

My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?  
Mark 15:33-35  
March 11, 2015  
4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday in Lent

*At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."*

Eloi. Eloi. Lama sabachthani.

Tonight's text is both from the heart of King David and from the heart of Jesus Christ. Both King David and Jesus spoke these words from their heart.

Sometime during life, we will feel abandoned by a loved one. We also experience the feelings that accompany abandonment; disappointment, discouragement, sadness. As those intensify, feelings of anger and even rage might surface.

Most people feel abandonment at one time or another during their life. The feelings that accompany the feeling of abandonment are normal, a human reaction. These feelings have no I.Q. These feelings are not necessarily rational or intelligent. Feelings just are. Such feelings are often directed at the person who abandoned you.

Sometime during life, we all may feel abandoned by God. This happens especially when tragedies happen to you personally. Let me give you some examples.

From the Old Testament, King David wrote the famous words in Psalm 22: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He continued: why are you so far from saving me Lord? Why are you so far from my groaning? Why do I cry out to you, but you do not answer?*

King David felt that God had forsaken him, abandoned him, deserted him. Why? Because of the personal tragedies of his life. King David felt this way because King Saul was trying to kill him, his enemies were trying to kill him, his oldest son was trying to kill him. His family didn't turn out very well. David was feeling down in the dumps and he wrote: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

The same thing happened to Job in the Old Testament. Job experienced several personal tragedies. He lost his servants, lost the animals, lost his children. Basically, he lost everything. All of this made Job feel that God had abandoned him, deserted him. Job was angry with God and even raged at God. Those feelings were all normal.

King David and Job felt that God had deserted them.

It is not only people in the Old Testament who feel that God has abandoned them. Many Christians of yesterday and today feel that way. For example, when terrorists attacked

the World Trade Center, thousands of people were looking up and shouting, "My God, my God, what's happening? Where are you?" In horrific tragedy, people felt abandoned, deserted, and being forsaken by God. They were overwhelmed with feelings of sadness, confusion, anger and rage.

Knowing that people can feel they are abandoned by their loved ones and especially that they are abandoned by God, we examine tonight's Gospel reading.

The setting was Golgotha, the place of execution outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was Friday, the day after Passover. Jesus and the thieves hanging on their crosses.

It was the darkest day in the history of the world. The sky turned dark and black, and so did the heart of Jesus. It was three o'clock on that Friday afternoon and Jesus was coming closer to his death.

Scripture tells us that Jesus cried out with a shrieking shout. His voice wasn't quiet and soft like the first three words. You could barely hear him pray, *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*. Jesus spoke gently to the thief on the cross: *Today you will be with me in paradise*. Jesus spoke in subdued tones to his mother and his best friend beneath the cross.

And then, Jesus reached into his soul and shouted to the heavens at the top of his lungs: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabach-thani*. The words are in Aramaic, his native tongue. Eloi, Eloi. My strong God, my strong God, why have you abandoned me, why have you deserted me, why have you forsaken me?

What can we learn from Jesus' cry to God?

The first thing we learn is this: it's okay to have feelings of abandonment and vent those feelings. Because of our sinful humanness, the pain and sadness of being abandoned by God is normal.

Many people were looking to kill King David when he wrote those classic words in Psalm 22, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* King David was a devout believer in God and clung to God. He was loyal to God, but he also felt depressed and abandoned by God and he vented his feelings to God.

If it was normal and acceptable for King David to feel his feelings and to vent his feelings, and he is described as a man after God's own heart, it's certainly normal and acceptable for you and me to feel the same way.

Job did. In the Old Testament, Job is known for his suffering. Job suffered more than any other person in the Old Testament, and he, too, felt abandoned by God, deserted by God, forsaken by God, and he shouted his anger toward God. That was part of his humanness to feel that way, and it is part of our humanness to feel that way as well. It is OK to feel like Job.

Jesus did. Jesus was the very Son of God, the heart and mind of God in the flesh, and in the moment of the deepest darkness of his heart, Jesus felt that God had abandoned him and he shouted his feelings to the heavens. This reveals that Jesus was fully human, and when we have those similar feelings and vent those feelings, that reveals that we are fully human as well. It is OK to feel like Jesus.

So when you have feelings that God has abandoned you, and you vent those feelings, remember that you are in the good company; King David, Job, and Jesus. When you lose a loved one due to death or divorce or someone moves away and you feel sadness and disappointment and you cry out to God with your feelings, remember that this is OK. King David did it. Job did it. Jesus did it.

The second thing we learn tonight from Jesus' word is this: even in the worst situations of life, we are to cling to God with both hands as Jesus did.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers of all time. He lived in London, England, in the late 1800s. Spurgeon said that in Jesus' darkest hour, with darkness all around him and within him, he still clung to God with both hands. His left hand said, "My God." His right hand said, "My God." Eloi. Eloi. My God, my God, was Jesus clinging to God with both hands in the midst of this horrific situation. Jesus clung to God with all his might during the darkest hour of his life.

Spurgeon went on to say that it's easy to believe in God when life smiles on you, but it is much more difficult to believe in God when life frowns on you. It is easy to believe in God when you are wearing silver slippers and the path is smooth and easy; but it is much more difficult to believe in God when your feet are blistered and the path is rocky.

Sometimes, life can be incredibly hard. In the worst and darkest day of human history, Jesus still clung to God with both hands. He held onto God. We are to cling to God in our darkest days.

And what are the darkest days of human history, when the sky was blackest?

Was it 200 million people killed by Hitler, Stalin, and Mao during World War II? Was that the darkest time of human history?

Or the 137,000,000 people killed by the Black Plagues in the 6th, 14th, and 17th centuries?

Or the over 100 million people in southern Africa infected with the AIDS virus?

Or the 25-30 million people killed in the United States in 1918 by a flu epidemic after World War I?

Or when six million Jews were exterminated in gas chambers during World War II?

So what the worst day of human history?

When there was more than 23,000 casualties in one day during the Civil War?

Was it September 11th when 3,000 civilians were killed in one hour?

Was it the day that the Son of God was executed?

In all of those horrific tragedies, we are invited to do what Jesus did in his darkest hour. Jesus clung to God with both hands, crying out to heaven, shouting his despair, “ My God, My God, where are you? Why aren’t you here?”

So on Good Friday, you find Jesus clinging to God with all his might, with both hands, and at the same time, shouting his feelings up to God.

We are invited to do the same. Cling to God with both hands and shout our feelings to God in the highest.

The third thing we learn from Jesus’ word on the cross is that these are not his last words. The drama does not end with his depression and emotional exhaustion. *Why have you forsaken me?* These are not his last words, not his final words, not the end of the story.

King David wrote the 22nd psalm: *My God my God, why have you forsaken me.* But he also wrote the next psalm, the 23rd psalm: *The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.* The 22nd psalm was not his last word.

Job complained to God when he lost all his possessions, his family, everything. He railed against God in his anger, but those were not his last words. He also wrote at the end of his book: *I know that my redeemer lives.* Job’s feelings of abandonment were not his last words.

So also with Jesus. *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.* These were not his last words. His last words were “It is accomplished. It is finished. It is done.” He also said, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Easter always trumps Good Friday.

Similarly, there is a quotation. “I believe in the sun when it is not shining. I believe in the stars when I cannot see them. And I believe in God when I cannot hear him.” Those words were inscribed on a ghetto wall in Poland in World War II.

It was three o’clock on Friday afternoon. Jesus was hanging on the cross on the darkest day of in history. Suddenly his voice penetrated the skies with a sheik and he cried, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.” My strong God, my strong God, why have you abandoned me.” But those were not his last words.