NEW FOCUS

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME? (PSALM 22:1)

Why Was He Forsaken ?

Don Fortner | Added: Jun 05, 2007 | Category: Theology

Everything recorded in the 22nd Psalm, if I understand it correctly, was written prophetically, penned by divine inspiration, as the very words spoken by our blessed Saviour when He hung upon the cursed tree, bearing our sins as our Substitute. Charles Spurgeon wrote …

Before us we have a description both of the darkness and of the glory of the cross, the sufferings of Christ and the glory which shall follow. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in scripture it is in this psalm.

Christ Forsaken

These are the words of our blessed Saviour when He hung upon the cursed tree as our Substitute, when He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. At the apex of His obedience, at the time of His greatest sorrow, in the hour of His greatest need, the Lord Jesus cried out to His Father, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' That is the question I want to address. Answer it I cannot. Declare it I must.

After asking, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' our all-glorious Redeemer tells us how utterly forsaken He was, so utterly forsaken that the Father refused to hear the cries of His own darling Son in the hour of His greatest need. — 'Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.' I read those words with utter astonishment. I will not attempt to explain what I cannot imagine. But these things are written here for our learning, that we might, through patience and consolation of the scriptures, have hope. And I hang all the hope of my immortal soul upon this fact. — When the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for me, He was utterly forsaken of God and put to death as my Substitute; and by His one great, sin-atoning Sacrifice, He has forever put away my sins. He not only bore our sins in His body on the tree, He

bore them away!

The Reason

Yet, when we read verse 3, our holy Saviour, when He was made sin for us, answers the cry of His own soul's agony. 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.' Why was the Lord Jesus forsaken by His Father when He was made sin for us? Because the holy Lord God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Our Saviour was forsaken by the Father when He was made sin for us because justice demanded it. 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity' (Habakkuk 1:13).

Here, in verse 3, our Saviour, when He was dying under the wrath of God, justified God in His own condemnation, because He was made sin for us. He proclaims the holiness of God in the midst of His agony. He is so pure, so holy, so righteous, so just, that He will by no means clear the guilty (Exodus 34:7), even when the guilty one is His own darling Son! Rather than slight His holy character, our Surety must suffer and die, because He was made sin for us.

Made Sin

Our Saviour had no sin of His own. He was born without original sin, being even from birth 'that Holy One' (Luke 1:35). Throughout His life He 'knew no sin' (2 Corinthians 5:21), 'did no sin' (1 Peter 2:22), 'and in him is no sin' (1 John 3:5). But on Calvary the holy Lord God 'made him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (2 Corinthians 5:21). Just as in the incarnation 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14), in substitution the Word who was made flesh 'was made sin for us'.

I do not know how God could be made flesh and never cease to be God; but He was. I do not know how the eternal God could die and yet never die; but He did (Acts 20:28). I do not know how all the fulness of the infinite, incomprehensible God can dwell in Christ bodily; but it does (Colossians 2:9). And I do not know how Christ who knew no sin could be made sin and yet never have sinned; but He was.

These things are mysteries beyond the reach of human comprehension. But they are facts of divine revelation to which we bow with adoration. Hard as it is for many to realize, our God is 'slightly' bigger than our puny brains!

'Mine Iniquities'

'Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head:

therefore my heart faileth me' (Psalm 40:11-12). — Commenting on these verses, John Trapp wrote, 'If this be taken of Christ, he is the greatest of sinners by imputation (2 Corinthians 5:20, Isaiah 53:6), for our sins (which here he calleth his) he suffered; and here his bitter agony in the garden is graphically described. Neither is it absurd to say, that as he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, he was first redeemed by himself, and afterwards we.'

Here we are again allowed to hear the agony of our blessed Redeemer's soul, when He was made sin for us. Here His language is even more specific in declaring that our sins were made His. Here, again, the Lord Jesus Christ calls our sins His own, because 'He hath made him sin for us'.

The One Speaking

The One speaking in this Psalm is beyond all doubt, our Saviour. We know this because God the Holy Spirit tells us that it is Christ who is speaking here in Hebrews chapter 10. Our Saviour knew that being made sin for us, He would be brought into an horrible pit (Psalm 69:15) and filled with distress. Yet, His love for us was, and is, so great that, in verse 7, He declares His readiness to assume a body, and to accomplish His Father's will in the salvation of His chosen, according to the ancient settlements written in the Volume of the Book, saying, — 'Lo! I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God.' Then in verses 11 and 12, He prays for deliverance from His deep distresses. This is exactly the same thing we read in John 12:27-28. — 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'

The Reason

Why was the Son of God brought to such sorrow and grief? Here is the answer. — 'He made him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!' Indeed He could never have suffered the painful, shameful, ignominious death of the cross as our Substitute, had He not been made sin for us. Justice would never have allowed it. The Lord God declares, 'He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.' (Proverbs 17:15; Exodus 23:7).

Worship Him

Hear the Saviour's words in Psalm 40:12, and worship Him. — 'For innumerable evils have compassed me about.' He was beset on every side with evil. Countless woes compassed our great Substitute and Sin-bearer. 'Our sins,' wrote Spurgeon, 'were innumerable, and so were his griefs.' All the accumulated sins of all His people, for all time, in all parts of the world were made His! The Blessed One of God, who knew no sin and did no sin,

was made sin!

He cried, ‘Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up.’ He had no sin, but our sins were laid on Him, and He took them as his own. ‘He was made sin for us.’ Again, I quote Spurgeon, ‘The transfer of sin to the Saviour was real and produced in him as man the horror which forbade him to look into the face of God, bowing him down with crushing anguish and woe intolerable.’

What would our sins have done to us eternally if the Friend of sinners had not condescended to take them all upon Himself? Oh, blessed scripture! ‘He hath made him sin for us!’ Oh, marvellous depth of love, that made the perfectly immaculate Lamb of God to stand in the sinner’s place, and bear the horror of great trembling which sin must bring upon those who are forever keenly conscious of it in hell!

Broken Heart

‘They are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.’ In dark Gethsemane, even as He anticipated being made sin, our Saviour’s holy soul shook within Him; and His holy heart broke. Anticipating the pains of God’s holy fury against sin, His unbending justice and unmitigated wrath beyond imagination, our dear Saviour’s soul was so crushed within Him that He was sore amazed, and very heavy even unto a sweat of blood. His strength was gone, His spirit sank, He was in an agony.

Then, as He hung upon the cursed tree, bearing our sins in His own body, He cried, as we read in Psalm 22:6, 14-15, ‘I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people … I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. 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.’ It was the thought and anticipation of being made sin for us, not of simply paying the debt due unto our sins, but of being made sin, that caused His bloody sweat in Gethsemane. It was this fact, the fact that He was made sin for us, that caused Him to be forsaken of His Father as He hung upon the cursed tree on Golgotha’s hill (Psalm 22:1-3).

Many tell us that these words cannot be the words of God’s darling Son. Indeed, some, in their foolish arrogance, assert that it is blasphemy and heresy to declare that these words are the words of our blessed Saviour. In doing so, they dare to defy God Himself, for it is God the Holy Spirit who, in Hebrews 10, tells us that these are our Saviour’s words. Robert Hawker wrote …

These things, so far from being unsuitable to the holy Jesus, are the very things we might reasonably suppose he would speak of, and consequently his holy soul would feel so painful. And when we consider that as our Surety he bore our sins and carried our sorrows, how very reasonable it is

to expect that these cries of the Son of God should be at the very time in which he is set forth as a Sacrifice for them.

Foolishness and Perversity

There can be no question that the One speaking in Psalm 69 is our blessed Saviour. Throughout the New Testament, the words of this Psalm are repeatedly attributed to him (Psalm 69 v. 4 - John 15:25; v. 9 – John 2:17, Romans 15:3; v. 21 – Matthew 27:34, 48, Mark. 15:36, Luke 23:36, John 19:28-29; vv. 22-23 – Romans 11:9-10; v. 25 – Acts 1:16, 20). The opening four verses of the Psalm are clearly the words of our Redeemer.

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away.

Verse 5 cannot, with any honesty, be attributed to someone else. Hear the cry of Him, who was made sin for us. — ‘O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.’ The word ‘foolishness’ means ‘perversity’. The word ‘sins’ means, as it is translated in the marginal reference, ‘guiltiness’. Our Saviour owns our perversity as His perversity and our guiltiness as His guiltiness, because it was made His.

The first Adam hid his perversity and guilt. The last Adam owns ours as His own and does it before God. It is as though He says — Here, lifted up upon the cross I suffer without the gate for my people, as their Substitute, in such a way, that I desire that my sins be conspicuous to every creature in heaven, earth, and hell, — my sins, the sins of my people, are all now and forever blotted out and washed away by my blood.

What condescension this is! What grace is here revealed! What unparalleled love! What mystery there is here! The Son of God takes to Himself our shame! Yes! When the Lamb of God, was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, it behoved Him thus to suffer and thus to cry! ‘O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.’

Intercession

Yet, in His soul's utmost agony, the Son of God remembered and interceded for us, as our great High Priest. — 'Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel' (Psalm 69:6). In answer to His prayer, the gospel promise is, 'Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed' (Romans 10:11). 'He that believeth on him shall not be confounded' (1 Peter 2:6).

Then, our sin-atoning Saviour again claims our sins, our reproaches as His own, as if to tell us that our sins were not merely pasted on Him, that He was not simply treated as though our sins were His, but that when He made His soul an offering for sin, He was made sin for us. — 'Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face … Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.' (Psalm 69:7, 19-20)

'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!'

Do you understand what we have read? Do you here see Christ as your Surety, your sin-bearer, taking all your guilt and sin, assuming total responsibility for all that you are? — Made a curse for you? Do you see Him as your Substitute, your Surety, your Saviour? Do you trust Him as such? If so, let your soul be ravished by His great love for you. Adore Him! Praise Him!

O blessed Lord Jesus! How I thank Thee for bearing my sin! How I thank Thee for allowing me to hear Thy soul's agony as Thou didst bear my sins in Thine own body upon the cursed tree (1 Peter 2:24) that I might go free! Thou, blessed Saviour, are exactly what this poor sinner needs. A complete Substitute! A real Substitute! An effectual Substitute!

Never, my Saviour, have I had such a sweet glorious, comforting, encouraging, humbling, precious view of Thee as my Redeemer as this. — Bearing my sin in Thy body upon the cursed tree, made sin for me, suffering all the hell of God's holy fury against sin for me, to the full satisfaction of justice, that I might be made the righteousness of God in Thee! Borne down with the weight of my sins and guilt, made Thine own, by a transfer that no mortal shall ever comprehend, Thou gavest Thy life for me; and by Thy precious blood put my sins away! Truly, Thy name is as ointment poured forth to my soul!

Because of His infinite, immeasurable love for us, our blessed Saviour became everything we were in such a real way that He owns our sins as His own before His Father and our Father! — 'Thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.' Either He was made sin for us, or that which He confessed in these three Psalms is not true. There is no in-between ground. Either our Saviour here spoke the truth or He did not.

Blessed be His name, His word is truth! He made our foolishness His foolishness! He made our sin His sin! He made our perversity His perversity! He made our guiltiness His guiltiness!

This is not a slander against our holy Saviour; but the magnifying of His mercy, love and grace. Christ's love for us is so infinitely great that He made our sins His very own. And by the same wondrous, amazing mercy, love and grace, He makes His perfect righteousness our very own.

Yes, my brother, my sister, yes, every poor sinner who trusts the Son of God, we are the very righteousness of God in Christ. With Jacob of old, we say with confidence to every accuser, as he did to Laban, 'So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come' (Genesis 30:33). With Job, we say, 'My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live' (Job 27:6). Why? Because Christ is the Lord our Righteousness, because He is made of God unto us both redemption and righteousness, we have assurance of everlasting salvation (Romans 8:1-4, 33-39). Soon, 'unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.'

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