

The Word of Anguish

by A.W. Pink

The sermon explores the significance of the Saviour's cry 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and its relation to the awfulness of sin, the wages of sin, and the absolute holiness and inflexible justice of God.

Scripture: Psalm 22:1, Matthew 27:46, John 3:36, John 15:13, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "The Suffering of Christ", "The Nature of Sin and Salvation"

Description

A.W. Pink delivers a profound sermon on the fourth saying of Jesus on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' He emphasizes the depth of anguish and mystery in this cry, illustrating the weight of sin and the holiness of God. Pink explains that this moment signifies the ultimate separation of Christ from the Father as He bears the sins of humanity, showcasing both divine love and justice. The sermon highlights the significance of this forsakenness as a demonstration of Christ's love and the basis of salvation for believers. Ultimately, Pink calls for reflection on the implications of this cry for both the saved and the unsaved.

Transcript

The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross

4. THE WORD OF ANGUISH

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

THESE ARE WORDS OF STARTLING IMPORT. The crucifixion of the Lord of glory was the most extraordinary event that has ever happened on earth, and this cry of the suffering one was the most startling utterance of that appalling scene. That innocence should be condemned, that the guiltless should be persecuted, that a benefactor should be cruelly put to death, was no new event in history. From the murder of righteous Abel to that of Zecharias there was a long list of martyrdoms. But he who hung on this central cross was no ordinary man, he was the Son of Man, the one in which all excellencies met - the Perfect One. Like his robe, his character was "without seam, woven from the top throughout".

In the case of all other persecuted ones there were demerits and blemishes which might afford their murderers something to blame. But the judge of this one said, "I find no fault in him".

And more. This Sufferer was not only perfect man, but he was the Son of God. Yet, it is not strange that man should wish to destroy God. "The fool hath said in his heart - no God" (Ps. 14:1) such is his wish. But it is strange that he who was God manifest in the flesh should allow himself to be so treated by his enemies. It is exceeding strange that the Father who delighted in him, whose own voice had declared from the opened heavens, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" should deliver him up to such a shameful death.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

These are words of appalling woe. The very word, "forsaken" is one of the most tragic in all human speech. The writer will not readily forget his sensation as he once passed through a town deserted of all its inhabitants - a forsaken city. What calamities are conjured up by this word - a man forsaken of his friends, a wife forsaken by her husband, a child forsaken by its parents! But a creature forsaken by its Creator, a man forsaken of God - O this is the most frightful of all. This is the evil of all evils. This is the climacteric calamity. True, fallen man, in his unrenewed condition, does not so deem it. But he, who in some measure at least, has learned that God is the sum of all perfection, the fount and goal of all excellency, he whose cry is "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps. 42:1), is ready to endorse what has just been said. The cry of saints in all ages has been, "Forsake us not, O God". For the Lord to hide his face from us but for a moment is unbearable. If this is true of renewed sinners, how infinitely more so of the beloved Son of the Father!

He who hung there on the accursed tree had been from all eternity the object of the Father's love. To employ the language of Proverbs 8, the suffering Saviour was the one who "was by him, as one brought up with him", he was "daily his delight". His own joy had been to behold the Father's countenance. The Father's presence had been his home, the Father's bosom his dwelling-place, the Father's glory he had shared before ever the world was. During the thirty and three years the Son had been on earth he enjoyed unbroken communion with the Father. Never a thought that was out of harmony with the Father's mind, never a volition but what originated in the Father's will, never a moment spent out of his conscious presence. What then must it have meant to be "forsaken" now by God! Ah, the hiding of God's face from him was the most bitter ingredient of that cup which the Father had given the Redeemer to drink.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

These are words of unequalled pathos. They mark the climax of his sufferings. The soldiers had cruelly mocked him: they had arrayed him with the crown of thorns, they had scourged and buffeted him, they even went so far as to spit upon him and pluck off his hair. They despoiled him of his garments and put him to an open shame. Yet he suffered it all in silence. They pierced his hands and his feet, yet did he endure the cross, despising the shame. The vulgar crowd taunted him, and the thieves which were crucified with him flung the same taunts into his face; yet he opened not his mouth. In response to all that he suffered at the hands of men, not a cry escaped his lips. But now, as the concentrated wrath of heaven descends upon him, he cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely this is a cry that ought to melt the hardest heart!

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

These are words of deepest mystery. Of old the Lord Jehovah forsook not his people. Again and again he was their refuge in trouble. When Israel was in cruel bondage they cried unto God, and he heard them. When they stood helplessly before the Red Sea, he came to their aid and delivered them from their enemies. When the three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace, the Lord was with them. But here, at the cross, there ascends a more plaintive and agonizing cry than ever went up from the land of Egypt, yet was there no response! Here was a situation far more alarming than the Red Sea crisis: enemies more relentless beset this one, yet was there no deliverance! Here was a fire that burned infinitely fiercer than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, but there was no one by his side to comfort! He is abandoned by God!

Yes, this cry of the suffering Saviour is deeply mysterious. At first he had cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", and this we can understand, for it well accords with his compassionate heart. Again had he opened his mouth, to say to the repentant thief, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise", and this too, we can well understand, for it was in full keeping with his grace towards sinners. Once more his lips moved - to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son"; to the beloved John, "Behold thy mother" - and this also we can appreciate. But the next time he opens his mouth a cry is made which startles and staggers us. Of old David said, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken" but here we behold the Righteous One forsaken.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

These are words of profoundest solemnity. This was a cry which made the very earth tremble, and that reverberated throughout the entire universe. Ah, what mind is sufficient for contemplating this wonder of wonders! What mind is capable of analyzing the meaning of this amazing cry which rent the awful darkness! "Why hast thou forsaken me?" are words which conduct us into the Holy of Holies. Here, if anywhere, it is supremely fitting that we remove the shoes of carnal inquisitiveness. Speculation were profane; we can but wonder and worship.

But though these words are of startling import, appalling woe, deepest mystery, unique pathos, and profound solemnity, yet are we not left in ignorance as to their meaning. True, this cry was deeply mysterious, yet it is capable of most blessed solution. The Holy Scriptures leave it impossible to doubt that these words of unequalled grief were both the fullest manifestation of divine love and the most awe-inspiring display of God's inflexible justice. May every thought be now brought into captivity to Christ and may our hearts be duly solemnized as we take a closer view of this fourth utterance of the dying Saviour.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

1. Here we see the awfulness of sin and the character of its wages. The Lord Jesus was crucified at mid-day, and in the light of Calvary everything was revealed in its true character. There the very nature of things was fully and finally exhibited. The depravity of the human heart - its hatred of God, its base ingratitude, its loving of darkness rather than light, its preference of a murderer for the Prince of life - was fearfully displayed. The awful character of the devil - his hostility against God, his insatiable enmity against Christ, his power to put it into the heart of man to betray the Saviour - was completely exposed.

So, too, the perfections of the divine nature - God's ineffable holiness, his inflexible justice, his terrible wrath, his matchless grace - was fully made known. And there it was also, that sin - its baseness, its turpitude, its lawlessness - was plainly exhibited. Here we are shown the fearful lengths to which sin will go. In its first manifestation it took the form of suicide, for Adam destroyed his own spiritual life; next we

see it in the form of fratricide - Cain slaying his own brother; but at the cross the climax is reached in deicide - man crucifying the Son of God.

But not only do we see the heinousness of sin at the cross, but there we also discover the character of its awful wages. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Death is the entail of sin. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Had there been no sin there would have been no death. But what is "death"? Is it that dreadful silence which reigns supreme after the last breath is drawn and the body lies motionless?

Is it that ghastly pallor which comes over the face as the blood ceases to circulate and the eyes remain expressionless? Yes, it is that, but much more. Something far more pathetic and tragic than physical dissolution is contained in the term. The wages of sin is spiritual death. Sin separates from God who is the fount of all life. This was shown forth in Eden. Previous to the Fall, Adam enjoyed blessed fellowship with his Maker, but in the early eve of that day that marked the entrance of sin into our world, as the Lord God entered the Garden and his voice was heard by our first parents, the guilty pair hid themselves among the trees of the garden.

No longer might they enjoy communion with him who is always Light, instead, they are alienated from him. So, too, was it with Cain: when interrogated by the Lord he said, "From thy face shall I be hid" (Genesis 4:14). Sin excludes from God's presence. That was the great lesson taught Israel. Jehovah's throne was in their midst, yet it was not accessible. He abode between the cherubim in the holy of holies and into it none might come, saving the high priest, and he but one day in the year bearing blood with him.

The veil which hung both in the tabernacle and in the temple, barring access to the throne of God, witnessed to the solemn fact that sin separates from him. The wages of sin is death, not only physical but spiritual death; not merely natural but essentially, penal death. What is physical death"? It is the separation of soul and spirit from the body. So penal death is the separation of the soul and spirit from God. The word of truth speaks of her that lives in pleasure as being "dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6).

Note, too, how that wonderful parable of the prodigal son illustrates the force of the term "death". After the return of the prodigal the father said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:24). While he was in the "far country" he had not ceased to exist; no, he was not dead physically, but spiritually - he was alienated and separated from his father! Now on the cross the Lord Jesus was receiving the wages which were due his people. He had no sin of his own, for he was the Holy One of God.

But he was bearing our sins in his own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). He had taken our place and was suffering the Just for the unjust. He was bearing the chastisement of our peace; and the wages of our sins, the suffering and chastisement which were due us, was "death". Not merely physical but penal; and, as we have said, this meant separation from God, and hence it was that the Saviour cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" So, too, will it be with the finally impenitent.

The awful doom awaiting the lost is thus set forth - "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9). Eternal separation from him who is the fount of all goodness and the source of all blessing. Unto the wicked Christ shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed" - banishment from his presence, an eternal exile from God, is what awaits the damned. This is the reason why the Lake of Fire - the eternal abode of those whose names are not written in the book of life - is designated "The Second Death" (Rev. 20:14).

Not that there will be extinction of being, but everlasting separation from the Lord of Life, a separation which Christ suffered for three hours as he hung in the sinner's place. At the cross, then, Christ received the wages of sin. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

2. Here we see the absolute holiness and inflexible justice of God. The tragedy of Calvary must be viewed from at least four different viewpoints. At the cross man did a work: he displayed his depravity by taking the Perfect One and with "wicked hands" nailing him to the tree. At the cross Satan did a work: he manifested his insatiable enmity against the woman's seed by bruising his heel. At the cross the Lord Jesus did a work: he died the Just for the unjust that he might bring us to God.

At the cross God did a work: he exhibited his holiness and satisfied his justice by pouring out his wrath on the one who was made sin for us. What human pen is able or fit to write about the unsullied holiness of God! So holy is God that mortal man cannot look upon him in his essential being, and live. So holy is God that the very heavens are not clean in his sight. So holy is God that even the seraphim veil their faces before him. So holy is God that when Abraham stood before him, he cried, "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27).

So holy is God that when Job came into his presence he said, "Wherefore I abhor myself" (Job 42:6). So holy is God that when Isaiah had a vision of his glory he exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). So holy is God that when Daniel beheld him in theophanic manifestation he declared, "there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption" (Dan. 10:8). So holy is God that we are told, he is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13).

And it was because the Saviour was bearing our sins that the thrice holy God would not look on him, turned his face from him, forsook him. The Lord made to meet on Christ the iniquities of us all: and our sins being on him as our substitute, the divine wrath against our offences must be spent upon our sin-offering. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That was a question which none of those around the cross could have answered; it was a question which, at the time, none of the apostles could have answered; yea, it was a question which had puzzled the angels in heaven to make reply to.

But the Lord Jesus had answered his own question, and his answer is found in Psalm 22. This psalm furnished a most wonderful prophetic foreview of his sufferings. The psalm opens with the very words of our Saviour's fourth cross-utterance, and it is followed by further agonizing sobs in the same strain till, at verse 3, we find him saying - "But thou art holy" . He complains not of injustice, instead he acknowledges God's righteousness - thou art holy and just in exacting all the debt at my hand which I am surety for; I have all the sins of all my people to answer for, and therefore I justify thee, O God, in giving me this stroke from thine awakened sword.

Thou art holy: thou art clear when thou judgest. At the cross, then, as nowhere else, we see the infinite malignity of sin and the justice of God in the punishment thereof. Was the old world over-flown with water? Were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by a storm of fire and brimstone? Were the plagues sent upon Egypt and were Pharaoh and his hosts drowned in the Red Sea? In these may the demerit of sin and God's hatred thereof be seen; but much more so here is Christ forsaken of God.

Go to Golgotha and see the Man that is Jehovah's Fellow drinking up the cup of his Father's indignation, smitten by the sword of divine justice, bruised by the Lord himself, suffering unto death, for God "spared not his own Son" when he hung in the sinner's place. Behold how nature herself had anticipated the

dreadful tragedy - the very contour of the ground is like unto a skull. Behold the earth trembling beneath the mighty load of outpoured wrath. Behold the heavens as the sun turns away from such a scene, and the land is covered with darkness.

Here may we see the dreadful anger of a sin-avenging God. Not all the thunderbolts of divine judgment which were let loose in Old Testament times, not all the vials of wrath which shall yet be poured forth on an apostate Christendom during the unparalleled horrors of the Great Tribulation, not all the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth of the damned in the Lake of Fire ever gave, or ever will give such a demonstration of God's inflexible justice and ineffable holiness, of his infinite hatred of sin, as did the wrath of God which flamed against his own Son on the cross.

Because he was enduring sin's terrific judgment he was forsaken of God. He who was the Holy One, whose own abhorrence of sin was infinite, who was purity incarnate (1 John 3:3) was "made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:2 1); therefore did he bow before the storm of wrath, in which was displayed the divine displeasure against the countless sins of a great multitude whom no man can number. This, then, is the true explanation of Calvary. God's holy character could do no less than judge sin even though it be found on Christ himself. At the cross then God's justice was satisfied and his holiness vindicated. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

3. Here we see the explanation of Gethsemane.

As our blessed Lord approached the cross the horizon darkened for him more and more. From earliest infancy he had suffered from man; from the beginning of his public ministry he had suffered from Satan; but at the cross he was to suffer at the hand of God. Jehovah himself was to bruise the Saviour, and it was this which overshadowed everything else. In Gethsemane he entered the gloom of the three hours of darkness on the cross. That is why he left the three disciples on the outskirts of the garden, for he must tread the winepress alone. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful," he cried. This was no shrinking horror in anticipation of a cruel death. It was not the thought of betrayal by his own familiar friend, nor of desertion by his cherished disciples in the hour of crisis, nor was it the expectation of the mockings and revilings, the stripes and the nails, that overwhelmed his soul. No, all of this keenest anguish as it must have been to his sensitive spirit, was as nothing compared with what he had to endure as the Sin Bearer.

"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while! go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:36-39).

Here he views the black clouds arising, he sees the dreadful storm coming, he premeditated the inexpressible horror of that three hours of darkness and all they held. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful" he cries. The Greek is most emphatic. He was begirt with sorrow. He was plunged over head and ears in the anticipated wrath of God. All the faculties and powers of his soul were wrung with anguish.

St Mark employs another form of expression - "He began to be sore amazed" (14:33). The original signifies the greatest extremity of amazement, such as makes one's hair, stand on end and their flesh to creep. And, Mark adds, "and to be very heavy", which denotes there was an utter sinking of spirit; his heart was melted like wax at sight of the terrible cup.

But the evangelist Luke uses the strongest terms of all: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). The Greek word for "agony" here, means to be engaged in a combat. Before, he had combated the oppositions of men and the oppositions of the devil, but now he faces the cup which God gives him to drink. It was the cup which contained the undiluted wrath of a sin-hating God. This explains why he said, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me". The "cup" is the symbol of communion, and there could be no communion in his wrath, but only in his love. Notwithstanding, though it means being cut off from communion he adds, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt". Yet so great was his agony that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground".

We think that there can be little doubt that the Saviour shed actual drops of blood. There would belittle meaning in saying that his sweat resembled blood, but was not really that. It seems to us the emphasis is on the word "blood". He shed blood - just like great beads of water in ordinary cases. And here we see the fitness of the place chosen to be the scene of this terrible but preliminary suffering. Gethsemane - ah, thy name betrayeth thee! It means the olive-press. It was the place where the life-blood of the olives was pressed out drop by drop! The chosen place was well named then. It was indeed a fit footstool to the cross, a footstool of agony unutterable and unparalleled. On the cross then, Christ drained the cup which was presented to him in Gethsemane.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

4. Here we see the Saviour's unswerving fidelity to God.

The forsaking of the Redeemer by God was a solemn fact, and an experience which left him nothing but the supports of his faith. Our Saviour's position on the cross was absolutely unique. This may readily be seen by contrasting his own words spoken during his public ministry with those uttered on the cross itself. Formerly he said, "And I knew that thou hearest me always" (John 11:42); now he cries, "O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not" (Ps. 22:2)! Formerly he said, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone" (John 8:29); now he cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou FORSAKEN me?" He had absolutely nothing now to rest upon save his Father's covenant and promise; and in his cry of anguish his faith is made manifest. It was a cry of distress but not of distrust. God had withdrawn from him, but mark how his soul still cleaves to God. His faith triumphed by laying hold of God even amid the darkness. "My God" he says, "My God", thou with whom is infinite and everlasting strength; thou who hast hitherto supported my manhood, and according to thy promise upheld thy servant - O be not far from me now. My God, I lean on thee. When all visible and sensible comforts had disappeared, to the invisible support and refuge of his faith did the Saviour betake himself.

In the twenty-second psalm the Saviour's unswerving fidelity to God is most apparent. In this precious psalm the depths of his heart are told out. Hear him:

Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly (Ps. 22:4-10).

The very point his enemies sought to make against him was his faith in God. They taunted him with his trust in Jehovah - if he really trusted in the Lord, the Lord would deliver him. But the Saviour continued trusting though there was no deliverance, trusted though forsaken for a season! He had been cast upon God from the womb and he is still found cast upon God in the hour of his death. He continues:

Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have encompassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog (Ps. 22:11-20).

Job had said of God, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him", and though the wrath of God against sin rested upon Christ, still he trusted. Yea, his faith did more than trust, it triumphed - "Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns" (Ps. 22:2 1).

O what an example has the Saviour left his people! It is comparatively easy to trust God while the sun is shining, the test comes when all is dark. But a faith that does not rest on God in adversity as well as in prosperity is not the faith of God's elect. We must have faith to live by - true faith - if we would have faith to die by. The Saviour had been cast upon God from his mother's womb, had been cast upon God moment by moment all through those thirty-three years, what wonder then that the hour of death finds him still cast upon God. Fellow-Christian all may be dark with thee, you may no longer behold the light of God's countenance. Providence seems to frown upon you, notwithstanding, say still, Eli, Eli, My God, My God.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

5. Here we may see the basis of our salvation. God is holy and therefore he will not look upon sin. God is just and therefore he judges sin wherever it is found. But God is love as well: God delighteth in mercy, and therefore infinite wisdom devised a way whereby justice might be satisfied and mercy left free to flow out to guilty sinners. This way was the way of substitution, the just suffering for the unjust. The Son of God himself was the one selected to be the substitute, for none other would suffice.

Through Nahum, the question had been asked, "Who can stand before his indignation"? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" (1:6). This question received its answer in the adorable person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He alone could "stand". One only could bear the curse and yet rise a victor above it. One only could endure all the avenging wrath and yet magnify the law and make it honourable. One only could suffer his heel to be bruised by Satan and yet in that bruising destroy him that had the power of death.

God laid hold upon one that was "mighty" (Ps. 89:19). One who was no less than the Fellow of Jehovah, the radiance of his glory, the exact impress of his person. Thus we see that boundless love, inflexible justice and omnipotent power all combined to make possible the salvation of those who believe. At the cross all our iniquities were laid upon Christ and therefore did divine judgment fall upon him. There was no way of transferring sin without also transferring its penalty.

Both sin and its punishment were transferred to the Lord Jesus. On the cross Christ was making propitiation, and propitiation is solely Godwards. It was a question of meeting the claims of God's holiness; it was a matter of satisfying the demands of his justice. Not only was Christ's blood shed for us, but it was also shed for God: he "hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2). Thus it was foreshadowed on the memorable night of the Passover in Egypt: the lamb's blood must be where God's eye could see it - "When I see the blood, I will pass over you!"

The death of Christ on the cross was a death of curse: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). The "curse" is alienation from God. This is apparent from the words which Christ will yet speak to those that shall stand on his left hand in the day of his power - "Depart from me, ye cursed" he will say (Matthew 25:41). The curse is exile from the presence and glory of God.

This explains the meaning of a number of Old Testament types. The bullock which was slain on the annual Day of Atonement, after its blood had been sprinkled upon and before the mercy-seat, was removed to a place without (outside) the Camp" (Leviticus 16:27) and there its entire carcass was burned. It was in the centre of the camp that God had his dwelling-place, and exclusion from the camp was banishment from the presence of God. Thus it was, too, with the leper. "All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be" (Lev. 13:46) - this was because the leper was the embodied type of the sinner.

Here also is the anti-type of the "brazen serpent". Why did God instruct Moses to set a "serpent" on a pole, and bid the bitten Israelites look upon it? Imagine a serpent as a type of Christ the Holy One of God! Yes, but it represented him as "made a curse for us", for the serpent was the reminder of the curse. On the cross then Christ was fulfilling these Old Testament foreshadowings. He was "outside the camp" (compare Hebrews 13:12) - separated from the presence of God. He was as the "leper" - made sin for us.

He was as the "brazen serpent" - made a curse for us. Hence too, the deep meaning of the crown of thorns - the symbol of the curse! Lifted up, his brow encircled with thorns, to show he was bearing the curse for us. Here, too, is the significance of the three hours darkness which lay over the land as a pall of death. It was supernatural darkness. It was not night for the sun was at its zenith. As Mr. Spurgeon well said, "It was midnight at midday". It was no eclipse. Competent astronomers tell us that at the time of the crucifixion the moon was at her farthest from the sun.

But this cry of Christ's gives the meaning of the darkness, as the darkness gives us the meaning of that bitter cry. One thing alone can explain this darkness, as one thing alone can interpret this cry - that Christ had taken the place of the guilty and lost ones, that he was in the place of sin-bearing, that he was enduring the judgment due his people, that he who knew no sin was "made sin" for us. That cry was uttered that we might be allowed to know of what passed there. It was the manifestation of atonement, so to speak for three (three hours) is ever the number of manifestation.

God is light and the "darkness" is the natural sign of his turning away. The Redeemer was left alone with the sinner's sin: that was the explanation of the three hours darkness. Just as there will rest upon the damned a twofold misery in the lake of fire, namely, the pain of sense and the pain of loss; so upon Christ answerably, he suffered the outpoured wrath of God and also the withdrawal of his presence and fellowship. For the believer the cross is interpreted in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ".

He was my substitute; God reckoned me one with the Saviour. His death was mine. He was wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities. Sin was not pushed away but put away. As another has said, "Because God judged sin on the Son, he now accepts the believing sinner in the Son". Our life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). I am shut up in Christ because Christ was shut out from God. He suffered in our stead, he saved his people thus; The curse that fell upon his head, was due by right to us. The storm that bowed his blessed head, is hushed for ever now And rest Divine is mine instead, while glory crowns his brow.

Here then is the basis of our salvation. Our sins have been borne. God's claims against us have been fully met. Christ was forsaken of God for a season that we might enjoy his presence for ever. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let every believing soul make answer: he entered the awful darkness that I might walk in the light; he drank the cup of woe that I might drink the cup of joy; he was forsaken that I might be forgiven!

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

6. Here we see the supreme evidence of Christ's love for us.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But the greatness of Christ's love can be estimated only when we are able to measure what was involved in the "laying down" of his life. As we have seen, it meant much more than physical death, even though that be of unspeakable shame, and indescribable suffering. It meant that he had to take our place and be "made sin" for us, and what this involved can only be judged in the light of his person.

Picture a perfectly honourable and virtuous woman compelled to endure for a season association with the vilest and impurest. Imagine her shut up in a den of iniquity, surrounded by the coarsest of all men and women, and with no way of escape. Can you estimate her abhorrence of the foul-mouthed oaths, the drunken revelry, the obscene surroundings? Can you form an opinion of what a pure woman would suffer in her soul amid such impurity? But the illustration falls far short, for there is no woman absolutely pure. Honourable, virtuous, morally pure, yes, but pure in the sense of being sinless, spiritually pure, no. But Christ was pure; absolutely pure. He was the Holy One. He had an infinite abhorrence of sin. He loathed it. His holy soul shrank from it. But on the cross our iniquities were all laid upon him, and sin - that vile thing - enwrapped itself around him like a horrible serpent's coils. And yet, he willingly suffered for us! Why? Because he loved us: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

But more: the greatness of Christ's love for us can be estimated only when we are able to measure the wrath of God that was poured upon him. This it was from which his soul shrank. What this meant to him, what it cost him, may be learned in part by a perusal of the Psalms in which we are permitted to hear some of his pathetic soliloquizing and petitions to God. Speaking anticipatively, the Lord Jesus himself by the Spirit cried through David:

"Save me, O God: for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.

Deliver me out of the mire, and Let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit

shut her mouth upon me.

Hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." (Ps. 69:1-3, 14, 15, 17-20)

And again, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42:7). God's abhorrence of sin swept forth and broke like a descending deluge upon the Sin-Bearer. Looking forward to the awful anguish of the cross, he cried through Jeremiah, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger" (Lam. 1:12). These are a few of the intimations we have by which we can judge of the unspeakable horror with which the Holy One contemplated those three hours on the cross, hours into which was condensed the equivalent of an eternal hell. The beloved of the Father must have the light of God's countenance hidden from him; he must be left alone in the outer darkness.

Here was love matchless and unmeasured. "If it be possible let this cup pass from me," he cried. But it was not possible that his people should be saved unless he drained that awful cup of woe and wrath; and because there was none other who could drink it, he drained it. Blessed be his name! Where sin had brought men, love brought the Saviour.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

7. Here we see the destruction of the "larger hope".

This cry of the Saviour's foretells the final condition of every lost soul - forsaken of God! Faithfulness compels us to warn the reader against the false teachings of the day. We are told that God loves everybody, and that he is too merciful to ever carry out the threatenings of his word. This is precisely how the old serpent argued with Eve. God had said, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die." But whose word proved true? Not the devil's for he is a liar from the beginning. God's threat was fulfilled, and our first parents died spiritually in the day that they disobeyed his command. Thus will it prove in a coming day.

God is merciful; the fact that he has provided a Saviour, reader, proves it. The fact that he invites you to receive Christ as your Saviour evidences his mercy. The fact that he has been so longsuffering with you, has borne with your stubborn rebellion till now, has prolonged your day of grace to this moment, proves it. But there is a limit to God's mercy. The day of mercy will soon be ended. The door of hope will soon be closed fast. Death may speedily cut thee off, and after death is "the judgment". And in the Day of Judgment God will deal injustice and not in mercy. He will avenge the mercy you have scorned. He will execute the sentence of condemnation already passed upon you: "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

We will not repeat again what has already been said at length; sufficient now to remind the reader once more how this cry of Christ's witnesses to God's hatred of sin. Because he is holy and just, God must judge sin wherever it is found. If then God spared not the Lord Jesus when sin was found upon him, what possible hope is there, unsaved reader, that he will spare thee when thou standest before him at the great

white throne with sin upon thee? If God poured out his wrath on Christ while he hung as surety for his people, be assured that he will most certainly pour out his wrath on you if you die in your sins. The word of truth is explicit: "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). God "spared not" his own Son when he took the sinner's place, nor will he spare him who rejects the Saviour. Christ was separated from God for three hours, and if you finally reject him as your Saviour you will be separated from God for ever - "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9).

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Here was a Cry of Desolation -

Reader, may you never echo it.

Here was a Cry of Separation -

Reader, may you never experience it.

Here was a Cry of Expiation -

Reader, may you appropriate its saving virtues.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-word-of-anguish/>

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