

Third Midweek Lenten Service – February 20, 2008
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

FORSAKEN LIKE NO ONE ELSE - PSALM 22:1-5

As New Testament Christians we have the entire history of the life of Jesus Christ. We know all about his sufferings and death for us. We are able to read the four Gospels which tell us exactly what happened to Jesus as he carried out his mission to save the human race. What did the Old Testament believers have? They had prophecies about the coming Savior. In Isaiah 53 the prophet describes the suffering Savior's death and burial. In Psalm 22 we hear the words that Jesus would speak one thousand years later while nailed to the cross for our sins. Psalm 22 was written by King David. However, David is not speaking about himself and what he is feeling about some situation in his life. These are the words of the Savior as he is rejected by his own people and then rejected and forsaken by his heavenly Father. As we consider the words of Psalm 22 we face this truth that Jesus is **FORSAKEN LIKE NO ONE ELSE**. As we hear him question his Father, let's consider **I) Why Was Jesus Forsaken** and then see that **II) This Is Not Characteristic Of Our God**.

WHY WAS JESUS FORSAKEN BY GOD?

“My God, my God why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.” (Vv. 1-2) What does it mean to be forsaken? The heavenly Father deserted his only Son. He left him all alone. He removed all of his blessings from his Son. At times you and I may feel that we have been forsaken and forgotten by our God and by our friends and families. But this is not the forsakenness that Jesus was experiencing. We may feel that we have been forgotten, but we still experience the blessings of God. God still provides us with life, air, water and light. Even though we may feel that we have been forsaken, we still have hope and we know that things will get better and we also see that things may be worse for someone else. However, Jesus was in a situation where there was no hope, no blessings from his Father. He was experiencing the torments and anguish of the damned. God had laid on Jesus all the guilt, shame and rebellion of the human race and then he was abandoned by his God. He was left alone to experience what it means to be in hopeless situation. Even though he was nailed to the cross and was on that Roman torture machine, he was experiencing the torments of hell. He wasn't in hell, but he was experiencing what it is like to be damned.

Why? This is the question that Jesus asked. Didn't he know why he was experiencing this torment and punishment? Remember several hours before this Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and he was asking his father that if it were possible to rescue the human race in any other way, may we do it that way. Yet he concluded his prayer, “not my will, but your will be done, O Father.” After praying three times he woke his disciples and told them it was time to go because his betrayer was coming to hand him over to his enemies. Jesus knew why. This question is a rhetorical question. It doesn't seek an answer nor does God give one. This is a question where God would have us think about the answer. We know that it is our sins that are the reason for Jesus being forsaken by his Heavenly Father. How many times when we experience great pain and suffering don't we also question God as to why we have to experience this? Especially when we are experiencing a feeling of hopelessness and despair– the mental and spiritual anguish causes us to question why. Jesus' spiritual torture is so great and terrible that God causes a great darkness to cover the earth on that Friday so that people are not able to totally see what our Lord is experiencing. Forsaken and totally deserted by his heavenly Father.

When you see our Savior in great physical pain and agony and then hear him cry out in spiritual torment and despair, you begin to understand the seriousness of our sin. When God forsakes his only Son and allows him to experience hopelessness, you start to realize that my rebellion, my disobedience, my unkind and hateful words, my evil thoughts aren't so insignificant and unimportant. This sinful condition that I have; these sinful actions that I do and the evil and unkind words that I speak and the unholy thoughts that I have are really dangerous and

life threatening. God does not and cannot overlook my failure to be perfect and holy as he demands. This debt that I owe must be paid. And the payment is something so great that I could never pay it no matter how hard I tried and no matter what I did; I could never satisfy the justice and anger of God. We live in a time when sin is no longer considered something that bad. In fact, we often joke and make light of sin. When we hear our Savior scream in agony, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” suddenly you begin to realize this sin is severe. It’s similar to a physician coming in and saying to us you have cancer and there is nothing we can do for you. You will die a painful and slow death.

Why was Jesus forsaken by God? Sin is serious and contemptible before God. It must be punished and God’s justice must be satisfied. As the Bible says, “the Lord will not leave the guilty go unpunished.” (Exodus 34:6c)

THIS IS NOT CHARACTERISTIC OF OUR GOD

As we listen to our Savior experience this hopelessness and misery we see that this is not characteristic of our God in his treatment of his people. “Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.” (Vv. 3-5) As Jesus cries out in suffering he notes that this is not how God has treated his people in the past. He says that God is holy and just and has been praised by the people of Israel. The Israelites trusted the Lord and he delivered them. They cried to him for help and he rescued and delivered them. As we read the pages of the Old Testament and review the history of God’s chosen people, the children of Abraham, we see time and time again how God was merciful, kind and forgiving to an obstinate and rebellious people.

We think of the slavery that the children of Israel were experiencing in Egypt. They prayed to the Lord to rescue and deliver them from their enslavement. God heard and answered their prayer. He sent them Moses to lead them out of their bondage. He sent the ten plagues upon the Egyptians to force the King of Egypt to finally let his people go. When the children of Israel were standing at the shores of the Red Sea with the deep waters in front of them and the army of Egypt behind them coming to take them back to their bondage and misery; God parted the waters of the sea and the people were able to escape and then the Lord drowned the King of Egypt and his armies in the Red Sea. As the people traveled in the desert and they ran out of food, God provided them with manna and quail when they prayed to him. When their water supplies ran dry, God gave them water from a rock. Over and over again God answered their prayers for help and deliverance. Even when they were upset and angry with God and complained about their condition, God was still kind and merciful. He still continued to rescue and deliver them.

But now the suffering Savior says, “You did this for our forefathers, but this is not what I am experiencing, O my God.” Notice that throughout this cry Jesus even though he has been forsaken and is enduring the torments of the damned, still refers to his heavenly Father as **my God.** He still trusts his heavenly Father even though his heavenly Father has left him all alone to experience the punishment of the world’s sin.

Why did my God and your God allow this to happen to his only Son? Why did God’s only Son have to endure punishment so great; to experience the spiritual anguish of hell? God loves you and me and every human being. He does not want any of us to ever have to experience such pain, hopelessness and despair for eternity. He did this so that we might always live with hope. He substituted his Son in our place so that we might always be able to live with the assurance of a future that is filled with peace and everlasting joy. He did this so that we might not have to carry the shame and burden of our sins and receive what we really deserve. He did this so that might live with the comfort of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life in heaven with our Savior and Lord.

As we view the agony and suffering of Jesus, we often just consider the great physical suffering and pain that he experienced while being beaten and then crucified. What was greater and more torturous was the spiritual pain and suffering; being damned for the human race’s sin. All this was done because as Jesus once said to

Nicodemus, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

You and I can never fully comprehend the great love that God has for us that he would willingly substitute his only Son and then forsake him so that he would not have to forsake and damn us. We can never thank Jesus enough for what he did for us. He was forsaken so that we might never have to be deserted, forsaken and forgotten by our God. Amazing love! Jesus was forsaken like no one else so that we might be set free and live in hope.

Amen.