

“Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

Matt. 27:46 – *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

These are the opening words to Psalm 22. As Jesus hung on the cross, the Jewish leaders and others wagged their heads and mocked him with these words: *“He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* (Matt. 27:39, 43). They were unaware that they were fulfilling the prophecy in Psalm 22:7-8. By quoting the first line of the psalm, Jesus was directing their minds to the prophecy. He would’ve been physically unable to provide a full sermon, as crucifixion compressed the lungs, but the opening words would’ve been sufficient for the honest truth-seeker. Jesus was helping them see what they were doing, although they did not pay attention.

To understand the meaning of “forsaken” here, we must first understand it in its original context. God had not abandoned David, for David said in the same psalm, *“He has not hidden his face from him,”* that is, the afflicted who cries to him (Psa. 22:24). The entire plea of the psalm depends upon David’s unbroken, unobstructed relationship with the Father (Psa. 34:15-16; Isa. 59:1-2). It’s clear from the psalm and David’s life that God, at times, allowed David’s enemies to persecute him, as Saul and Absalom did. “Forsaken” means that God did not intervene immediately to save David, just as God did not intervene to save Jesus. Jesus could’ve requested legions of angels to save him, and the Father would’ve sent them. But the plan required the Father to let Jesus be taken and killed (Matt. 26:53-54). Jesus told his disciples that the Father would not leave him alone (John 16:32). The Father remained in fellowship with Jesus throughout the torture of the cross, hearing the Son’s prayers (Luke 23:34, 46), but he did not move to save him. Those who mocked Jesus had no idea what they tempted him to do with their taunts. Had Jesus appealed to God to save himself, they’d have been doomed, along with everyone.

“Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

Although Jesus' persecutors did not pay attention at the cross, some later realized their error and received the forgiveness for which Jesus prayed (Acts 2:36-41; 6:7; Luke 23:34). Jesus willingly bore the punishment for our sins, the death penalty, and the Father “forsook” him to those who carried it out. What amazing love moved the Father to remain still while the innocent Son bore the punishment we all deserve. What amazing power to prophesy Jesus' sacrifice a thousand years beforehand in the songs of David. Just as God did eventually deliver David from his enemies, he delivered Jesus from death.