

HE TOOK YOUR PLACE

Matthew 27:46 - The FOURTH WORD from the cross:

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice . . .

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Fellow-Redeemed,

I would not trade places with anyone in hell for all the money in the world. Can you imagine the pain, the despair? Can you imagine being separated forever from God and from his mercy, knowing that the pain and misery would never end? No, I would not want to trade places with anyone in hell, not for anything! I can't imagine anyone who would trade places with a condemned sinner for any reason, for any price, except for Jesus.

He took the place of every sinner who ever lived, every mass murderer, every terrorist, every evil dictator, every person. He took your place, too. He stood before the Judge of All whose heavenly face didn't show any mercy, only angry justice and contempt. He received in his body the only sentence God's justice allows for sin and that is: HELL. And when the sentence was carried out, he suffered such torment, such abandonment that he screamed these words, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Why would the innocent Son of God do such a thing for people like you and me who deserve no mercy? The answer is simple. On this Good Friday we remember how much Jesus loves us. Because only Jesus would suffer the pain of hell in our place.

"My God, my God" These words are different from any prayer Jesus prayed in his lifetime. In the Garden of Gethsemane, where his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground, he prayed, *"Father," "Father, if it is your will, take this cup away."* On the cross his first words were, *"Father," "Father forgive them . . ."* And his last words were, *"Father," "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* But in the instant Jesus cried out *"My God, my God"* God the Father was carrying out his plan of saving the world. The prophet Isaiah foretold that moment.

⁶ . . . the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁵ . . . the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5-6 NIV).

To show us mercy, God could show no mercy to his Son, Jesus. In these hours he could not act like a loving father but only as an angry judge. He couldn't comfort Jesus. He could only inflict on him the punishment of hell. Jesus felt the white-hot wrath of God's anger against sin. He couldn't pray *"Father."* He could only cry out, *"My God, my God."* I hope you can you feel the depth of Jesus' passion when he says, *"My God, my God."* I hope you can you feel the anguish when he asks, *"Why?"*

In his extreme pain Jesus asked the question, "WHY?" Without a doubt, Jesus knew the answer. Jesus knew that God had to punish his own Son with the pain of hell, so that you and I could taste the glories of heaven. If Jesus knew the answer why did he ask the question? I believe he asked the question so that you and I could begin to comprehend the depth of Jesus' pain and suffering. Only the very pain of hell could make Jesus ask "WHY?" *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

I know there are times when you feel alone. I know there are times when you wonder where God is and whether he really cares. But you know in your heart that God is always near. He has promised, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."* (Deuteronomy 31:6 & Hebrews 13:5 NIV). But God DID abandon Jesus, he DID leave Jesus, he DID forsake Jesus. How can the same God who said, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17 NIV), turn his back on the same Son and abandon him to the pain of hell?

The answer is this: God's love for sinners is deeper than you can comprehend. God abandoned his own Son so that he could claim us as his sons and daughters. Because God abandoned Jesus to suffer the pain of hell, you can be certain that God will never abandon you. Because Jesus suffered the pain of hell for you, you will never have to speak the words, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

I don't think you or I could ever fully understand, fully comprehend what Jesus' suffering on the cross must've felt like. No one this side of hell could possibly understand it. By the grace and mercy of God, who laid on Jesus the sins of the world, you and I will never have to know it.

I don't think you or I could ever fully understand, fully comprehend the depth of his love for you. But Jesus loved you enough that he took on the pain of hell, so that you might have a place with him in heaven. Amen.