

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME ?

In the 15th chapter of Mark's gospel, we read about the darkness of the SOUL. We read about the God-forsakenness of Jesus. And personally, I think that THESE are the most MYSTERIOUS words EVER uttered by a human voice. LISTEN to them AGAIN:

When it was noon, DARKNESS came over the WHOLE land until THREE in the afternoon. At 3 o'clock, Jesus cried out with a LOUD voice: "ELOI, ELOI, LEMA SABACHTHANI?" which means, "My God, My God, WHY have You FORSAKEN me?"

Yes, friends, THESE are the most MYSTERIOUS words ever uttered. Now, of course, on ONE level we all UNDERSTAND them because we've ALL said them. ALL of us in this church have felt ABANDONED by God at SOME time or other in their lives. ALL of us in this church, at ONE time or another, have felt desperately ALONE. ALL of us in this church have, at SOME time, prayed: *GOD, in Your providence, YOU can do ALL things! You say to us 'ASK and you shall RECEIVE. SEEK and you shall FIND. KNOCK and the door will be OPENED.' Well, I'm ASKING, Lord! And I'm SEEKING! And I'm KNOCKING! I'm DESPERATE, Lord! Come and HELP me!* And ALL of us this church, ALSO know what it FEELS like to hear: S-I-L-E-N-C-E. SILENCE! That's right! We've all HEARD the SILENCE of God....

And I don't know WHY that's TRUE. I mean: ALL around us we see SIGNS of the goodness, the providence, and the beauty of our Creator. WE are wonderfully MADE, and SO is the environment in which we live. The sky, the sea, the flowers, the human body: ALL of these things are AMAZINGLY mysterious and wonderful! And YET, misfortune and adversity, and occasionally even TERROR and HORROR, come into our lives, and we're left with a PIT in our stomach, and asking: *WHERE is God? OR, if we fall into SIN, or get CAUGHT up in some bad HABIT or COMPULSION, and feel nothing but WEAKNESS or CONFUSION, we ask: GOD, WHERE are YOU? Please HELP me!* And then, there's the GUILT we sometimes feel, or the SHAME. Jesus says: *STRIVE to enter by the NARROW gate, and all WE have to say: UGH? I'm at EVERY gate! I'm all OVER the place!* He says: *IF you love me, you will keep my commandments.* And WE have to say: *Then I guess I don't LOVE you, Lord, because I don't KEEP Your commandments very well. I CAN'T! I DON'T! I WON'T! I'm TOO confused. I'm too WEAK!* And THEN comes the desperation: *I'm feeling all ALONE, Lord. Nobody CARES! I try to PRAY, and in the depths of my soul, there is nothing but DARKNESS – nothing but EMPTINESS!* And sometimes we can't even SLEEP. Or TEARS are just under the surface, so that when we begin to SPEAK, the TEARS are always right THERE, waiting to ENGULF us. And our EGO, our inner being, begins to FADE and WANE, and we don't know WHO we ARE anymore. And we become ONLY our grief, or ONLY our SHAME. And at THAT moment, we feel like we have nothing else, that our lives are just God-FORSAKEN. And friends, you can be very YOUNG and feel this way, or you can be very OLD and feel this way. You might have DONE a lot of GOOD in your life, or NOT so much. You may have had a very GOOD life, or a BAD one. But EVERYBODY comes to such a MOMENT, a MOMENT when the ONLY prayer that you can pray with ANY kind of honesty at ALL is the prayer that JESUS prayed on the CROSS: *My God, my God, WHY have You FORSAKEN me?*

But you know: that PRAYER, and especially when JESUS prays it, makes absolutely NO sense at all! I mean, WHY would Jesus ALLOW Himself to go THROUGH such PAIN and HORROR? After all, the resurrection COULD have occurred RIGHT then and there! Jesus could have slipped into DEATH for just a FEW brief seconds and then -- bang, boom, crash -- He could have come RIGHT back to life! And I'll tell you: things WOULD have been different THEN! Annas and Caiaphas would have become the 13th and 14th APOSTLES! Pontius PILATE would have started wearing a CROSS! And that whole CROWD would have ALL joined up immediately. But that's NOT the way it HAPPENS, is it?

Instead Jesus prays in agony: *MY God, my God, WHY have You FORSAKEN me?* But it doesn't make SENSE, does it? Have you ever wondered HOW God could have forsaken Jesus? After all, Jesus is DIVINE, isn't He? Jesus and God are ONE, aren't they? HOW is it POSSIBLE for God to FORSAKE GOD in the flesh? No, it just DOESN'T make SENSE!

Somewhere in the Holy Land – and I CAN'T remember WHERE -- I saw a gorgeous CHAPEL. And IN this chapel, there's a BEAUTIFUL mosaic that depicts JESUS on the CROSS. And BEHIND the head of Jesus with its crown of thorns, there IS what's called the *LUMEN GLORIA*. In other words, the crucified FIGURE of Jesus is in TORTURE on the cross, but from BEHIND His head, come these brilliant RAYS of LIGHT and GLORY. And it's such a crazy COUNTERPOINT and CONTRADICTION that you HAVE to ask: *HOW? HOW can He be BATHED in the LIGHT of eternal GLORY, and yet be SUFFERING and DYING in such AGONY on a cross? HOW?*

And THAT, my friends, is where YOUR mind and MY mind simply give OUT. We don't KNOW how THAT can be true. And SO, these WORDS are utterly MYSTERIOUS! HOW can they BE? But you know: EVEN if we were to go OUT of here and MEET the Risen Christ, and kneel down before Him, and ask Him: *Can I ASK you something? HOW could you have SAID those words on the CROSS: 'My God, my God, WHY have You FORSAKEN me?'* Well, I believe that, EVEN if the Risen Christ could EXPLAIN it to us, we STILL wouldn't UNDERSTAND it, because it's a MYSTERY! We DON'T, and CAN'T, know HOW God, IN and through Jesus Christ, can SUFFER, feel UTTERLY forsaken, and DIE. But quite frankly, I don't think that we are MEANT to UNDERSTAND. And THAT'S why I HATE it when people go around offering EXPLANATIONS for such MYSTERIOUS things, as if THEY know all ABOUT it. Friends, WHY can't we just accept it as a MYSTERY and LET the mystery BE? And WHEN we stand in front of a CRUCIFIX like THIS one, WHY can't we just KEEP our mouths SHUT, get DOWN on our KNEES, and just LISTEN to the words of Jesus, as He says: *My God, my God, WHY have You FORSAKEN me?* I'm TELLING you: THAT is the ONLY response that is APPROPRIATE when we're standing in front of a CRUCIFIX! We JUST need to SHUT up and LISTEN!

And because we have ALL said these very WORDS, and MEANT them – because we have ALL felt utterly FORSAKEN by God at one time or other, THEN we will KNOW, as we shut up and listen, that the ONLY place where we will EVER find any kind of ANSWER to that question is WAY down deep in the very DEPTHS of our SOULS – IN that PLACE where we are WITHOUT a human name, MADE by GOD, and where WE are a SPIRIT called OUT of eternity, and a SPIRIT that will live on INTO eternal life. Yes, SOMEWHERE, WAY down in the DEPTHS of our SOULS, beyond concepts, beyond words, beyond ANY intellectual formulations, there is something that SAYS (whenever you hear Jesus say those words: *My God, my God, WHY have You forsaken me?*) – there is something that says: *Oh, Jesus, I am SO glad You SAID those words, because NOW, I don't have to say them ALONE. YOU are saying them WITH me, and I am SO grateful!* And maybe THAT is why Jesus had to SAY them: for YOU and for ME.

Friends, in the next few moments, I hope that we will all REFLECT on these mysterious words of Jesus as we witness the Light of His life slowly being extinguished on the cross of death. HEAR the readings from Scripture. LISTEN to the music. WATCH the Light darken. And FEEL, deep in your soul, the POWER and the PAIN of His words: *My God, my God, WHY have You FORSAKEN me?*

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your compassion in suffering WITH us and FOR us. We don't know HOW You felt separated from GOD when You ARE God. But we don't know HOW You ever came to live among us EITHER. These truths are MYSTERIES. But we DO know from those WORDS that You spoke on the cross that You have come to US in our DEEPEST, DARKEST moments, so that we might not be ALONE in our suffering, ALONE in our shame, and ALONE in our grief; that we might KNOW that You never, EVER leave us ALONE, but stand with us ALWAYS, even in our most difficult and TERRIFYING moments. Thank you, Lord Jesus, thank you! Help us NOW to reflect upon YOUR passion, YOUR suffering, and YOUR agony, as we now witness the Light of YOUR life being slowly EXTINGUISHED on the cross of DEATH. Amen.