

Forsaken by God

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the profound understanding of the death of Jesus, emphasizing the unseen spiritual realm and the significance of God's love and justice intersecting at the cross. It explores the deep agony and sacrifice of Jesus in Gethsemane, highlighting the mystery of the incarnation and the divine nature of Christ as the Son of God. The sermon concludes with a powerful message of redemption, emphasizing the finished work of Christ on the cross and the wide-open arms of Jesus inviting all to receive forgiveness and cleansing.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24, John 1:18, Philippians 2:8, Matthew 27:45

Topics: "The Cross", "Redemption and Forgiveness"

Description

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Transcript

Well, it's a pleasure to be able to talk to you this morning, and I'm not going to read scripture to start with, but we will turn to scripture as we move along. We don't have TV, but I suspect that this past week, even in this increasingly anti-Christian climate, it's likely that some Hollywood-style portrayal of the death of Jesus will have been shown, and it's quite likely that the majority of people who would look at those portrayals would really know little or nothing about the real truth behind the images, or maybe I could rephrase that and say maybe that's all that they know about it. If there's anything I could add to that that's really even more sad, it would be simply this, that I suspect that there are many people who are claiming to be Christian who really don't know very much more than that either, and you know, it's completely common that we have knowledge about all kinds of things, but we can have knowledge without understanding.

I mean, excuse me, I was thinking just earlier about my mobile phone here, and it's very useful. I know how to send texts and emails, but I haven't got a clue how it works, and it is amazing that I can type something here and press a button, and lo and behold, someone in another country can read what I have just written there. How all that takes place, I really have no clue.

Obviously, some people do know, not the majority I'm sure, or on the other hand, I can type in somebody's postcode or zip code or whatever we call them wherever you live, and I can, if there was the kind of freedom that we used to have, I could make my way to where you live, and I could appear right at your front door somehow with this GPS. I can find you wherever you are, and that's amazing. I know I can do that, but I don't understand it.

I know very, very little about these things, and I think this is certainly true in respect to the death of Jesus. Having said that and led in the way I have, I'm well aware that full understanding of what took place at the cross of Calvary belongs exclusively to God, and I'm aware of that without any question, and yet I remember the words of Solomon. He wrote in Proverbs 4, I think verse 7, and he said, with all your getting, get understanding, and I believe what the Lord is saying to us through that word, and perhaps it's a very timely word for us this morning, is whatever you do, don't become satisfied simply with superficial knowledge, but seek understanding, and that's certainly my heart, and I think I can truthfully say the older I get, the more intensely I desire to understand these great truths that the Lord has revealed to us in Scripture, and revealed to our individual hearts to some degree as well, and for that we're very, very grateful.

And so, to get started today, in just a few words, I want to just draw a very brief outline. If I was painting it, I'd be painting it with a very broad brush, just things that we generally know about the death of Christ, and the reason for his death indeed. If I could just say it's very hard to encapsulate these great truths into just a few sentences, but thanks to Adam, man, men and women, mankind, however you want to say that, man is spiritually dead to God, and hopelessly lost.

I'm thinking of an illustration, suppose we thought about our helpless situation before God as a kind of a sin debt, as though we have a debt before holy God, and we are utterly unable to pay it. Someone would say, well God is love, so surely he can just cancel the debt and have done with it, and that's that. But God is indeed the God of love, he is the very essence of love, perfect love, but he is also the God of justice, and his justice will not permit him to just simply wipe our debt out with a word.

But graciously, he has made a way, he's made a way to rescue us, to rescue us from his own justice, without compromising his righteousness. To help us understand that, there's a story told, you know, of a Cossack leader who passed a law that anyone caught stealing food would be beaten with 30 lashes on his bare back. When the hood was pulled off the face of an elderly woman who had stolen food, it turned out to be the leader's mother.

The leader buried his own back and sheltering her, he put his arms around his mother and he took the 30 lashes for her. This is justice and mercy in the same act. The Psalmist wrote this in Psalm 85 and verse 10, mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

You know, that is the crucial key feature of redemption. Jesus paid the penalty for the guilt of others, he took it upon himself, and that truth lies right at the core, right at the heart of the gospel message. Of course, there's so much more that needs to be said about that and so much more to understand about it.

Let's just dig down just a little bit this morning or this evening, if it's evening where you are. You know, we want to know what really lies beneath the surface of this amazing grace. To help us grasp where I'm coming from this morning, can I just share two boyhood memories that I have.

The first would be when I was age 13, which was rather a long time ago now, and I sat in a Plymouth Brethren meeting. My family belonged to a group called the Plymouth Brethren and I was raised in that context. The morning meeting in a Brethren meeting, I don't know how it's changed these days because I haven't been part of it for many, many years, but at that time the morning meeting was exclusively a breaking of bread meeting and everything was different in that meeting.

We had no musical accompaniment. We had special hymn books for the occasion and various men in the church would share something from the scriptures as they felt led and so on. I had just been baptised in water and that gave me permission in that context to partake of the elements, the bread and the wine, and so it was a big event to be there and I remember it very vividly.

But the men who spoke, mostly they were elders in the assembly but not exclusively, they attempted to speak about the death of Christ in terms that frankly would be very graphic because they wanted us to understand Christ's execution and the barbaric and agonising aspects of it and those memories are vivid in my mind, memory. I'll come back to that or perhaps I'll build on it because another story from my background is to speak of a book that my father had. One or two of you here will have come across it yourselves.

It was titled Fox's Book of Martyrs and that book my dad kept on a high shelf but there were times when I was known to climb up the shelves and sort of try to see what I can find on that very high shelf in our little room where we lived and I can remember turning the pages of that book and it had artists' drawings and renderings of various men and women who were martyred for the sake of their testimony in the Lord Jesus. I remember the picture of Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, they were both, had been, one had been, the other one currently was a Church of England bishops, but on October the 16th in 1555 they were chained to a stake in Oxford, England and they were burned there at the stake. Before things had got too far Latimer is recorded to have said to his colleague, be of good comfort Master Ridley and play the man.

We shall this day light such a candle by the grace of God in England as shall never be put out. There are other stories also, some of the events and even the drawings were too savage to describe. We also know that so many of the great men and women who were martyred in the days gone by and very likely still today in different places, but it was not unusual for them to sing, there was reference to the singing, the singing martyrs.

Let me now turn to some scripture and make some sense out of this. In Matthew's Gospel is where I'm reading and in chapter 26 I can read in verse 38 and Jesus is speaking to three of his disciples, Peter, James and John. Then he said to them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death, tarry here and watch with me.

And he went a little farther and fell on his face and prayed saying, oh my father if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt. I'll leave the reading there for now anyway. With the kind of records that I've just referred to from the book Fox's Book of Martyrs and the other references that we find to those who have been martyred for the Lord Jesus and we read about their courage, we read about them actually singing as they're going into the arena where the lions are going to devour them and so on.

So we've got all of that in our minds and then we read here these verses of scripture and we ask ourselves what really is going on here? What was going on in Gethsemane? We can't help but do this. I hesitate to

even voice this but we must do it. I ask the question, was Jesus in some way less than Ridley and Latimer? Of course the answer is absolutely not and yet he's grieving so terribly and pleading that things might be different as he expresses his prayer to his father.

So what is going on? The fact of the matter is, and this is what we're trying to understand this morning, there's something more going on. There's something more going on even than what those elders sought to describe in those meetings I referred to. There's something else.

There's something more than Hollywood with all of its skilled actors and special effects are able to produce. There's something more going on. There's something that they would never ever be able to portray.

As a matter of fact even Mary standing at the cross and John who was standing there near to her, they had not a clue what was really going on as they looked at the body of the Lord Jesus, the person who's still person is hanging on the cross. What was going on? What was happening? Something was happening in the realm of the spirit in a different dimension altogether than that which was outward and physical. I am not in any way for a moment underestimating the physical grief, suffering forgive me, that Jesus was subjected to.

But clearly there's something else that's going on here and we want to investigate that. We want to know what it was. Whatever it was, had it not taken place, Jesus' death, terrible as it would have been, would be meaningless to you and to me today.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesians, he speaks about principalities and powers and then he writes to the Colossian church and he's addressing this very moment in the life of Jesus as he's hanging on the cross. And he makes this statement that he, Jesus, threw off these principalities, these powers, these spirits of darkness. He threw them off from him, can I add, as though they were nothing.

That was not an issue. It was happening. It was certainly part of what was going on that certainly had a connection with and would have a connection with everything that Jesus was engaged in.

But there was something bigger yet that was going on, something much bigger, something so transcendent that even the sun hid its face from it. It was as though all of nature blushed and bowed. Somehow it seems as though nature sensed more than any human being could have understood at the time.

More could be said about that. But to explain the meaning and the significance of what really is going on here, we must remind ourselves that the man who is hanging on the cross was the Son of God. He was the second person of the eternally existent Godhead.

The Apostle John puts it this way, if I can just quickly turn to his words, John chapter 1 verse 18. We read, No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father. He has declared Him.

He has made Him known. The one who was hanging on the cross on that occasion was the only begotten Son of the eternal God, who according to John's inspired writing is stated as existing in present tense, who is in the bosom of His Father, so united with His Father, united in ways that we can't even begin to understand and certainly not explain. He was so eternally one with His Father, and He's hanging on the cross.

He is the same one before whom angels fall and bow. He hanging on the cross is the one who called out into the prime ordeal of darkness and said, let there be light, and the whole universe lit up while He went about His creating. The one who is hanging on the cross is the one whom the Apostle Paul will speak much of.

As Paul writes to Timothy, he speaks about the mystery. There are mysteries which are made known to us that Paul explains, but there's one mystery that we shall never, never fully understand so long as we live in this world. I'm not sure we'll ever understand it.

And Paul tells us what that mystery is and he makes a statement, very succinct statement, but so meaningful, so poignant. He said this is the mystery. It's the mystery of the incarnation, which was God manifest in the flesh.

Beloved, this was God hanging on the cross. That's what made all the difference in the whole wide world. You know, this is He with whom He had walked a little earlier, with Peter, James, and John, those three privileged disciples who were with Him on three particular occasions, but none so sacred and holy as this, surely.

And they walked together into the olive press, which is the meaning of the word Gethsemane, the olive press where the olives were crushed until the oil flowed. And there is Jesus and He's praying to His Father. And as we look at this passage I've just read to you a moment or two ago, we sense that there was somehow some unspeakable, indescribable horror that He was facing, something that repulsed Him in the extreme.

I mean, we know from His own words that He was aware of why He was born into this world. He knew where He was from. He knew where He was going.

And He came for the express purpose of giving His life for us all. He knew that. Every other man and woman born into this world are born to live.

He was born to die. He knew that. And on this occasion as He's praying, He refers to a cup.

The imagery is that His Father's handing a cup to Him, for Him to drink. Three of the Gospels make a reference to this. There are other occasions, I think there's only three, occasions when we read about a cup in the Old Testament, but it's always in these three instances at any rate.

It's in reference to God's wrath and God's judgment, and Jesus must drink that. What I'd like to do, there might be some people who will listen to me who will object to this, but I'm a big boy now so I can take it when they write little notes about me. I'm reading from a book which Peter Boyle, who was in the meeting, gave to me in 1992, to my brother beloved and esteemed.

Thank you Peter, it's been a blessing to me these years. It is an expanded translation of the New Testament by Kenneth West, a Greek scholar. Let me just read some of the verses I read to you a few minutes ago.

Forgive me, I didn't read these, this is from Mark's Gospel, I was forgetting that. Listen to this, and they came into a place called Gethsemane, and he says to his disciples, sit here while I pray. This isn't somebody's own little interpretation of these words, this is a scholar, a Greek scholar, who understands the deeper meaning of the words and that's why it's referred to as an expanded translation.

Sit here while I shall pray. And he takes with him Peter and James and John, and he began to be thoroughly alarmed and distressed. And he says to them, my soul is encompassed with grief, even to the point of death.

Abide here and be watching. And having gone ahead a little, he fell repeatedly upon the ground and was praying that if it were possible, the arm might pass from him. And he was saying, Abba, Father, all things are possible to you, cause this cup to pass by and from me, but not what I desire, but what you desire.

And then he came back and found his disciples sleeping. Amen. You know, the prophet Isaiah, referring to this moment, he wrote in that very well-known 53rd chapter of Isaiah, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Let me just pause for a moment, particularly interested in the expanded translation there. Some of you will have noticed it in particular, how the one word translated Abba, and the closest word that we have to translate that really is the word Daddy. It speaks of that intense personal affection.

And I find it so moving to remind myself that in this awful moment of the life of Jesus, that he is reaching out to his Father with such passion in his heart. This is not just words that he said, but his heart is deeply, deeply moved as he faces what he knows he is facing. And when we read in Isaiah 53, the Lord, this is a reference of course to the Father, he's laid on him, on his son, on the Lord Jesus, the iniquity of us all.

The Apostle Peter put it this way, he said, who in his own self, bear our sins in his own body on the tree. The Apostle Paul, he describes it, can I suggest, in a far more dreadful manner, as though God amassed upon his son, all our sins, as he writes, he was made sin for us who knew no sin. And I must add, the next part of that verse is that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

I don't know what that means. I can describe these words to you, and I can bring them to your attention, but what did that mean? What did this mean for God who is more holy than we even know what the word means? We have no idea what the holiness of God truly is. God who is holy, who we read elsewhere, he cannot even look upon sin.

And yet, perhaps Wesley put it best when he said, referring to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, he says, God incomprehensibly made man. This mystery that we shall never be able to fathom, but this holy God, this thrice holy God, somehow had the very sins of the entire world laid upon him. He became, he was made sin for us, says the apostle.

Amen. And the amazing thing is, let me just read again another reference from Matthew's gospel, which is where I thought I was going earlier. Chapter 27, I read this in verse 45.

Now from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, that is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some that stood there, they thought he was calling for Elijah. And straightway one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave him to drink.

Verse 50 says, Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, he yielded up the ghost. And the apostle John writing in his gospel in chapter 19, he says this, he said, when Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, it is finished. It's John who helps us with those words.

The other engines, they make a reference to him crying out, this was his last cry out to God from the cross. And John tells us what it was. He said, it is finished.

It is finished. You know, as we leave this scene this morning, perhaps we just glance back for a moment and we shall never forget the, we never forget what we see and what we've seen. We've seen the slaughtered lamb.

And so the elders that I referred to at the outset, emphasize these things which were also real. But there was this that was taking place in the unseen realm. But just look now with this word, all the mockery and all the shame is finished.

All the searing pain and choking suffocation caused by hanging on a cross is finished. Prophets in the Old Testament says, where is the fury of the oppressor? Well, we can rest assured thinking back to my quote from Philippians chapter two, that when Jesus hung upon the cross, we can rest assured with this, that Satan knew exactly what would be the conclusion and consequence, more particularly if this were to proceed according to God's plan. We can only think to the best of our ability, which is not very well equipped to imagine the kind of temptation that ordinary people face today.

But imagine, I suspect that it would be as though the devil himself would marshal every evil power against that man hanging on the cross, if they could cause him to sin in thought even. As he hung on the cross, his offering would be insufficient for the purpose for which he hung there and so on. But where is the fury of the oppressor? It's gone because Jesus cast them off from him.

Our man was able to cry, it is finished. The accuser of the brethren is cast down. Glory to God.

And the moment of his father's forsaking is over and it's finished. The angelic being with the flaming sword, barring entry into the paradise of God is gone. You know, I can't improve on Charles Wesley's words.

Listen to these. He wrote, it is finished. The Messiah dies.

The Messiah dies, cut off for sins, but not his own. Accomplished is the sacrifice. The great redeeming work is done.

It is finished. All the debt is paid. Justice divine is satisfied.

The grand and full atonement made. God, for a guilty world, has died. The reign of sin and death is over and all may live from sin set free.

Satan has lost his mortal power to swallowed up in victory. Death, hell and sin are now subdued. All grace is to sinners given.

And lo, I plead the atoning blood and in thy right I claim thy heaven. Amen. You know, all was settled in Gethsemane.

When Jesus said, oh my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. He drank that cup of God's wrath that was due me and you, and he drank it to its bitter dregs.

Another hymn writer wrote these words. Here is love, vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood. When the prince of life, our ransom, shed for us his precious blood, who his love will not remember? Who can cease to sing his praise? He can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion, fountains open deep and wide. Through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide. Grace and love like mighty rivers poured incessant from above and heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed the guilty world in love.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Jesus was forsaken for a moment, but triumphant for eternity.

Amen. The fountain of God's mercy opened deep and wide, as the hymn writer put it. The mighty rivers of his love and his forgiveness are here.

They're here today by the Holy Spirit. They're here to wash, to wash your heart. They're here to bathe your inward being.

Did you notice when we last glanced back at the cross, the Lamb of God hanging there now, his arms staked to the cross but opened wide. The Lamb of God with his wide open arms. I happen to just personally believe this is one of the reasons why God chose the cross for Jesus' death.

He died with his arms wide open. My friend, his arms are wide open today. They're wide open to you.

He's open to receive you. He's open to wash you, forgive you, cleanse you from all of your inward filthiness, to start a whole new chapter in your life, to bring you to himself. Let me just pray.

Father, your love compels us to bow down. We pray, Father, this day that you will cleanse your people, O Lord, and totally set your people free, Lord, free from all of sin's seductions and from the arrogance of human pride, Lord, and all the baubles of this world and have a people for yourself. In Jesus' name.

Amen. You know, just before I finish, if you're someone watching on the internet, can I just encourage you to maybe just leave a response in the comment area and consider visiting us on our website. The address is very simple, mckenziefellowship.com. McKenzie, someone asked me why McKenzie.

Well, it's just the name of the road where we live. mck, mckenziefellowship.com. And God bless you all. Amen.

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