

A Study in Satisfaction

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon examines the profound significance of Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross and its implications for understanding salvation and suffering.

Duration: 59:38

Scripture: Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, Luke 23:34-46, John 19:30

Topics: "Satisfaction"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the figurative meaning of bulls as leaders of the nation. He then draws a parallel between the feeling of having all bones out of joint and the crucifixion of Jesus, emphasizing the immense suffering he endured. The speaker highlights the infinite value of Jesus' sufferings due to his divine nature, which allows for the payment of sinners' penalties in just a few hours on the cross. The sermon concludes with a note of salvation from God and the recognition that Jesus' trust in his Father was not in vain, despite his despairing cry from the cross.

Transcript

Father, we commit the hour to Thee and we ask Thy blessing upon us again as we study the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the light that They give us concerning the Lord Jesus, concerning the salvation that we have in Him, concerning our destiny, concerning the future, and concerning the blessings that are ours as a result of identification with Him. And so we pray that as we study tonight, Thou wilt minister to us through the Spirit the things that concern Him.

We commit this hour to Thee now, in Christ's name and for His sake. Amen. Our study for tonight is entitled The Last Words.

This is the third in our series on the last words of our Lord upon the cross, a study in satisfaction. And we are turning for our Scripture reading to the Matthean account in chapter 27 and reading verses 45 through 50. Essentially the same words are found in Mark chapter 15, verse 33 through verse 37, but we will read this Matthean account.

Matthew chapter 27, verse 45 through verse 50. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. This, of course, means from twelve midday to three p.m. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, Ali, Ali, lama sabachthani.

That is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? These words are a combination of Hebrew and Aramaic. Ali, Ali is the Hebrew for my God, my God. Lama sabachthani is Aramaic.

Why hast thou forsaken me? Probably the reason for the combination of the Hebrew with the Aramaic is that this was the form which appeared in the Targum of Psalm 22 and verse 1. And our Lord evidently was citing the text from the well-known source that the Jewish people about the cross would recognize. That is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there when they heard that said, this man calleth for Elijah. For Elijah's name was Eliyahu.

And Eli of Eliyahu and Eli, of course, are very similar. 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. The rest said, let be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. The death of Jesus Christ was very strange. He did not die a martyr's death as radiant Stephen under a hail of stones, nor as the noble Socrates in scornfully superior resignation.

Rather, a cursory reading of the text suggests that he died with a helpless, despairing cry in the most terrible isolation. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? How may we explain such a death? And why do Christians revere it so? The apostle Paul, when he spoke of his preaching to the Corinthians, said that he determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified. Evidently, the manner in which Jesus Christ was presented as crucified was of the greatest significance in the apostolic preaching.

Also in the epistle to the Galatians, the apostle expresses something of the same sentiment. For in chapter 6 and verse 14, he says, But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Theologians have always recognized the significance of the cross of Christ, if they are evangelical. And they have all recognized that it is fundamental to Christianity to see our Lord Jesus as Jesus Christ and him crucified. Luther spoke about its importance in this way.

He said, Theologia crucis, theologia lucis, or the theology of the cross is the theology of light. If we understand our Lord's cross, then we have light upon the truth of God. If we do not understand the cross, then we do not have light upon the truth of God.

I think one of the most amazing things is the fact that human beings often, though unbelievers, have been able to penetrate into the significance of the cross. Not the meaning, but the significance of it. They have come to understand at the heart, that at the heart of Christianity is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, even when they do not recognize the theological significance of it.

I think the best illustration of it that I can think of on the spur of the moment is the Unitarian Sir John Bowering, who wrote the famous hymn, which you often sing, probably, In the Cross of Christ. And in that hymn, in one of the stanzas, he has written, In the cross of Christ, I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time. All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.

Now there is a man who, though not a Christian, nevertheless by some insight, some study evidently of the New Testament had come to the correct conviction that at the heart of Christianity, whatever it may be,

is the truth of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now not all unbelievers have come to the same view that Sir John Bowering did. For example, Professor Joseph Klausner, a famous Jewish man who has written A Life of Jesus Christ, as well as A Life of the Apostles, has written, The dream of his life had vanished.

His life work had perished. The thought was unbearable. In his terrible anguish of heart, he summoned up all his remaining strength and cried out in his mother tongue, in the language of the book he loved most, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? In other words, he died in desolation.

H.G. Wells, who has not owned the rolls of any evangelical church that I know of, has said, The symbol of the crucifixion, the drooping, pain-drenched figure of Christ, the sorrowful cry to his father, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? These things jar within our spirit. He didn't like it. Another, Jesus died in agony as an outcast and a criminal.

His father failed him at last. Jesus died utterly disappointed. He was deserted and disillusioned.

Now that's the kind of thing that you find in college textbooks on religion. But of course, it is very far from the truth. A simple reading of the accounts of the New Testament would convince you that that was not true, because just a moment after he says this, he says, It is finished.

Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. So it is evident that he did not die feeling that his trust in his father did not count for anything at all. I think the solution to the perplexity of the death of Jesus Christ, if there is some perplexity over why he died, is found in this very despairing cry, the fourth that he uttered from the cross.

Now remember, he uttered seven cries from the cross. We have studied the first three. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Today thou shalt be with me in paradise. Woman, behold thy son. Behold thy mother.

Then this one, the fifth, I thirst. The sixth, it is finished. The seventh, father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.

But this one, the fourth, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now think for a moment about the places in which these texts are found in the New Testament gospel records. Three of these texts, three of these last sayings, are found in the twenty-third chapter of the Gospel of Luke. We have studied two of the three.

Three of the texts are found in the Gospel of John. We have studied one of them, that is, the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. In other words, six out of the seven statements are found in the two chapters, Luke twenty-three, John nineteen.

Mark has only one of the statements. He has the statement, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matthew has only one of the statements. He has the same statement that Mark has.

Now, if you were to attend a class in New Testament introduction at a theological seminary in 1974, aside from hearing a lot of strange things, some of which would be worthwhile and some not very worthwhile, you would probably in the New Testament introduction course hear a brief discussion, at least, perhaps a lengthy discussion, over the priority of the Gospels of Mark or Matthew. Almost all of modern critics of the New Testament believe that Mark was the first Gospel written. There are some old-fashioned, not radicals,

but old-fashioned conservatives who still believe that Matthew was the first Gospel written.

The earliest testimony that we have from the Church Fathers is to the effect that Matthew was written first. Now, what I'm going to say does not affect this one way or the other. It is, I think, granted by most New Testament scholars that it is either the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Matthew that is prior, that is the first Gospel written.

So regardless of which one of these Gospels is prior, it is true, probably, to say that the one statement that the Church had in writing, first of all, is the, my God, my God, why'st thou forsaken me? As if in this statement, above all of the seven, we have the lesson, the doctrine, the revelation of the sayings that our Lord uttered upon the cross. And I think it is fair to say that in this statement we do have a clue, an essential clue, to the significance of the death of Jesus Christ. Now all you have to do to discover that this is a citation from the Old Testament is to notice some of the marginal notes that you have in your edition of the Bible.

So at this point I want to turn back to the Old Testament psalm, Psalm 22, and take a brief look at the psalm so that we can notice the context of the text which our Lord selects to cite in the midst of his sufferings upon Golgotha. Psalm 22. It has been said that Psalm 22 begins with a sob and concludes with a song, and in between there are scenes of suffering.

So vivid is the picture that it seems more like a history than a prophecy. It is almost as if someone stood underneath the cross of Jesus Christ and recited the story of what he was looking at from underneath the cross upon which he died. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, said, it is the photograph of our Lord's saddest hours.

It is the record of his dying words, the lacrimatory. Now that's a new word for us, isn't it? The lacrimatory of his last tears, the memorial of his expiring joys. David and his afflictions may be here in a very modified sense, but as the star is concealed by the light of the sun, he who sees Jesus will probably neither see nor care to see David.

In other words, when we read Psalm 22, we should read it as if we were standing under the cross. Why is it that for every sermon that we hear on Psalm 22, we hear scores of sermons on Psalm 23? I have a good friend who has been a preacher for about 60 years, a little over 60 years, Dr. Carl Armeding. He said one time a man came up to him and said, Dr. Armeding, why is it that for every one sermon we have on Psalm 22, we have 100 sermons on Psalm 23? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Dr. Armeding said, perhaps the reason for it is that we're not up to preaching on Psalm 22. Now you can see I've got an awful lot of nerve to be talking about Psalm 22 and also about the citation of it in the New Testament. There are three notes in this Psalm to which we only allude briefly.

First, the note of separation from God. Now I think that it would be of interest to us if we had time to speak about this Psalm and to ask ourselves the question, is David prophesying directly of the future? That is, is he looking into the future, thinking under the inspiration of the Spirit of the Messiah who is to come? And is he given words by the Holy Spirit which refer directly to Jesus Christ? Or is he out of some experience that he himself is experiencing at that moment, speaking primarily of his own experiences so far as he is concerned, but while he speaks of his own experiences primarily, the Holy Spirit takes his words, gives them a sense that even David perhaps did not fully understand, and so out of David's experiences speaks, the Spirit speaks through him of our Lord Jesus that is to come, who is to come. Now you can see in the

first case we would be using the Old Testament, Psalm 22, as a direct prophecy of the future.

In the second case we would be thinking of this Psalm as a typical Psalm. That is, the experiences of David are illustrative, but of course we must increase the illustration, we must augment it in degree, an illustration of our Lord's ultimate suffering upon the cross. Now the sense that I'm going to make of the Psalm does not demand that we solve that question and we don't have time to do it.

Let's just think of it for the sake of thinking of it as a typical Psalm in which David speaks of his experiences, but he is carried by the Holy Spirit forward also into the future. And so out of the present he speaks also of the future. The note of separation, however, is there, and I want you to notice verse 1, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And verse 11, Be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help.

So while men upbraided him for his piety, he felt the sense of separation from his God. Now this, of course, finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. For on the cross he too felt the sense of separation and spoke of, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? You'll notice that the Psalmist in the Old Testament mentions his mother, but he never mentions his father.

We read in verse 9, But thou art he who took me out of the womb, thou didst make me hope upon my mother's breasts. I pointed out last time that the Lord Jesus in the New Testament never spoke of Mary as his mother. But in the passages of the Old Testament, which are typical, the Psalmist and others do speak of their mother.

For example, we saw this when we were studying Isaiah, that the prophet also, speaking typically, referred to the mother of the Messiah. But in the Old Testament we never have any reference in the Messianic passages to the father of the Messiah, as if to suggest that this Messiah is to come by virtue of a different kind of birth, which the New Testament spells out in detail as a conception in a virgin's womb and a birth from one who was a virgin. Now the second note that we find in the Psalm is the note of suffering from God and man.

And that is given us in verses 12 through verse 21a. I notice particularly verse 15 and verse 16. 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.

Notice the Psalmist says that there is divine sovereignty in his death. 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. Here is a picture of a naked man in the midst of a herd of infuriated bulls, who are the leaders of the nation.

The bulls being simply figurative of the leaders of the nation. He says also in verse 14, I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. How beautifully, how beautifully accurate that is of the feeling that our Lord Jesus must have had when he was crucified.

For when they took the cross, and took the cross with the person upon it, and plunged it into the hole in which it was to rest, that was the kind of feeling that a person would get. All my bones are out of joint. Or even if they put the cross there, and nailed him to the cross, hanging there he would have the same kind of feeling.

All my bones are out of joint. So the Psalmist, as he expresses his own feelings in the midst of his sufferings, is guided by the Holy Spirit to use terms that apply ultimately to our Lord Jesus. He says in the 15th verse that his strength is dried up like a potsherd.

Now I want you to notice that, because in our next study, in the month of September, when we deal with the question of I thirst, we're going to see that that has some tremendous significance. And the final thing that I want you to notice is they pierced my hands and my feet, or my hands and feet. Now I don't have time to discuss the technical matters of this particular clause in verse 16.

Suffice to say that I think that this is an accurate rendering of the Hebrew text. They pierced my hands and my feet. And that too, of course, is very appropriate for a crucifixion.

Why this text is not cited in the New Testament, I cannot say. It may be that the questions over the text, for there are some questions over the text, were alive in the day in which the New Testament authors wrote and they did not desire to take some text out of the Old Testament over which there might be some dispute. But I just do not know.

We notice that in the Old Testament it is specifically stated that our Lord was pierced. For in Zechariah chapter 10, 12 and verse 10, remember, they shall look upon him whom they have pierced. And so the idea of piercing is taught in the Old Testament.

How is it possible for three hours to equal an eternity of misery? Now that is the question that arises when we think about the satisfying work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He hung upon the cross for six hours. There were three hours in the midst of the darkness.

And here in the midst of the climax of the sufferings of the darkness, he cries out, my God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? They have pierced my hands and my feet. How is it possible for such suffering to be sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of many sinners? How is that possible? Well, the only answer, of course, is that our Lord did not die the same kind of death that sinners would die, but he died an equivalent death. That is, his death is reckoned because it is the death of a God-man as sufficient before the eternal God to pay the price, the ransom price, for the sins of sinners.

In other words, the answer lies in the dignity of the person who suffers. Now let's just suppose, for the sake of illustration, that I decide that next month I want to take a little trip to one of the countries in Europe that has a king and has some royal children. Let's say to the country of Norway, which has a king and which also has a little grandson, a prince.

Let's suppose that I walk along the streets of Oslo and there is a young urchin that comes out from the side of a building and throws a brick at me and misses, fortunately, and I reach over and slap him on the face. Well, perhaps if his mother is nearby she might shout some word at me. Stop doing that in Norwegian, which of course would be totally lost upon me, but nevertheless she may shout something like that and that would probably be the end of it.

But if I walked on down the end of the street to the royal palace and there happened to be a little boy playing out in front of that royal palace and he stuck out his tongue at me and said, yeah, yeah, yeah, and I reached over and slapped him, well, I might not be able to leave Norway for months and months because there is a great deal of difference between slapping a little urchin and slapping a prince who is ultimately going to rule. Now the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ are infinite in value because of the infinite dignity

of the Son of God, and that is the only way by which we can account for the sufferings of a few hours upon the cross being sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of sinners. The third note is the note of salvation from God.

We read in verse twenty-one, save me from the lion's mouth, and then suddenly the sufferer breaks forth in confident prophecy and prediction of what God has done for him. Thou hast heard me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will declare thy name unto my brethren.

And the remainder of the psalm is a note of the glorious fruits of the suffering which the psalmist has just engaged in. Now I want you to notice, too, that we move in verse twenty-one in the midst of that psalm from a tempest to a calm. Everything has been trouble and suffering to that point, but in the midst we have thou hast answered me from the horns of the wild oxen.

The prayer of our Lord was answered from the horns of the unicorn. Dr. Lewis Barry Chaffer used to say that Jesus Christ was the only person who ever cried out to God in prayer and never received an answer. But he did receive an answer.

And here is the answer in thou hast heard me from the horns of the wild oxen. Then we read in verse twenty-eight, and the psalmist now thinks of the whole world, for the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations. In other words, moral government exists in spite of the fact that it seems as if the wicked were almost successful in doing away with the righteous.

The kingdom is Jehovah's. No matter what we may think about the suffering of our Lord Jesus, you can be sure that God is sovereign in the midst of it. Some years ago, when Principal Burley was principal of New College at Edinburgh, he was addressing the Scottish General Assembly in the month of May when they meet there.

And they had Sir Bernard Lovell, an outstanding astronomer, speak. And he spoke about the wonders of the heavens. And when he finished, he sat down and Principal Burley looked over at him and said, Sir Bernard, we thank you very much for being with us.

And we have been very interested and thrilled by the insights that you have given us into the universe. But we would just like to say as a last word, so that we all remember it, that our God rules over all your worlds. And he was expressing this truth that the kingdom is the Lord's.

And it may seem on the cross, when Jesus Christ died, as if all moral government was coming to an end. As if God was not sovereign, but he is. And finally, in verse 31, we read, they shall come and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

In other words, the psalm ends on the note of praise. Now, I want you to notice that we have, if I have interpreted this correctly, I'm not sure that I have so far as it being a typical psalm. It may be a direct prophecy.

But even if it is simply a typical prophecy, you will notice that the psalmist considers his sufferings to have effects that go out to the four corners of the earth. In other words, the effects of the Davidic suffering, if that is what he was speaking about, are those that go out to the ends of the earth. Now, it is evident that, therefore, this psalm must be at least typical, for the sufferings of King David, looked at in themselves, could have no worldwide effect, were he not an illustration of the ultimate Redeemer who is to come, and whose ministry is a worldwide ministry.

And so it is evident then that this psalm is a psalm that ultimately reaches out to the ends of the earth. And notice that it winds up on the note of praise. Now praise, that is something for us to always think about.

Praise is one of the lost arts of Christians. Have you ever noticed how significant praise is? Now, we don't mind praising in anything but in spiritual things. If somebody were to shout out in the meeting on Sunday morning, hallelujah, everybody would look around and say, what kind of an oddball has managed to get in our meeting? But on Sunday afternoon, things are entirely different then.

Then we are praising constantly. We are saying, boy, did you see that tackle? That was bone-crushing. Boy, did you see that run? I've never seen anything more beautiful than that.

And when the game's over, did you notice this? Did you notice that? Or if it's a musical that we've listened to, did you catch the force of that? Wasn't that tremendous? Wasn't that beautiful? We are full of praise. Now I've noticed this about people who praise, that it is healthy people and appreciative people who praise, and it is sick, sour people who never praise. Have you ever noticed that? No matter what it is, you can always pick them out.

If you're talking about theology and a person never praises, well, he's kind of sour and sick and probably out of fellowship in some way. But if he's praising, full of thanksgiving, the chances are that he's appreciative, he's healthy. That is generally true.

Praise is a kind of sentiment that expresses our health, and it's the natural thing to praise if we have seen something. And so we praise everything that we are interested in. We praise our wives, or we praise our husbands, or we praise our friends, or we praise what we are studying.

Some of you men look as if you never praise your wives. Well, you're sick. You should appreciate your wives.

You should not only praise her to herself, but you should praise her to others, if you love her, if there are some characteristics about her that you like. Whatever it is, the natural outgrowth of appreciation is the expression of praise. And so we delight in praise because we understand the blessings that God has given us through Jesus Christ.

It is the appointed consummation of the understanding of the doctrine of redemption that we praise. And have you noticed also in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, particularly in the Old Testament where you have deeper insight into these things, have you ever noticed that it is not only that they praise, but they call on other people to praise. So they say, praise the Lord.

They praise the Lord, and they tell you to praise the Lord because they're interested in your spiritual health. Now some of you look like you've been baptized in lemon juice, and you never praise. But it's perfectly normal to praise, and it's all right to let slip a hallelujah every now and then, or a praise the Lord, or a glory.

That's all right. You don't have to upset the whole congregation with it. But nevertheless, it's all right to say something like that, and surely it's all right to feel something like that.

I like what C.S. Lewis said about John Donne, who was a famous British, both preacher and poet. And John Donne, I always feel if I say something like this, you know him, but maybe you don't know how the British pronounce it. I didn't know how the British pronounced John Donne's name.

I called him John Donne all this time until I heard an Englishman who carefully told me that you pronounce D-O-N-N-E, Donne. But John Donne was speaking about this one time, and he said, in the meantime, since we're not in heaven, that's when we're really going to be praising. But in the meantime, we're just tuning our instruments.

So we're like members of a symphony getting ready to play, and we're tuning our instruments. So let out a hallelujah every now and then. It may sound like somebody tuning up on a clarinet during the midst of the pre-tuning session before the symphony starts.

That is a cacophony of the strangest kind of sounds, isn't it? But it's in preparation for the symphony. And sometimes you can even enjoy that strange medley of sounds because you can understand what is going to come to pass. So that's all right.

It's all right. Even if you were Presbyterians and you've never said hallelujah in your life, it's all right to have a word of praise. And if you can't bring yourself to do it here in the congregation, well, go home and do it in the kitchen or in your bedroom or in your closet.

That is, if you feel something because of what Christ has done for you. Well, now we're going to turn quickly to the New Testament passage, and I only want to mention a few of the important points because some of you have heard me speak on Matthew chapter 27 and verse 46 before. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? You will remember that the darkness came over all the land at the sixth hour, and so our Lord Jesus was hanging in darkness for three of the six hours in which he was upon the cross.

It may have been a very repulsive spectacle if he had not been hidden by the darkness. For Isaiah tells us in his prophecy of the sufferings that his face was so marred more than any man. So if you had been able to look upon the face of our Lord Jesus in the midst of the sufferings of the cross, you might have wondered if this really was a man who was suffering.

But now the darkness is of great significance because the fact that there came darkness over all of the land is God's way of giving us an insight into what is happening at that moment. You may remember that in the plague of darkness which preceded the first Passover in the land of Egypt, darkness over the land was a token that the curse of God rested upon it. So the fact that when Israel was in Egypt and there came as one of the judgments darkness over the face of the land was an evidence of the fact that Israel or Egypt and the Egyptians and all who remained in Egypt were under the curse.

Now when the darkness came while our Lord hung upon the cross, it was designed by God to portray to us the fact that what Jesus Christ was doing at that time had to do with a curse. Now we have studied Galatians 3 verse 13, Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. And so here we have a little clue, a little indication that what is happening on the cross has to do with the curse.

In fact I think we can put it this way. The cry of our Lord Jesus, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me, gives the meaning of the darkness and the darkness gives us a clue to the meaning of the cry. They both explain one another.

The darkness telling us it's a curse, the words of our Lord telling us that the darkness coming over the land has to do with the curse which he was suffering. In other words the natural, the elements express the spiritual. Now I wish I had time to give you illustrations of this through the New Testament, but there are many, many illustrations of the same principle.

For the God who controls the events that are happening upon the cross controls the elements thereabouts and he is speaking not only through what is happening on the cross, but speaking through the elements of his creation. Now let's take a look at the address which our Lord offered in prayer to the Father. My God, my God.

Now we must remember to beware of two emphases when we study the Atonement. There is a kind of humble teacher of the word who says we cannot really know anything much about the theory of the Atonement. We know a lot about the fact of the Atonement.

We know there is an Atonement, but so far as the theory of the Atonement is concerned we cannot know much about that. Because after all, does not the Bible say that now we see in a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, then we shall know even as also we are known.

In the meantime we cannot know much other than that there is an Atonement. Now that is just nonsense, even though there have been some great names associated with it. It is impossible for us to think of an Atonement without having some theory of an Atonement.

We have to have some theory of the Atonement. So it is really a question of whether we have an adequate theory of the Atonement or an inadequate theory of the Atonement. So I do not think, though it may sound very humble, that this emphasis is right, that we can know nothing about the Atonement.

On the other hand, I think I react just about as badly toward those who say, in the light of a few texts which they have managed to gather from the Scriptures, that we know everything there is to know about the Atonement. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. That explains everything that there is to know about the Atonement.

Now that is ridiculous. That is a great text. That is a great text that expresses the satisfaction theory of the Atonement.

And any theory of the Atonement has to have that element in it if it is to be an accurate theory of the Atonement. But it does not tell us all that there is to know about the Atonement. When I think about the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and I think I have been studying it for a long time, I admit I am not nearly as intelligent as a lot of other people, and I am not trying to be humble when I say that.

I admit that I am not, but I do claim to have studied it for a fairly good number of years, and I am convinced that when Paul says, oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out, I am convinced that I am going to learn a few things when I get to heaven. In fact, one of the first courses that I want to enroll in is a course in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, because I would like to understand a great deal more than I understand now. In spite of the fact that I think that the Holy Spirit has given me an insight into the most significant or the most important things that we should know about it.

So let's not fall into the trap of saying we know nothing about the Atonement, nor into the trap of saying we know everything there is to know about the Atonement. I think it is good to maintain a good sound kind of sense of humility in the study of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Now let's look at this particular address.

My God, my God. Now, I first want you to notice that in the seven statements that our Lord made, the first one begins with, Father, forgive them. We translated it, remember, let them go.

Father, release them, for they know not what they do. In other words, our Lord prayed for this age of grace in which we are living, or this age of the church, in which the elect have an opportunity to respond to the message of God. He said, Father, let them go, for they know not what they do.

Now the last of the statements is, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. The first and the last begin with the address, Father. The central address begins, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now notice, it is very important that you notice that the first begins with the term, Father.

There is a paternal relationship expressed in it. The end is, Father. A paternal relationship is expressed in that petition.

But in this one, it is, My God, my God. Why? Well, you might say, that just happens to be an accident. Well, it so happens our Lord offers about twenty-one prayers to God in the New Testament, and in twenty of the twenty-one prayers in which he addresses God, he speaks of him as Father.

This is the only place in the New Testament where the Lord Jesus addresses a prayer to God and calls him God. The only place. Now that surely is significant.

If in twenty out of twenty-one cases he should say, Father, or My Father, and in one case, this case, he should say, My God, well now I don't have to be enrolled in that class in heaven to know that I ought to find out the reason for that. And it so happens that this statement, in which he addresses God as God, and the darkness all around him, that statement must then ultimately, it must clearly arise out of a sense of a judicial relationship with God at this moment. He may begin with a paternal relationship and close with a paternal relationship, but right here in the midst of that darkness, when he cries out, My God, My God, he's there before the great judge of the universe, and he is there as the offering for sin and suffering the punishment for sinners.

Now, one of our, or a couple of our men said that Jesus Christ died not trusting. They didn't read this text. Klausner didn't read this text.

They didn't read the text. Our Lord does not say, Oh God, oh God, why hast thou forsaken me? He said, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why the relationship that our Lord understood to exist between himself and God is maintained in that prayer. True, he asks why he is forsaken, but he asks it in an attitude of trust.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It was a cry of distress, but it was not a cry of distrust, an interpreter has said. Spurgeon has said it was man in weakness, not man in revolt. And how different was our Lord's prayer to ours.

When we get in trouble, we don't turn to our God. We address ourselves to the world in our distress, and we say, Oh, look what has happened to me. So we call our best friend on the telephone and tell them about the tragedy that has happened to us.

We turn immediately to the world. Our Lord did not do that. He did not say, I have been telling you that there is a God in heaven, and that he is a loving God, and that he is a just God, and that he is going to provide a ransom for your sins, and you can put your trust in him, and you can know that you have life and righteousness and a place before him forever.

He didn't say, I've been telling you all of that, but now I discover that it's all wrong. I'm bankrupt. I don't have anything.

I thought God was really helping me, but he's not helping me after all. I've led you astray. He doesn't say that.

He says, my God, my God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? He doesn't say God is dead. He says, my God, my God, my God. Nor was it a thoughtless word.

He didn't just utter the first thing that came to his mind like we do. We blurt out things and then have to say, I was sorry that I said that. But he reaches back into the Old Testament.

He selects a passage from Scripture, no doubt upon which he had meditated often, and which now probably was the very meditation of his heart at that very moment on the cross, as he realized that it's come down to this, that I must, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, cry out, my God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? And so he reached up for a divine word out of the word of God, and then turned it and sent it up to God in prayer. The most beautiful kind of trusting prayer that you can make, the prayer of the word of God itself. So he wasn't in some cosmic darkness in some deserted no-man's land.

He was praying within the congregation of the faithful. My God, my God. And now the question.

We've talked about the three well-known answers that have been given to this, the answer of Abelard, that Jesus Christ died to exert upon men a moral influence by virtue of the example of his death. We've talked about Irenaeus and the classic theory of the atonement, that the Lord Jesus died in order that he might destroy the works of the devil. We have acknowledged some truth in these elements.

We have also talked about Anselm and the satisfaction theory, that Jesus Christ died to provide a satisfaction for sin to God. Anselm left out the idea of punishment, that it would be a satisfaction through punishment, but it was the great John Calvin who came along and purified Anselm's theory a little bit by pointing out that the satisfaction for sin was rendered by means of the punishment of a substitute. Now the interrogation is, why hast thou forsaken me? This implies that our Lord had no sense of sin.

My God, my God. Why, if he had sense of sin, he wouldn't say, why hast thou forsaken me? He would know. The fact that he cries out, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me, is itself an implicit testimony to our Lord's consciousness of sinlessness.

He knew he had not given any ground in himself for this forsaking. What is he asking for? Is he asking God to change his mind? Is he saying that he doesn't think this is right? No, he's simply praying as any man would pray, for he is, remember, a divine person who possesses a perfect, sinless human nature. He is praying out of his human nature, asking for information.

For the texts of Scripture say that he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected, reference to the cross, he became the author of eternal salvation to them who call upon him. So this is part of his perfecting, to in the midst of this most terrible of all of his sufferings, to cry out, why hast thou forsaken me? Now, the explanation of forsaken.

This question indicates substitution. And I do not think that we can understand it if we do not understand that our Lord was dying as a substitute. Let me ask you a few questions.

Would a loving God forsake the only good man who ever lived? I'm sure that you all would grant me, at least for the sake of argument, that God is good. We learn that from Christianity, by the way. We're kind of arguing in a circle, but almost all of our heathen friends like that doctrine, so they think of God as being good.

They don't think of him as being just, and only just. I would like to remind them that the kind of God they think that Christians talk about is a just God. I think we ought to stop talking about the love of God for a little while and preach the justice of God so we can bring these two doctrines into the kind of biblical harmony that we have, because as a result of so much preaching on love and false preaching on love, we have the idea that God is a sentimental kind of Santa Claus in heaven who's willing to do anything that is good for people, even if it means that he is unrighteous in the doing of it.

Oh, we wouldn't say that, but that is actually what we come to mean when we say that he lowers the standard of his righteousness in order to bless men. He never lowers the standard of his righteousness, as we've already pointed out so many times. So would a loving God forsake the only good man who ever lived? David said, I've been young, now I'm old, yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed baking bread.

But David didn't live long enough to see our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the one of whom the Lord God said, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. If God really forsook Jesus Christ when he died on the cross at Calvary, then we don't have a God.

We may as well forget all about Christianity. Let me ask you another question. It's related to it.

Would a loving God injure the only innocent man who ever lived? Then we don't have the kind of God that we talk about. Why were our Lord's prayers answered elsewhere? In Psalm 22, we read, Oh my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent. Now we've already talked about the fact that ultimately our Lord's prayers were answered when he was on the cross.

What is the meaning of all of this that I'm saying? Well, I'm saying simply this, that the cross makes utter nonsense if Jesus Christ is not dying in the stead of others. He must be dying for others. James Stewart used to say, the heart of the atonement is that Jesus Christ stood in the stead of others.

Now this is such a terrible doctrine to many of our contemporary theologians that when they are presented with the kind of God who finds it necessary to demand a satisfaction for sins, they say, as one of them has said, your God, you evangelical Christian's God, your God is my devil. But I must say, I prefer Jesus Christ, who said, the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. I prefer the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I prefer the words of the apostle Paul.

So we answer then the question of the necessity of satisfaction by saying simply that it is the demands of a holy God. And that's what the psalmist said in Psalm 22. O God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent, but thou art holy.

Thou art holy. That's why Jesus Christ cries out, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? He was experiencing forsakenness because the holy God, the Son of man, was bringing to bear upon him the judgment for human sin. He was the sin offering, and the sin offering was slain outside the camp, separated from the company of the sons of Israel.

He was the leper who distinguished himself as a person who went about crying unclean, unclean. He was the brazen serpent looking like a serpent in order that Israel might have life. And the triumphant conclusion is that as a result of what our Lord did, we are able to read in the New Testament, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, because he has been forsaken for us.

If our Lord is perplexed in his human nature, in just a moment he answers his own question, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It is finished. That's why he was forsaken. That's what he was doing, doing the work of the atonement.

Now may I close with a word of practical application. We say that Jesus Christ is the light of the world, but here the light went out. We also say that men who are to die outside of Christ are to suffer eternal torment.

What is hell? Well, Paul says that hell is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. He does not deny for one moment that it is torment. It is torment.

But also one element of it is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. It is that separation of which our Lord is speaking, which stretches out into eternity. Everlasting separation from the Lord in the blackness of darkness forever, as Jude puts it.

So if you want to know what hell is like, take a good look at the cross when Christ cried his so-called cry of desolation. I've often wondered, and I still wonder a little bit, I must say, why we read in verse 46, Jesus cried with a loud voice. Now of course our Lord didn't have to cry with a loud voice in order for God to hear.

It's evident that he has the conviction that God hears all of his prayers. In John chapter 11, he said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I knew that thou hearest me always. But because of those that stand by, I have said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

And I have wondered if the reason that we read that Jesus cried with a loud voice, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me, so that all those people around that cross would hear it, and so that cry would be repeated. Did you hear what Jesus said when he died? It was not simply that he was making this petition out of the agony of it, but there also was something purposive in it. It was that others might hear it, that we might hear it ultimately, and that we might reflect upon it, and that we might be saved through it.

I can't help but believe that. In perfect love he dies, for me he dies, for me. O all-atoning sacrifice, I cling by faith to thee.

That's my faith, and I hope it's yours too. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we are grateful to thee for the saving work.

We shall never understand the depths of it, no doubt, but we understand some of the depths, and we give thee praise and thanksgiving. Hallelujah. What a Savior.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. We will not have a meeting next Wednesday, next Monday night, and we will not have a

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