

**LENTEN
QUESTIONS
THAT
DEMAND AN
ANSWER**

DEVOTION # 5

WHY, GOD?

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2018

Morning Devotion

OPENING RESPONSE

L: God, our Father, each day is a gift of Your grace.

G: Your mercies are new every morning.

L: Guide our steps by the light of Your Word.

G: Shield us from harm and keep us from evil.

L: Better than life is Your love.

**G: Put joy in our hearts and praise on our lips.
Amen.**

PRAYER FOR GRACE

L: O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, You have brought us safely to this new day. Defend us with Your mighty power, and grant that this day we neither fall into sin nor run into any kind of danger; and in all we do, direct us to what is right in Your sight, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

G: Amen.

Evening Devotion

OPENING RESPONSE

L: Lord Jesus, You are the light of the world,

G: The light no darkness can overcome.

L: Stay with us, for it is evening,

G: And the day is almost over.

L: Let Your light scatter the darkness.

G: Let it shine in our hearts and lives. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

L: Lord God, all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works come from You. Give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments. Defend us also from the fear of our enemies, that we may live in peace and quietness, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

G: Amen.

1 Oh, come, my soul, your Savior see
 Nailed to your cross on Calvary.
 Your pains he bears; Your thorns he wears
 That yours a crown of life might be.

2 'Tis yours, my soul, the sin, the shame,
 The cross, the nails, the thirst, the pain;
 In agony His blood runs free
 To write in heaven's book your name.

3 Oh, sing, my soul, sing endlessly
 The wondrous love that sets you free;
 His dying breath Brings life from death,
 Makes heav'n your home eternally.

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PASSION HISTORY READING

MARK 15:33-47

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

LUKE 23:33-34 (NIV)

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

DEVOTION

Of all the questions we’re faced with during Lent is there any more astounding than the one we have in front of us here? In order to place an even heavier emphasis on it, both Matthew and Mark record this question of Jesus in the original language in which He spoke it.

Why? Why must the holy, righteous, sinless Son of God, who was one with the Father from eternity, who had come from the Father and would return to Him, be forsaken by the Father? Can you feel the terror in your Savior’s words when after three hours of incredible suffering (likely beyond what we have experienced physically and certainly beyond what we will ever endure spiritually) He now cries out:

WHY, GOD?

We'd like to know the answer too. We haven't heard anything like this from Jesus' lips so far. Before this, there was always complete certainty. As the Beloved Son He could even ask for forgiveness for those who crucified as we saw last week. He could offer the sinful man on the cross alongside Him the blessed assurance: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise." When we look at that promise we can see Jesus looking beyond death to the arms of the Father. But now, suddenly, we hear a cry of utter loneliness. Cut off from the Father whom He had loved with all His heart as both the Son of God and the Son of man.

From the eerie, uncharacteristic darkness that had fallen over the land that afternoon we hear the cry of bitter anguish, "Why, God? My God, Why? Why have You forsaken Me?" Is there an answer for Jesus? for us? None recorded here. No voice from heaven, only the continued mockery of the crowd as they misinterpret His words and say to each other, "He's calling for Elijah! Let's see if he comes to the rescue."

Once the Father had spoken from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with Him I am well pleased." But now He is silent. Why won't He speak? Was He no longer pleased with Jesus? Was Jesus no longer His beloved Son? Is there anywhere we can find the answer to these questions?

There is. As always, God gives us the answers we need in His revelation of Himself, the holy Scriptures. As it happens, this is not the first time this question has been asked. Some ten centuries earlier King David had foretold this very prayer Jesus would utter from the cross in a psalm that gives one of the most graphic pictures of the suffering and triumph of the coming Messiah in the Old Testament:

Psalm 22

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
- ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.
- ³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

As Jesus cried out to God He knew that His Father's failure to deliver Him could not be due to injustice or weakness on God's part for He was the one holy God, enthroned in heaven. It was then, *because* of God's holiness rather than *despite* it, that Jesus found Himself suffering so grievously.

The question we're naturally led to then is, "Why does God being holy mean that suffering is necessary?" Or, perhaps a question you've heard from society today, "Why would a loving God subject anyone to the suffering of hell?" This can be a difficult concept to understand; I'll try my best to explain it. First, we need to clear up a few phrases. The idea that God is a "loving God" does *not* mean that He is a non-confrontational God who will allow us to do whatever we want. The idea that tolerance and love are synonyms is a worldly concept, not a scriptural one.

What the Bible teaches us is that as our holy and loving God, God wants not just anything for us, but only what is best for us. The one thing that is best for us is the plan we heard about on Sunday from Jeremiah's prophecy: "I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Jer 31:33). That is what God wants for us because that is the plan where we receive all His blessings. In other words, that is what is best for us.

“Sin” is the word we use to define any thought, word, or action on the part of a human being that deviates from God’s plan. When we sin, we are essentially saying, “I don’t need God to be my god, I can do that on my own.” Were God to simply overlook sinful behavior and permit it to go unanswered, He would no longer be holy or loving. In fact, in willingly permitting His plan to fail, He would, in a sense, be just as guilty of sin as we are!

Because He is holy and because He cannot allow His holy plan to fail, God cannot let divergence from that plan go unanswered. If someone separates himself from God’s plan, then He rightly deserves to be separated from God’s love and to face God’s wrath and punishment.

But Jesus hadn’t done that. He had never disobeyed God. He had not, with even one single action or word or thought, deviated from God’s plan. He was as holy as the Father, righteous and without sin. So then why did the heavenly Father forsake Him? *Because Jesus was holy.* As the holy Son of God, His life (and His alone) held value enough to satisfy the debt which our aberrance from God’s plan had incurred.

The Father’s will was this: that Jesus His Son suffer for the sins of men—even being totally and completely forsaken by the Father on account of them—so that once again those sinful people could be brought back into God’s loving, holy, and perfect plan: “I will be their God and they will be My people.”

That Jesus knew this in advance and still cries out, “Why, God?!” gives us a glimpse into the depth of His anguish. Body and soul, human nature and divine, all are experiencing one pain, one terror, one grief, one death. He receives no support at all. He must bear it alone. Why? Because this was the answer. The one solution where God could remain perfectly holy and yet at the same time be perfectly loving: The sins of men would be laid on the Son of God and mercy would be shown to the sinners.

It’s hard to imagine: One of the holy Persons of the Trinity lays our filthy sins upon another person of the Trinity. We are cleansed; He is weighed down with guilt. No human philosopher or proud theologian could ever come up with something like that. They could only say: “We must appease God.” God says, “I will appease Myself.” And that’s what we see, right there on the cross, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor 5:19). That’s the kind of love and mercy that filled the Father’s heart.

And that’s why the Son ascended the cross. He was equally and fully as merciful. In His pain, experiencing hell and forsaken by the Father, not once does the thought take root to step down from the cross. Even as His senses begin to reel, He expresses His readiness to bear it all. “*My God, My God.*” Christ had not let go of God, even though the Father had turned from Him. Had Jesus relinquished His hold, you and I would have been lost. But He loved us too much for that. “Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends” (Jn 15:13). He gave His life for the ungodly—for you and for me.

Why had God forsaken Jesus? Because of the holiness of God and the love and mercy of God. Because of the holiness of Christ and the love and mercy of Christ.

*O Lord, my God, my sins are great; Your wrath it terrifies me.
Your Son steps in and bears the pain.
He is forsaken, I regained.
Lord Jesus, in Your bitter cry I feel Your love – I hope again.
Amen.*

CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION

O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy, and in Your faithfulness, come to my relief. Do not bring Your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide Your face from me, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God.

Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a troubled and repentant sinner, confess that I have sinned against You in my thoughts, my words, and my actions. I have not loved You with my whole heart; I have not loved others as I should. I am distressed by the sins that trouble me and am deeply sorry for them.

Silence for private meditation and confession.

Jesus says to His people: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."
His death paid for the guilt of your sins and the sins of the whole world. Do you believe this?

Yes, I believe.

Because of the promise of our Savior Jesus, I forgive you all your sins. Be assured that you are a dear child of God and an heir of eternal life.

LUTHER'S MORNING PRAYER

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. Into Your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

BLESSING

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to Himself. May the power of the Lord Jesus make us strong to do His will. May the peace of the Lord Jesus fill our lives.

Amen.

LUTHER'S EVENING PRAYER

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into Your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

BLESSING

May the blessing of the eternal God be upon us:
His light to guide us,
His presence to shelter us,
His peace to unite us.

Amen.

1 Behold the Lamb of God For guilty sinners slain;
Let it not be in vain That you have died!
You for my Savior let me take;
My only refuge let me make Your pierced side.

2 Behold the Lamb of God! Into the sacred flood
Of your most precious blood My soul I cast.
Wash me and make me pure and clean;
Uphold me through life's changing scene Till all is past.

3 Behold the Lamb of God! All hail, incarnate Word!
O everlasting Lord, Purge out our leav'n.
Clothe us with godliness and good;
Feed us with your celestial food, Manna from heav'n.

4 Behold the Lamb of God! Worthy is he alone
To sit upon the throne Of God above,
One with the Ancient of all days,
One with the Comforter in praise, All light, all love!