

Some years ago actress Winona Ryder said, "When I was 18, I was driving around at two in the morning, completely crying and alone and scared. I drove by this magazine stand that had this Rolling Stone that I was on the cover of, and it said, 'Winona Ryder: The Luckiest Girl in the World.' And there I was feeling more alone than I ever had."

Have you ever felt lonely? I mean, really lonely because, for some reason or other, you were cut off—totally separated—from your loved ones? Maybe you felt this way as a child the first time you went off to camp or as a teen when you left home and moved into the dorm your first year of college.

If we were to poll our troops around the world to see how many of them are experiencing that feeling, I imagine all of them would say "Yes!" As they are in the various areas of the globe, they know they're thousands of miles from home—unable to contact their wives or husbands or children and know it's months before their painful separation is over. Can you imagine what that must be like for them to be so isolated from their families?

The Lord Jesus knew what it was to be lonely, more lonely than any other human being has ever been. Matthew's Gospel records for us: "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About 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 there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.' Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save Him.' And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit." (27:45-50).

This is one of the last things Jesus said as He hung on the cross. It shows us that Jesus understands the pain we experience when we're separated from our loved ones. There was a point as He hung on that cross that He was cut off, separated from His Father in Heaven.

What does this cry mean? What was Jesus saying when He said He was forsaken by God? Of all the words from the cross, this is the most difficult to understand. If you feel baffled by what Jesus said, you're not alone.

Charles Spurgeon honestly admitted that he could not figure it out. It's said that Martin Luther, once vowed to wrestle with this text until he could explain it, no matter how long it took. He focused on it for days, going without food or sleep. Finally he stood to his feet and basically gave up saying, "God forsaking God! Who can understand that?" Luther, as great of a theologian as he was, couldn't understand how God could abandon His own Son. While I don't think we can understand *how*, I believe we can understand *why*. Let me suggest **two truths** about this cry.

**1. It was a cry of terrible separation.** For the first time in all eternity, God the Son was separated from and forsaken by, His Father. All His life Jesus had known what it was like to be forsaken by others. Members of His own family forsook Him for a while. People in His hometown turned against Him. His nation rejected Him, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." Later John's Gospel tells us of a time when many of Jesus' followers, "turned and walked with Him no more." Even His closest disciples, the twelve abandoned Him in His hour of need and fled in panic. Jesus knew what it was like to be forsaken.

But up until this point Jesus had always had His Father! When trouble came, He'd slip away to the mountainside to pray. He would talk with His Father for hours in these impromptu retreats and the Father would talk with Him. When others turned away, when others forsook Him, Jesus could always steal away to this tender, healing, reassuring fellowship with God. But as He hung there on the cross, even this was gone! God had forsaken His Son. He had separated Himself from Jesus.

Why would this happen? Why would our loving God forsake His Son? Because for the first time in His life, Jesus was not righteous. He was not pure and sinless. This caused God to turn His back on Him. It made it impossible for our loving but Holy God to look at Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made Him—Jesus—Who had no sin to be sin for us." 1 Peter 2:24 puts it this way, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree." All the sins of all humanity were gathered into one huge pile of evil and that pile of evil was laid on Jesus Christ; all the lusting, idolatry, materialism, gossip, witchcraft, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, murder, drunkenness, child abuse, every sinful thought—every selfish sin of omission...all of it!

Try to imagine in your mind every sinful act that's ever been or ever will be committed and distill all that into a huge smoking vat of poisonous brew with a putrefying odor, a mass of filth so horrible...so revolting...that you can't help but cover your nose with a handkerchief and look away. It makes you nauseated and your eyes water!

If you can imagine that then you begin to get a bit of an idea of the revulsion that was in the holy heart of God that day. On the first Good Friday, that one spot on Golgotha was the most hated square foot of area in God's universe. No wonder He looked away from His own Son!

God is holy and a holy God must judge and cannot tolerate sin, even if that sin is on His own Son. God by His very nature cannot dwell in the presence of sin. And Jesus went through Hell on the cross because the essence of Hell is to be cut off from God.

**2. It was a cry of wonderful substitution.** 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all."* In other words this cry reminds us that Jesus was our **substitute**. He died for us, in our place. You and I, the ones that should have been on that cross were not and the One Who should not have been there was!

As 1 Corinthians 15:3 says, *"Christ died for our sins."* Galatians 3:13, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung upon a tree.'"*

Christian comedian and singer, Mark Lowery, tells of a time when he was a little boy and his mother took him and his older brother to the movies. The film they went to see was *King of Kings*, that great biblical epic of Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

Mark said that as a small boy he was completely enthralled as the Bible literally came to life in front of him on the big silver screen. He saw Jesus walk on water, heal the sick, raise the dead and feed the 5,000. He couldn't take his eyes off it all. For him it was as if he was looking back in time and was actually seeing Jesus' life and ministry unfold before his eyes. He was thrilled and amazed!

But then Jesus was arrested and beaten and nailed to a cross and when that happened Mark said he stood up in his seat and yelled, "NOOOOOO! STOP IT! STOP IT! NOOOOOO!" At this point, his big brother pulled him back down and said, "Shut up Mark or we'll all go to hell."

Mark's brother was right Jesus suffered the hell of being cut off from God so we wouldn't have to. He was our Substitute. As Isaiah 53 says: *"He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed."* On the cross Jesus did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. He was a pure offering with no sin, so He was able to carry ours. Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, once and for all!

Never again would the Jewish high priest have to make sacrifices in the temple. Never again would blood have to be shed for the forgiveness of sins. Christ was God's one, final, acceptable sacrifice. Having made that sacrifice, Christ opened the way for us to know God intimately. His being *forsaken* by God meant we would be *accepted* by God.

God the Father forsook His Son, so that He would never have to forsake us. In one sentence that's the answer to Jesus' question, *"My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?"* God the Father forsook His only Son once for all that He might never have to forsake us, His adopted sons and daughters. Because of the Cross God Himself has said to you and to me, *"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake You."* (Hebrews 13:5)

Jesus was our Substitute. He went through darkness so that we might have light. Jesus was cursed so that we might be blessed. He was condemned so that we might be able to say, *"Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Rom. 8:1) He suffered hell for us so that we can enjoy Heaven with Him.

The bottom line is that Jesus said those words, *"My God, My God why have you forsaken me"* so that you and I wouldn't have to. I think that's the greatest thing about being a Christian, I am never forsaken by God. I am never alone. He is always with me. I can say with the psalmist, *"Where can I go from Your Spirit, [Father God]? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast....such knowledge is too wonderful for me!"* (Psalm 139).

No matter where I go, God is with me. He is indeed *"an ever-present help"* (Ps 46) because of Christ's death on the cross in my place and yours. He was forsaken by God so that we would never be.