

A Word of Abandonment

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Mark, Mark chapter 15.

Mark chapter 15, and if we read again at verse 33. Mark 15 and verse 33.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, leme sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Eloi, Eloi, leme sabachthani, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Now, as you know, it's good to ask questions, because it's by asking questions that we learn. And you often see that with children.

[1 : 11] They're always asking questions. Our boys are forever asking questions. Why? Where? What if? How? But as you know, it's good to ask questions, because by asking questions, we learn.

Even when we come to the Bible, there's no such thing as a silly question, because we're all learning. We're all learners. We're all disciples of Jesus Christ. And as we're studying on Sunday evening, we're looking at the disciples.

They are learners. They're a list of learners. But as you know, there are some questions in life that we can't answer, and questions that we'll never know the answer to, maybe not until we leave this world.

Because when we encounter, and when we experience, and sometimes when we endure sin, and sickness, and suffering, and sorrow, and separation, there are times when we're left asking, why? Why this way? Lord, why this incurable disease? Why this painful providence? Why? There are some questions in life that we can't answer, that we'll never know the answer to.

[2 : 18] But you know, I always find it so comforting. I always find it a great consolation that even Jesus asked, why? We might ask, why, in our situations.

But even Jesus asked, why, in his situation. Even Jesus asked, why? Eloi, Eloi. Leme sabachthani. My God, my God.

Why? Why have you forsaken me? As you know, this is the fourth in our seven-part series of the seven sayings, or the seven words of the cross, from the cross of Jesus at Calvary.

We've called these seven words crosswords. They're the seven crosswords from Calvary. But these seven crosswords, they're not a puzzle. They're a picture. They're a picture which presents and portrays to us the glory of the gospel in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The first crossword, we considered it a few weeks ago, was a word of forgiveness, where Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. The second crossword was a word of salvation, where Jesus said to the thief on the cross, today you will be with me in paradise.

[3 : 33] The third crossword was a word of affection, Jesus saying to his own mother, Woman, behold your son. And then to John the Apostle, behold your mother.

Then the fourth crossword from Calvary we see this evening is a word of abandonment. A word of abandonment. And I'd like us to reflect upon this crossword from Calvary by looking at it under three headings.

So boys, three headings. A cry of darkness, a cry of distance, and a cry of dereliction. A cry of darkness, a cry of distance, and a cry of dereliction.

So first of all, we see a cry. This word is a cry of darkness. A cry of darkness. We read in verse 33, And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, leme sebachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[4 : 45] You know, when I was young, there was a TV program, a children's TV program called, Are You Afraid of the Dark? Are you afraid of the dark? And you know, there's something about darkness, isn't there?

There's something about the darkness, isn't there? Because the darkness is unknown. And the darkness is unseen. When we're in the darkness, we can't see anything.

We don't know anything. In fact, it's often in the darkness that the devil attacks us. And the devil assaults us. Because, as you know in the Bible, the devil is described as the prince of darkness. And the devil's destiny is the outer darkness. And the deep darkness of hell, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. But you know, I was thinking about this saying from Calvary.

If we were to have stood amongst the crowd, gathered at the cross of Calvary, I think that without doubt, we would all have been afraid of the dark.

[5 : 47] We would all have been afraid of the dark. Because as we read there in verse 33, it says, When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

Now, as you know, the Jewish day began at sunrise. It began around 6 a.m. And from our four gospel narratives, we can work out that the crucifixion of Jesus, it began at the third hour of the day. It was about 9 a.m. And that it was between the third hour of the day and the sixth hour of the day, between 9 a.m. and midday, 12 noon, it was between that time that Jesus uttered the first three crosswords from Calvary, where he uttered the words, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And today you will be with me in paradise. And woman, behold your son, behold your mother. But we're told there that at the sixth hour, at midday, when the midday Mediterranean sun was meant to be at its highest and at its hottest point in the day, we're told that the cruel cross of Calvary plummeted and was plunged into darkness.

And in that moment, I have no doubt that everyone in the crowd at Calvary would have been afraid of the dark. Because they knew that this darkness, they knew that it wasn't a solar eclipse.

[7 : 13] Because a solar eclipse, it only takes place when there's a new moon. But the festival of Passover always began with a full moon. Which means that this darkness was not only so unusual, it was so unnatural.

In fact, it was supernatural. It was a supernatural and spiritual darkness that shrouded the cross of Calvary as all the forces of demonic darkness and the horrors of hell were unleashed upon the soul of our Savior.

And you know, this darkness, it reminds me of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. I think everybody loves the Sermon on the Mount. You know, Jesus says there in the Sermon on the Mount, He says, If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness?

If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness? And you come to Calvary, and you see this supernatural and spiritual darkness, Calvary shrouded in darkness, the demonic darkness is there, the horrors of hell are there, being unleashed upon the soul of the Savior.

And we're thinking, Well, if the light that is in him be darkness, how great is that darkness? Because as you know, Jesus, he's the light of the world.

[8 : 36] His Father is described to us in the Bible as the Father of lights, and in whom there is no darkness at all. And together, as Father and Son and Holy Spirit, they spoke into the darkness of creation at its genesis, at its beginning.

And they spoke with those poignant and powerful words. They said, Let there be light. light. Because they only speak light. And when they spoke light into the darkness, we're told that there was light.

And as John explains in his Gospel, he says about Jesus, In him was life. And the life was the light of men. He was the true light, which was to come into the world, to lighten everyone.

And then as Paul explains in his own letter, he says that the God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, he has shone into our heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.

And Paul emphasizes all the time, that this God who speaks light, he's a God who speaks light into darkness. And because he speaks light into darkness, we as his people, we are the saints in light.

[9 : 50] We are the children of light. And we are those who can enjoy fellowship only in the light. But you come to Calvary, and you see there that the only way for Jesus Christ, the light of the world, the only way for him to shine into the darkness of our hearts, the only way for him to bring

dead sinners from the demonic darkness of sin into the marvelous light of salvation, salvation, the only way was for him to encounter and experience and endure the demonic darkness of our sin on the cross at Calvary.

The only way was for the light of the world to be extinguished. The only way was for the light of the world to be extinguished.

And then you come back to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness?

You know, my friend, the demonic darkness of hell that shrouded the cross of Calvary that day, it was a symbol, it was a sentence of God's just judgment.

that that demonic darkness of hell was descending into the soul of our Savior. And you know, that's why I believe that everyone gathered around the cross would have been afraid of the dark.

[11 : 21] They would all have been afraid of this darkness to the point that there would have been this scared and stunned silence. I don't believe anyone would have spoken in those three hours.

No one would have spoken or said anything to anyone. And yet the voice that broke the silence, the voice that broke the silence was Jesus, where there was this cry from the darkness.

We're told there in verse 34, at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, leme sabachthani, which means my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But as we said, this was not only a cry of darkness, it was also a cry of distance, which is what we see secondly. So there's a cry of darkness and then a cry of distance.

A cry of distance, we're told that at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with that loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani, which means my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[12 : 41] Do you know, out of all the things that Jesus spoke and said at Calvary, there was something different about this cry from the cross at Calvary. Because it was not only a cry in the depths of demonic darkness, it was also a cry from a distance.

There was a distance now. Now we know that Jesus spoke, he said, he said this crossword from Calvary. When he said it, he was quoting the words that we were singing from Psalm 22.

But what ought to stand out is that Jesus, when he cried, he didn't cry, Avi, Avi, my father, my father.

Instead, we're told, Mark tells us, Matthew tells us, he said, Eloi, Eloi. It's not, Avi, Avi, my father, my father.

It's, Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani, my God, my God. Why have you forsaken me? So there's not only darkness, there's also distance.

[13 : 48] There's distance in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. And this distance, it was not only rare, it was absolutely remarkable.

Because from all eternity, as you know, God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, they experienced and enjoyed this unique relationship with one another. There was this union with them.

There was the union, this unique union and communion between God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And even John, he explains in his gospel, he says that, in the beginning, right at the beginning, before even the world was, in the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

There was this unique relationship, says John. This great relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

Where God the Father and God the Son, they're co-eternal. The Son is co-eternal with the Father. He's co-equal with the Father. He's face to face, says John, with the Father.

[14 : 55] He's, they're both infinite, eternal, and unchangeable together. And yet, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. He's the only begotten Son of the Father.

And we're told, John tells us, that God the Father so loved us, so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son. He sent His only begotten Son.

He delivered up His only begotten Son. His only begotten, His monogamous, as John calls Him, His one and only, His unique Son, His special Son, His incomparable and irreplaceable Son.

And He said to Him, You go. And that Son, He humbled Himself from the crown of glory, as we often say, from the crown of glory, to the cradle in Bethlehem, all the way down to the cross of Calvary, where He became flesh.

He dwelt among us, so that we would, and so that we could, that we could behold His glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

[16:03] And you know, it's this unique relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus emphasizes it all the way through His ministry. He explains this relationship, that He's in union with His Father.

He's one with His Father. He says so often, What the Father says, I say. What the Father wills, I will. What the Father loves, I love.

What the Father does, I do. Because as Jesus says, I am in the Father. And the Father is in me. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

If you know me, you have known the Father also, because I and the Father are one. I and the Father are one. And you know, my friend, when you look at it, you see that from all eternity, God the Father and God the Son, they experienced and they enjoyed this unique union, this unique relationship with one another.

And it was so intimate, such an important relationship. But you know, we see how important and how intimate it was. Because as Jesus encountered the sins and the sicknesses and the sorrows of this life, you see that Jesus always brought everything to His Father.

[17:24] That's what I love about the example of Jesus. We'll see that more when we come to the last saying of the seven sayings. You know, when Jesus encountered the sins and the sicknesses and the sorrows of this life, He brought it always to the one He was in relationship with.

He brought it to the one He was in union with from all eternity. He brought it to His Father in prayer. Do you remember as Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus? His friend Lazarus had died.

And so what does Jesus do? He prays. Who does He pray to? He prays to His Father and He thanks His Father. He thanks His Father that His Father always hears Him.

That's what He said. Father, I thank You that You always hear me. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus repeatedly prayed about the prospect of being punished on the cross, Jesus' sweating, we're told, as it were, great drops of blood.

And He's saying, O my Father, who else can He turn to but O my Father, O my Father, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

[18:38] And even while He's crucified on the cross, He's still praying. He's praying for those who have put Him there. And He's saying, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

From all eternity, God the Father and God the Son, they have this unique relationship of union and communion. But when we come to this moment, we see something rare.

We see something so remarkable at Calvary that there was demonic darkness, there was distance, as hell descended into the soul of our Savior.

And Jesus is left crying, not as He always cried, Ave, Ave, my Father, my Father. But no, He's now saying, Eloi, Eloi, Lema sabachthani, my God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

You know, I had the privilege in college of sitting under the late Professor Donald MacLeod. It was a great privilege, a privilege that many ministers in our denomination had.

[19:57] But this is what he wrote in one of his recent books, a brilliant book, if you've never read it, read it, the simple title, Christ Crucified. That was his ministry, that was his life, preaching Christ and Him crucified.

And this is what Professor Donald MacLeod said, the forsakenness, this is what he's talking about, this verse, the forsakenness is only a moment in a long journey from the third to the ninth hour.

For much of the time, Jesus remained in communion with His Father. But now comes a moment of well-nigh unsustainable awfulness.

Abba is out of reach. He's not listening. The intimacy is broken, an intimacy that had never been broken before. It was a breach for which nothing could have prepared Jesus.

throughout His life, Jesus had been assured that He was not alone and that the Father was with Him. But now at the ninth hour, Abba wasn't there and Jesus can only say, Eloi.

[21:03] God is certainly there, but not as Abba. There is now no sense of His own divine sonship, no sense of God's love, and no sense of His Father's approval.

God is not hearing Him. He cries, but there is no answer. At every other time of crisis, Abba had spoken great words of encouragement on the Mount of Transfiguration, at the baptism, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

How He needed those words now, but no such words came. He hears the derision of the spectators, the curses of the soldiers, and the whispers of the Prince of Darkness.

He is on His own. He is on His own. Eloi, Eloi. Lema sabachthani.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? My friend, it's a cry of darkness. It's a cry of distance. And it's a cry, lastly, of dereliction.

[22 : 09] A cry of darkness, a cry of distance, and a cry of dereliction. We're told that when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi. Lema sabachthani. Which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The 20th century theologian, A.W. Pink, who's actually buried in Stornoway, if you've ever gone to look for his unmarked grave, he said, the very word forsaken is one of the most tragic in all human speech.

The word forsaken. But he writes, the first thought of a preacher in coming to these words is to find some excuse as to pass them by.

I could totally relate to that and to go on to something else. But if the preacher does look at them, after doing his utmost to expound these words, he will still confess that they are quite beyond him.

[23 : 24] They are beyond us. As David said, such knowledge is too strange for me, too high to understand. That was certainly the confession of the 16th century theologian, Martin Luther.

Luther spent days trying to figure out and fathom the depths of the darkness and the distance and the dereliction of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. But in the end, all Luther could say was, God forsaken of God, who can understand it?

God forsaken of God, who can understand it? And you know, sometimes we need to just stop trying to work it out. And instead of working it out, it should just lead us to worship.

That we don't need to work out every detail, but we are called to worship because of what we are told. And yet, back to Professor Donald MacLeod.

He was really the people's theologian. He has this beautiful thought where he writes, even at the lowest point, in the black hole of dereliction, faith and hope still breathe.

[24 : 41] They must breathe for unbelief and despair are sin and would have rendered the sacrifice of Jesus void. But then he writes, this is what he writes, faith must walk where there is no light.

Faith must walk where there is no light. And you know, it reminds us that Jesus is the one who goes before us into everything.

That's what faith must do. Faith must walk when there is no light. We must follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Faith must walk where there is no light.

Even when Jesus cannot say, Abba, he can say, Eloi, my God. As you know, and as we said earlier, when Jesus spoke this crossword from Calvary, he was quoting from Psalm 22.

But I believe that he was not only informing us about the opening line of Psalm 22. Jesus was inviting us to consider the whole of Psalm 22.

[25 : 48] Because Psalm 22, we've read it before, we've sung it before, we've considered it before. Psalm 22, it's the psalm of the cross. It's the psalm of the suffering Savior. It's the psalm that presents to us and portrays before us the suffering of Jesus Christ.

And the amazing thing about Psalm 22 is that it was not only written before crucifixion was ever invented, but it was written a thousand years before crucifixion or the crucifixion of Jesus took place.

It's the oldest and one of the clearest Old Testament prophecies about the crucifixion of Jesus. And it brings us face to face with the cross of Jesus Christ.

It's amazing. Psalm 22 is older than Isaiah 53. It's older than Isaiah 53. And you know, in Psalm 22, we see that it is the psalm of the suffering shepherd.

I think it was about six months ago we were looking at the trilogy of shepherd psalms. At our last communion like this, we looked at Psalm 22, which was the psalm of the suffering shepherd, and Psalm 23, which was the psalm of the saving shepherd, and then Psalm 24, the psalm of the sovereign shepherd.

[27 : 02] Some have described these three psalms as the cross, the crook, and the crown. But Psalm 22, it brings us face to face with the cross of Jesus Christ.

It brings us face to face with this question, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And as we said earlier, and with this I'll conclude this evening, as we said earlier, it's good to ask questions because it's by asking questions that we learn.

It's always good to ask questions. I love questions. But there are some questions in life that we can't answer. There are some questions we'll never know the answer to.

Maybe not until we leave this world. Because, as you know, when we encounter different situations and circumstances in our life, when we encounter the sins and sicknesses and sufferings and sorrows of life, there are times we're left asking, why?

[28 : 09] Lord, why? But as I said, our greatest comfort is that Jesus asked the same question. Why? Our consolation is that Jesus said, Eloi, Eloi, lemme sabachthani, my God, my God, why?

Why have you forsaken me? But you know, as we said, there are some questions in life that we can't answer.

This is a question that we can all answer. We all know the answer to this why. We can all answer the why of Calvary.

We all know why Jesus is at Calvary. We all know why Jesus is crying why at Calvary. We can all point to the reason why.

Point to the reason why. If you were to point at yourself, you'd know the reason why. I'm the reason why.

[29 : 16] I'm the reason why. I'm the reason why Jesus humbled himself from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem all the way down, down, down to the cross of Calvary.

I'm the reason why there was a cry of darkness. I'm the reason why there was a cry of distance. I'm the reason why there was a cry of dereliction.

I'm the reason why there is this word of abandonment in the gospel. I'm the reason why he was forsaken in order that I could have fellowship.

My friend, I'm the reason why he was rejected. That's what you can say tonight. I'm the reason why he was rejected, all so that I could be reconciled. I could be redeemed. I could be restored. I could enter into a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son. I'm the reason why he descended into the depths of hell's demonic darkness. I'm the reason why, so that he could bring me from that darkness into his most marvelous light. I'm the reason why.

And you know, that's how I want you to come to the Lord's table tomorrow. I want you to come to his table saying, I'm the reason why. I'm the reason why.

[30 : 48] Because if you can say, I'm the reason why, then that's why we should be at the table tomorrow, to remember the Lord's death, to remember the Lord's death and to give thanks for what he's done.

Because I'm the reason why Jesus cried, Eloi, Eloi, lemme sebachthani, my God, my God, why? Why have you forsaken me? I'm the reason why. I'm the reason why. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Now let us pray. Lord, we are undeserving of the least of thy mercies. And yet when we come to the gospel, we realize that we have grace been poured upon us, grace upon grace.

We have received so much. And help us, Lord, to realize that to whom much is given, much will be required of us. Oh, Lord, help us to see that we are the reason why.

[31 : 58] The reason why Jesus cried from Calvary's tree, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Help us, Lord, we pray, to remember his death, to remember him until he comes again, to realize that this is our great privilege, a privilege denied to so many.

And yet we as thy people, we are able to enjoy it, to reflect upon Jesus, to remember his death, and to realize that in him, we have an inheritance, an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, but is reserved in heaven for us.

Go before us and we pray. Bless us, we ask. Prepare us for thy day tomorrow, if we are spared to see it, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake.

Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion. This evening we're going to sing the words of Psalm 116. Psalm 116 is in the Scottish Psalter, page 396.

Psalm 116. We're singing from verse 13 down to the end of the psalm. But before we sing, gents, it's the only time I ever call you gents.

[33 : 32] Question one, what psalm is Jesus quoting? 22. What are tonight's headings? A cry of darkness.

Cry of distance. Cry of that's a hard word. Dereliction. So forsakenness. Good job. Point at the reason, or who is the reason why Jesus said why.
So everybody needs to point. Who is the reason? Who is the reason Jesus said why? Me. Good. I'm the reason why.
I don't know if there's any sweets tonight. You can get some at home. Okay. Psalm 116 at verse 13. I'll off salvation take the cup.
On God's name will I call. I'll pay my vows now to the Lord before his people all. Dear in God's sight is his saint's death. Thy servant Lord am I. Thy servant sure, thine handmaid son.
[34 : 38] My bands thou didst untie. Thank offerings I to thee will give. And on God's name will call. I'll pay my vows now to the Lord before his people all.
Within the courts of God's own house. Within the midst of thee. O city of Jerusalem. Praise to the Lord. Give ye. I forgot to say before we sing, Ivan.
If you're planning, God willing, to sit at the Lord's table tomorrow, come and sit in the front rows before you go home. And we'll give out the tokens. I forgot to say that.
Angus didn't remind me. So we're singing Psalm 116 at verse 13 down to the verse marked 19. We'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.
God is unaADE.
[35 : 41] I'll pay my vows now to the Lord, before His people alone.
Here in those sight is His state said, Thy servant, Lord, am I.
Thy servant, Lord, am I. My hands are fixed untied.
And always I truly will give And on God's day we'll fall.
I'll pay my love, shout to the Lord Before His people alone.
[37 : 03] Within the courts of God's own us, Within the midst of Thee, O city of Jerusalem, Praise to the Lord, give me.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all, Never and forevermore. Amen.