



We're going to meditate on the most awful words spoken by any human being on earth. Jesus' words from the cross when He cried out to His Father: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* As we consider these words, I feel like a child standing at the precipice of a great ravine and dropping a stone down into the ravine, then waiting to hear it fall and hit the bottom but never being able to hear it because it's too deep. Surely when we approach a statement like this, we just need to stand in awe of God and realize that we're never going to get to the bottom of it. The sufferings of Christ at Calvary are like an unfathomable ocean. May God give us grace as we ponder these words and enable us to esteem our Savior more and understand what it was that He delivered us from.

Let's read God's Word from Matthew 27:45-56: *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. <sup>46</sup>And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>47</sup>And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." <sup>48</sup>And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. <sup>49</sup>But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." <sup>50</sup>And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.*

<sup>51</sup>*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, <sup>53</sup>and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup>When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

Let's pray: God, we pray that we too, by the power of Your Spirit, will be filled with awe and would be moved to say from the depths of our being, "Truly, Jesus, You are the Son of God." That we would believe in You, esteem You, delight in You, treasure You for redeeming us from the hell our sins deserve. We pray that You would give me words to speak and empower my speech. Give us ears to hear; let every heart be moved by Your Word, we pray for the glory of Jesus, Amen.

When was the last time you heard someone say, "I went through hell on earth." It's not uncommon these days to hear people describe experiences they have with words like hell. Sometimes people say it with appalling flippancy. For instance: comparing the sweltering heat of summer to hell; or maybe a baseball player talking about going through hell in center field. Sometimes the words are used less flippantly for experiences that are truly terrible: A survivor of the Holocaust might speak of her years in Auschwitz as "hell on earth." People going through immense physical pain; a woman who lives with an abusive husband; a child whose parents are never home; a husband who loses his beloved wife. People describe experiences like this as "hell on earth" but I would exhort us, as God's people, to never speak that way. I would exhort us to never laugh at a joke about hell; to never think of it lightly because we believe hell is a reality.

From the perspective of the Bible, we must ask, without in any way minimizing the dreadfulness of human suffering, "Has anyone ever gone through 'hell on earth?'" As we ask that question, we realize there is only One who has truly experienced what it is like to go through "hell on earth" and that is our Lord Jesus Christ and that is what He is experiencing here on the cross. He stands in our place; He bears the wrath we deserve for our sins. In His cross and in His humanity, Jesus experiences the hell that all who would ever believe in Him deserve to experience for all eternity. As He pays the wages of our sin in full and the enemies of Christ think they are destroying Him, actually Jesus is defeating death and sin and hell itself.



An old hymn puts it like this:

"He hell in hell laid low;  
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;  
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,  
And death, by dying, slew."

([His Be the Victor's Name](#) by [S. Whitlock Gandy \(d. 1851\)](#))

That's what Jesus is experiencing and accomplishing here on His cross. [As we survey this wondrous cross](#), and look particularly at the words of Jesus in verse 46: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" I want us to ponder what the Bible teaches about the reality of hell. In particular, two aspects of the reality of hell converge as we look at this statement of the death of Christ. We see first of all that hell is a place of darkness and secondly that it is a place of dereliction.

### 1. **Hell is a Place of Darkness**

Let's think about the darkness of hell. If you look at Time magazine this week, you'll see that the existence of hell that is so often called into question in the world, is also being called into question in the church, including churches that say they believe in the Bible. But when we come to the cross and see what Jesus was experiencing, we have to pause — we have to really consider the reality of hell. What Jesus is going through on the cross and especially what Jesus is describing when he says, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" makes no sense if hell is not real.

Hell is a place of darkness just as the cross was a place of darkness. Look at verse 45: "*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.*" Jesus is the [light of the world](#) but He is being enveloped in this gloom of darkness. As He becomes [sin for us](#), He becomes like a pack of sin there on Calvary's tree. Every bitter thought, every evil deed, is crowning His blood-stained



brow and heaven turns off the lights so to speak so our Savior hangs there in the blackness of darkness, bearing the filth of our sin. And that darkness is a symbol of God's judgment.

You'll remember back in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus, when God was bringing His judgments on Egypt, "*Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.'*" ([Exodus 10:21](#))

The only time I really can imagine feeling darkness was when I was in a cave in Georgia. We went deep in that cave and had flashlights on our helmets. The guide had turned off the lights and we put our hands in front of our faces and couldn't even see our hands. It just felt dark.

There is a darkness to be felt that covered Egypt when the plagues of God's judgments were being poured out. It says, "*So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.*" ([Exodus 10:22-23](#))

And now here at Calvary, there is darkness for three hours. Imagine what would happen in Chicago-land today if at noon on Friday, the sun went dark and the whole land was covered in pitch darkness. Imagine the chaos. The fear. The terror that would ensue. There on Calvary, it was so dark you could feel it for three hours in the middle of the day -- this is a description of what judgment is like. In Amos 5, we read that the people were saying, "Oh, we want God to come, we want God to move among us. We desire the day of the Lord." But Amos says, "Woe to you, you don't have any idea what the day of the Lord will be like."



[Amos 5:18-20](#) states: *"Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?"*

I don't know if you've ever gone through a period in your life where it felt like the dark night of the soul. Maybe you're going through a time like that right now. The sun comes up in the morning but it's just a blanket of darkness smothering your mind and soul. If you feel or see no light -- no hope -- that's what happens here at the cross. This is the day of the Lord's judgment. This is the day of days when God is pouring out His wrath on the head of His Beloved Son, for all our guilt and shame.

They scourge Jesus into a bloody pulp; they tear His clothes from Him; they spit on Him; they beat Him and slap Him and crucify Him and mock Him. And then they think they're going home to a nice Passover meal that same night. And God says, "I'm going to turn off the lights and I'm going to give these people a taste of what My judgment will be like as My Son hangs on that cross, bearing My judgment for their sins."

For all sinners who do not repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, listen to what the Bible says. This is [Jude 13](#): *"...the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever..."* for people who do not repent. Or [Revelation 16:10](#): *"...the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds."*

That's a description of what God's judgment is like and people still say, "Oh, I'd rather go to hell than to heaven because that's where all my friends are going to



be." But does this sound like a place where you're going to be able to party forever with your friends?

Living in a darkness can be felt - gnawing your tongue in anguish; cursing the God of heaven; unable to repent anymore of your evil deeds. No wonder Jesus said in [John 12:35-36](#): *"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light (Jesus, the Light of the World), that you may become sons of light."* The darkness that overtakes the land is a symbol of the wrath of God that is burning itself out in the heart of God's Son. [William Henrickson](#) says, "Hell came to Calvary that day and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead."

Jesus Himself is bearing our sins in His body on the tree so that we might [die to sin and live to righteousness](#). Hell is a place of darkness and it's also a place of dereliction.

## 2. Hell is a Place of Dereliction

Dereliction—that's not a word we use very often. A ship is said to be a derelict ship when the captain and the crew abandon the ship. They take out the compass and cargo; there's no more port of call for the ship. It has no usefulness; it's abandoned; it's derelict. The word derelict in the [dictionary](#) means: "The act of leaving with an intention not to reclaim or resume. The state of being left abandoned, forsaken." That's dereliction.

When Jesus cries out on the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* theologians call this His cry of dereliction. He's expressing the torment, the anguish of His soul, having been abandoned, having been forsaken by God. He's been silent for three hours as He bears the awful weight of our sin. Now He speaks out and expresses His anguish with these awful words. Words



that my mind just can not comprehend. Words that are so profound with mystery that they are better for us to just stand back and stand in awe and tremble: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Someone\* has said that "all the wailings and howlings of the damned for all eternity will fall infinitely short of expressing the evil and bitterness of sin with such emphasis as these few words: *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*" Hell is a place of dereliction. Jesus says when sinners are cast into hell, they will hear these words of the Almighty God: *"Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* ([Matthew 25:41](#))

[\* Quote attributed to Robert Jamieson in the *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*]

[2 Thessalonians 1:9](#) describes God's judgment like this: *"They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away ["shut out" in the NIV] from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."* If God's nearness is our good, then God's absence is our misery. Even in hell, God is present -- He is present only in His wrath in hell. Not in His mercy. Not in His compassion. Jesus cries out: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* as He experiences the reality, the essence of hell's judgment for the sins of those who would believe in Him. I think one way that is helpful to explore these words is to place the emphasis in three different points.

#### A. **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

First, let's think of these words with the emphasis on the word You— *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* You, My Father, the One I've loved, the One I've lived for, the One Whose presence is my greatest joy and delight. Why have **You** forsaken me? Jesus has suffered much from His enemies. They have hurt Him in



every way; they have abandoned and forsaken Him. And even worse than His enemies, Jesus has suffered the betrayal and desertion of His friends: Judas betrayed Him; Peter denied Him; they all left Him and fled.

You've probably felt the sting of a friend's rejection. You probably know what it's like to be gossiped about, to be mistreated, ignored by people whom you thought would care for you when you needed them but they just weren't there. You know what that feels like -- to be abandoned by your friends. But when it happens to us, don't you have in the back of your mind the thought, "Maybe I've done something to deserve this?" And don't you think, "I've probably done this to other people, too. I've betrayed people. I've failed to be there for them when they've needed me."

But here's Jesus, Whose very meat and drink was to do [the will of His Father](#), Who never failed His Father and now He finds Himself forsaken. On the cross alone for three hours. God the Father brings a darkness over His soul. It's an infinite agony, too crushing to bear. He's left without any comfort from God. No feeling that His Father loves Him. No feeling of compassion and pity and support from His Father. All fellowship is cut off.

Now if you go into a room full of blind people and turn off the lights, they're not really going to notice or miss the light because the light is most precious to those who have experienced it. No one has experienced the light of the Father's presence and fellowship and comfort so sweetly and so constantly as Jesus. And no one misses the Father's presence and feels the pain of His absence as much as Jesus because no one has walked with the Father like Jesus has.

[Robert Murray McCheyne](#) says: "God was His Son before, now that Son became all darkness. He gets not a smile from His Father. Not a kind look. Not a kind word." *"My God, my God, why have **you** forsaken me?"* Forsaken by My friend, I



can bear that; but forsaken by My Father, to be without the light of His presence, this is too crushing to bear.

**B. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

Secondly, let's put the emphasis on the word me: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" We can hear Jesus cry: "[The Holy Heart was broken, sent from the Father's throne....The Holy Heart was stricken, abandoned and alone.](#)" Why me?

Just about everyone I read on this word from the cross referenced an experience in [Martin Luther's](#) life. They said [there was a time](#) when Luther sat alone in his study for hours on end. I always wonder if this is just a legend but it's been carried on and they describe how Luther sat in his study and people would come in and check on him and he just kept repeating these words: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" They tried to bring him food; he didn't want it. Finally about six hours later, he came out of his study entranced by these words and he exclaimed, "God, forsaken by God. Who can understand that?" That's what's happening here.

Where is God when Jesus is hanging on the cross? Do you ever wonder in the words of that one book, "Where is God when I'm suffering?" I think [C.S. Lewis](#) wrote about this after the death of his wife, Joy Davidman Gresham, in [A Grief Observed](#). He said something like, "The worst pain of it all is the awful silence of God." It's an experience that is often common to humanity but not like this.

Where is God when Jesus is hanging on the cross? Well, God is in two places: In heaven seated on His judgment throne and on earth bearing that judgment on the cross. God the Father in heaven - God the Son on the cross, bearing the awful weight of our sin. And the Son cries out, "My Father, why would you forsake Me?"

In [Genesis 22](#), we read that when Abraham walks his dear son up Mount Moriah, obeying the instructions that were given by God, Isaac asks, "Where is the



lamb, my father? What are we to offer for an offering of sacrifice?" And Abraham says to Isaac, "God Himself will provide the lamb, my son." Not knowing how God was going to work; ready to sacrifice his own son and as he lifts the knife over his son who has been tied down on that alter of sacrifice, a voice from heaven intervenes and says, "Abraham, do not harm the boy." And there's a ram caught in the thicket - a substitute.

But here we are -- 2,000 years later -- on a hill right in that same location, a hill called Calvary or Golgotha. This time, God the Father leads God the Son up that hill. As they lay His body down to be nailed to that cross, no voice from heaven intervenes because here is "[the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.](#)" The Son cries out, standing at the bar of God's judgment, "*Why have you forsaken **me?***"

We imagine the Father as the Great Judge, breathing an indictment of all the sins of all God's people - billions and billions of sins we've committed, vile sins, every sin imaginable: lust, deceit, thievery, hatefulness, murder, adultery, all the commandments that we've broken. The Father reads out this long list of indictments, the sins of God's people. And He says to His Son, "Here you are My Son, charged with the sins of My people. What is Your plea?" And the Son answers, "Guilty. Guilty as charged." Because He stands there as our Substitute. And as our Substitute, Jesus becomes a curse for us. All the guilt of every heinous and wicked sin we would ever commit, laid on Him as He bears that sin, that shame. The Father turns His face away, forsakes and abandons. "[For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.](#)"

*"Why have you forsaken **me?**"*

C. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"



Thirdly, let's emphasize the word why: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* It's a cry of distress but not of distrust. It's not a cry of anger, unbelief, despair. He's crying out to God His Father in trust. Even though God has forsaken Him, Jesus will not forsake His Father. Even though He walks in darkness and has no light, He will trust in the name of the Lord and will rely upon His God. He knew why He was dying: *"for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."* But in the midst of the human agony and the spiritual agony of it all, He goes to the only place He knows to find comfort -- [Psalm 22](#). He speaks these words of Scripture, realizing that in Himself, these words are being fulfilled.

Why? Why this dereliction? Why did God forsake His Son? Why did He abandon Him in the hours of utter darkness? Why did Jesus endure such agony? I'll tell you why. Because He knew either He or the whole world must suffer. He knew it was either hell for Him or hell for us. And so in His mercy and compassion and love, in order to bless us, He stood where God had to turn His back on Him. Someone said it was damnation and He took it lovingly, willingly.

Don't think here for a moment that God the Father is the grim, mean God Who delights to punish sinners and if it were not for Jesus the Son, God the Father would have gladly punished us all in hell. No, they are both full of love. They are both full of mercy. It was in love that God the Father *"gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* And it was in love that Jesus went willingly to the cross and gave Himself up for us.

[John Stott](#) says it well, "The Father did not lay on the Son an ordeal He was reluctant to bear, nor did the Son extract from the Father a salvation He was reluctant to bestow."

John R. W. Stott, [The Cross of Christ](#) (InterVarsity Press), p. 151

Jesus was glad to bear our sin and shame and the Father was glad to provide salvation in Christ for all who believe. But the cross was a horrid necessity in order



for that salvation to be accomplished and applied. I want to apply these words in three ways this morning:

**#1. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** These words are a **mirror in which we can see our sins as God sees them.** I don't know if you've ever prayed, "Lord, help me see my sin the way You see it?" I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand but I think that's a good thing to pray. "Help me see my sin the way You see it."

"Ye who think of sin but lightly,  
Nor suppose the evil great,  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate."

[Stricken, Smitten, And Afflicted by Thomas Kelly](#)

If sin is just a small thing, why did the Son of God need to endure this agony? Why was He forsaken by His Father? You see, we're used to this. We're like fish swimming in the ocean. They don't think about the water. The only time they think about water is when they are pulled out of it. And as people living in this world of sin, we're used to it. It's the atmosphere we breathe. We tend to think of it but lightly.

I heard an illustration this week that if a snake bit your wife and killed her, would you take that snake home to be your pet? [Erwin Lutzer](#) has said, "Just as we would abhor the knife used to murder a child, so we should abhor the sin that caused Jesus to die."

[\[Cries from the Cross, page 91, Moody Publishers.\]](#)

This is what sin costs. This is how evil sin is. And so as we think about this week that Christians call "Holy Week" may our meditations be frequent and deep upon the cross of our Savior. May we take infinitely more pleasure in thinking of our Savior Jesus, than we do in entertaining ourselves with the world's entertainment that so often entices us to laugh and chuckle at the very sins that

drove our Savior to the cross. Realize that every time we turn on the TV we're being tempted to think of sin but lightly. And how guarded we must be to keep the cross of our Savior before our eyes so we might see sin as God does.

**#2. These words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" are a foreshadowing of what unrepentant people who will not turn from sin and turn to Jesus will experience for all eternity.** To be forsaken, abandoned. Because we see in Scripture that God is a Holy and just God Who will not leave sin unpunished. You might hope in your selfishness that God would bypass some of your sins, but then when someone comes and does something wicked or takes something that belongs to you, or harms someone who is dear to you, you hope then that God is just and right. You hope then that God doesn't overlook sin. You see, if God had to forsake His Only Son as He bore the weight of sin, will He not forsake those who refuse to repent and believe in Him.

We are hearing these days that hell is not real and if it is real, it is not populated. No one will ever go there - that's just what the world wants to hear. I read these words this week and I thought they were very convicting. Richard Bodey says, "Is it really rational to believe that if God abandoned His own Son to hell when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of others, that He will refuse to abandon to hell those who persist in their own sins and unbelief."

[\[The Voice from the Cross, page 65, Kregel Publications\]](#)

Because God poured out His wrath on His sinless Son when He died for sinners, but not on rebellious, impenitent, unbelieving sinners themselves, all sense of moral decency and right is outraged. Sometimes people must think, "Well, God must be a monster if He punishes sinners in hell." But the reality is that if God lets everyone into heaven in the end, that's more of a monster. As He punishes His Son, Jesus cries out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" If He forsook His Son, Who never inherited any sin of His own and never committed any sin of His



own, as He died for the sins of those who would believe, will not God punish those who refuse to repent and believe in Him? These words are a foreshadowing of what we will experience if we do not repent.

**#3. These words are a comfort for those who flee to Christ for a refuge.** Jesus cries, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* There may be times when you feel deserted, abandoned. But that's the feeling not the reality for those who trust in Jesus. The reality is, as God Himself says to His people in [Joshua 1:9](#) and [Hebrews 13:5](#): *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* He promises, "You will never be abandoned and alone, cut off from my love, cut off from my care, cut off from my comfort."

And though you may go through periods of darkness where you do not see the Father's face, you can know that because Jesus stood in the darkness and bore the wrath and experienced what it was to be abandoned by the Father, you who run to Jesus for refuge will never be abandoned because Jesus was separated from the Father's fellowship at the cross. We who trust in Him can say with confidence, *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* ([Romans 8:38-39](#))

["In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song."](#)

---

**New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*