us because He loves us. Jesus is the way He provides.

^{NIV} **Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God’s love and compassion for us compelled Him to take radical action to save us. God forsook His Son so that He wouldn’t have to forsake us. Jesus was abandoned so that we might never be alone.

C. The third reason that Jesus suffered and died is so that He could enter into and identify with our brokenness.

Even when you’re facing the most gut-wrenching things in life, you’re not alone. Jesus has been there, too. He knows what it’s like. And He is there to help. Think of all the things our Lord knows because of three ours one day on a cross.

1. Jesus knows what it’s like to be in hell.

The essence of hell is separation from God. It is separation from all that is good. Jesus experienced it three hours one day. And, in effect, Jesus is saying to you and to me, “I know what hell is like. Don’t go. Believe in Me for eternal life.”

You see, because of what Christ has done, God will not forsake us. That’s His promise to all who believe. But, we can forsake Him by never believing in Him. He has provided the payment, but we must appropriate it by believing in Jesus for eternal life. Our hearts testify to our spiritual indebtedness. By faith, we must accept Christ’s payment. Do it now. Don’t forsake Him. Believe.

2. Jesus also knows what it’s like to be lonely.

I have seen it in the eyes of many, including my friends. I have seen it in the eyes of widows who have lost their lifelong partners. I have seen it in the eyes of single people who are wondering if anyone will want them for a mate. I have seen it in the eyes of young people who desperately want to belong.

Jesus says, “I know what it’s like. I’ve been desperately lonely.”

3. Jesus also knows what it’s like to be abused, to be rejected.

I have spoken with many who have struggled to overcome abuse and rejection, and many more who struggle with the fear of these things. Whether you’ve been abused or abandoned by a parent or a spouse. Whether you’ve been unjustly rejected by an employer or a friend. Jesus says, “I know what it’s like. I’ve been abused and rejected and abandoned when it wasn’t my fault.”

4. Jesus even knows what it’s like to be a sinner.

Think of it. Jesus knows what it’s like to be a sinner, not because He personally committed sin, but because He took on Himself the guilt of all our sins. He felt every one of them.

So, we should never fear to go to Him when sin seems to cut us off from God. No matter what we’ve done. No matter how sordid or grizzly the details. No matter how badly we feel about it. No matter how unforgivable and far away from God we feel, Jesus says, “I know what it’s like. I’ve felt far from God. I experienced your guilt and everybody else’s.”

5. Jesus also knows what it’s like to hang by a thread of faith—to have hold of absolutely nothing but the promise of God.

There may be times in our lives when we don’t feel God and we don’t particularly like God. We feel like we’re circling the drain. Like we’re walking in a dark, thick cloud. We can’t see anything. And the only thing we feel is pain. We’re just clinging to the promises of God in the Bible and we’re on the verge of letting go.

Jesus says, “I know what that’s like. I have hung by a thread of faith. It made Me cry out into the darkness.” (Play ► video “Forsaken Dark” here.)

- III. Jesus died to satisfy the demands of God’s holiness. Jesus died to satisfy the desires of God’s heart. Jesus died to enter into and identify with our brokenness. Let’s remember Him. Let’s worship Him.

Tonight you have two opportunities.

- A. First, you have an opportunity to publicly acknowledge that Jesus Christ bore your sins on the cross. At the foot of the wooden cross in the front, there is a bucket. In a moment, you'll have an opportunity to come to the front and drop your nail in the bucket. It symbolizes the fact that your sins were nailed to the cross with Jesus; He died in your place and on your behalf.

- B. Second, you have an opportunity to take communion.

You may linger as long as you like. You may leave as soon as you are ready.

It is finished.