

I.N.I.

Good Friday
April 10, 2020
Matt. 27:45-49

In Christ Jesus, our God-forsaken Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I heard on the news this past week that car accident deaths have gone down with less cars on the roads. Petty crimes and robberies have also gone down, but domestic violence has rocketed. People sheltering in place at home have gotten on each other's nerves and arguments, fights, and murders have increased. Unfortunately the pandemic has not changed people's sinful character.

A doctor wrote this past week "Over my 40 years of medical practice, I have never seen so many people so anxious, so worried, so upset. It's the psychological trauma associated with the disease, the fear of the disease, the self-quarantining, the isolation that this true emergency has caused." It probably has caused many people to cry out, **MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**

Jesus cried out the same thing, but it was not for Himself, but for you and for me to answer. Why was Jesus forsaken by God?

Jesus was nailed to the cross around 9 in the morning on Friday. For three hours the crowd around the cross jeered and ridiculed Jesus. They mocked and made fun of Him. During those three hours Jesus spoke the first three sentences from the cross. Jesus said: **FATHER, FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING.** He spoke to the repentant and believing thief on the cross: **ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE.** And then addressing His mother and His disciple John, Jesus said, **WOMAN, BEHOLD YOUR SON!** and **BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER!**

Around noon when the sun is usually at its greatest height in the sky; it suddenly stopped shining. From noon till three there was darkness all over the land. This was no eclipse. This was not just a very, very cloudy day. This was a miracle of God displaying the Judgment that was taking place. During these three hours of darkness God was judging all of mankind, by placing that judgment, all of His wrath and damnation for sin on His Son. Every single sin (in thought, word and deed), of every single person (past, present and future) was being paid for in full. One cannot even fathom the agony of soul that Jesus endured on the cross to pay the full price.

Jesus' greatest suffering was not the physical pain of the nails and crown of thorns; as great as that must have been. It was not the whippings and the beatings; it was not the thirst and hunger, or the heat and the tiredness. It wasn't even the mental anguish of the arrest and trials and the mockery and ridicule that was constant for those many hours. Nor was it the being forsaken by His disciples, betrayed by Judas and denied by Peter that left Jesus alone and friendless and no doubt broke His loving heart. His greatest suffering was **HELL!** For three torment-filled, grueling, humanly unbearable hours Jesus suffered the God-forsakenness of damnation for us.

So often we hear people speak of God as being unjust or even cruel for allowing evil things to happen. People say how could a loving God let this or that take place, or how could God damn anyone to hell. Or on the other side they say God is love and overlooks and condones sin because He is so loving. Well if someone wants to see total absolute Justice, **LOOK AT THE CROSS!** If someone wants to see total, absolute love, **LOOK AT THE CROSS!**

The picture that we get from the four Gospels is that when the darkness fell upon the earth there was a silence that accompanied the blackness. On Golgotha it became silent. Fear stopped the mouths of the mockers. Darkness hid the anguished face and tortured body of Jesus from the onlookers. Then suddenly out from the silent darkness of that mid-afternoon crucifixion, as the three hours drew to a close, a cry is heard, a loud voice shouts **ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI? MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**

Instead of God being Jesus' Father, He was now His Judge. To our puny minds we cannot fathom how God the Father could forsake God the Son, but it happened. When Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, angels comforted Him. When He was before Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod; when He was beaten and whipped and mocked: the Father was there with Him.

He was not alone, He was not forsaken. But now there is no help, no comfort, no support or strengthening. He is forsaken by the Father. Only the damned in hell know what it is like to be forsaken by God. This Jesus endured.

God the Father made Jesus **who knew no sin, to be made sin for us**. The Father looked down upon His Son on the cross and saw nothing in Him but the world's sin and guilt. God who is a consuming fire against sin, unleashed the full fury of His hatred and wrath against Jesus because He bore the sins of the whole world. This had to be done in order for us to be redeemed.

On the cross in the darkness of that Judgment, Christ balanced the scales of Justice forever! Man's judgment of death, eternal death because of sin, had now been met. The torments of hell had now been endured. The eternal payment had now been made. The Son of God, in human form, suffered for all humans, endured the torments of hell for the whole damned human race. Jesus had to bear the punishment, the eternal damnation for our sins so that we could be declared **NOT GUILTY!** By this question Jesus is loudly proclaiming to all the world: **GOD IS JUDGING ME FOR THE SINS OF ALL OF YOU---THE WHOLE WORLD.**

His ever tender, loving heart, even as it experienced God-forsakenness, still reached out and never forsook us. He was there on the cross for us. His cry of **WHY?** was not a complaint, nor was it a question of why this was happening, as if Jesus had no idea of what was going on. It is a question for us to answer. This should not be a cry that wakes us up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat: **WHY? WHY?** Nor is it a question that lays more guilt on us and burdens our conscience. No, it is to be a soothing voice that comforts us in the darkness and loneliness of this world. Why was Jesus forsaken?! ***So that we would never be!***

Man makes many empty promises, many that He can never fulfill. God made one in the beginning of time to Adam and Eve. He said "eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and you shall surely die. Disobey Me and you die" It came true! But God has also made the promise that He would send His Son to take our place, endure the death and punishment Adam and Eve and all of us deserved. This also came true! No one can add anything to what Christ has done, nor was anything left undone that needed to be done for our salvation. That is why the way to heaven, forgiveness of sins and everlasting life is by grace alone.

Why was Jesus forsaken by God? It was for me, it was for you! It was for every person in this world, for every sinner. Christ was forsaken so that we would never be. Yes, we are the reason for Christ being forsaken, but in that forsakenness we are also recipients of a blessed peace with God!

Sometimes we feel as if we have been forsaken by our God when we are experiencing suffering, sorrow, grief, loneliness or pain. We feel as if God is not listening to us or doesn't care about us. We know in our hearts of faith that this can never be, yet those feelings are there. Sometimes we feel we are unworthy of God's help and then don't turn to Him when we should. We need to forget our feelings, we need to do away with our reason and emotions when they contradict the clear Words of our God. Even though we fully deserve to be forsaken by God, God's promise of never forsaking us is seen clearly in these words. He forsook His Son, abandoned Him to suffer eternal punishment as final payment so that He will never forsake us ever. His promise is sure. That which stood between us and God; our sin, our guilt; the curse of the Law is gone; removed, paid in full by Christ. He endured being forsaken by His Father so that we would forever be reconciled and at peace with God. That is an accomplished fact!

The past few weeks have been some of the most unique in the history of our nation and the world. Lock downs, quarantines, sheltering-in-place, stores, malls, bars, restaurants, beaches closed, jobs lost, economies collapsing, and thousands of lives being taken by an unseen virus. No doubt many of those who died alone, or who lost loved ones dying alone in the hospital felt forsaken by God. Yet because of what we are celebrating today, the crucifixion of Jesus and His being forsaken by God the Father, none of those who suffered loss in this virus anywhere in the world has ever been forsaken by God. And all of those who trust alone in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will never experience being eternally forsaken in hell, but will dwell with our loving Savior-God forever and ever in the perfect glory and joy of heaven.

What greater assurance can we have than these words of Christ--**MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**

Our Lord in the letter to the Hebrews repeats this promise: **I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU. SO WE MAY BOLDLY SAY, THE LORD IS MY HELPER; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID!**

Amen.