

Would it be all right if we begin this morning's message with a question? 😊 Here's the question I really want to ask: At some point in your life, have you ever asked God "Why?" Maybe you were at a particularly low point, maybe something tragic happened, maybe life had been dragging you down for several days or weeks or months...and at some point have you ever said, **"God, why aren't you here with me? Why have you left me to my own devices? Why is this happening to me?"** Whether it's at the loss of a loved one, failing health, job loss, or your NCAA Basketball bracket completely blown to smithereens, we go through seasons of life that cause us to ask these kinds of questions.

What's astonishing is that Jesus asked that same kind of question. At the lowest point in his life, he cried out to his heavenly Father and said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" They are not easy words to read, and they are words that we hate to say, because we know that those kinds of words aren't usually uttered when we're full of joy and having mountain-top experiences in life. Not very often do we ask God "Where are you? Why is this happening to me?" when we're sitting on the beaches of Maui, or on the golf course on a beautiful, sunny day, or laughing with close friends as we share a meal together. Quite frankly, we probably should ask "why" in those situations at least occasionally. But that's another sermon. **Usually, when we're at a place in life where we are crying out to God as Jesus does here, we're full of pain and anguish.** Jesus was no different. It's why he cried out these words, too.

Before we get to Jesus' question, I want to speak to a question or two that probably arise for many of us in regards to this passage. Mark first records for us what appears to be an extraordinary cosmological event of darkness covering the land for three hours in the middle of the day. Three of the four gospel writers tell of this darkness. People have speculated for centuries about what happened here, trying to explain it in natural terms. Many have suggested that it was a solar eclipse. If that's the case, it's the longest solar eclipse ever recorded, because usually they last just a few minutes. Some

people have speculated that there was a sandstorm that kicked up and caused it to get very dark. That just doesn't seem like what Mark is trying to convey here. Perhaps we read this and interpret the darkness too literally. That is to say, we think it means it was almost as dark as night. But perhaps there were simply dark storm clouds that had rolled in, and made it to feel dark, even if it wasn't like being in the middle of the night. Certainly around here we've experienced our fair share of afternoons where dark clouds obscured the sun to the point that we practically need to turn on our headlights to be safe as we're driving around. It's practically the norm around here from September 1<sup>st</sup> to about August 31<sup>st</sup>. ☺ Maybe we get too caught up in trying to explain the darkness in this passage, rather than living in faith that God did it, trusting the three gospel authors that record it for us. Regardless, it was an unusually dark afternoon.

Now aside from the physical aspect of this, there is a spiritual connotation as well. **Throughout Scripture, darkness is often a sign for God's judgment.** For instance, in Exodus, the last plague that fell upon Pharaoh and Egypt was the plague of darkness. That was a sign of God's judgment, and a warning against them about further judgment which would come. A little earlier in Mark, Jesus speaks of his eventual return to earth which will be to judge the earth, and says that it will be marked by darkness.

Amos is an Old Testament prophet who pronounced God's judgment on Israel because of their waywardness from God and turning to idol worship. (I know, you thought famous Amos was known for cookies.) And Amos 8:9, written several hundred years before the life of Jesus, says, **"In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight." (Amos 8:9).** This is a prophecy that is fulfilled right here at the death of Jesus.

So with this darkness as a sign of God's judgment, the question becomes: Who is being judged? The answer? Jesus Christ. He is being judged on our behalf. Why? Because Jesus took upon himself the judgment that belongs to us for our waywardness from God. On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world, and suffered the penalty for them, so that we are washed clean and made righteous and holy in God's eyes. Now, this isn't some

random idea that Jesus came up with, or that Christians have created over the centuries since the cross, to bring meaning to Jesus' death. This is the fulfillment of the Old Testament law that a sacrifice was made as atonement for the sin of the people. In the Old Testament, it was always an unblemished animal of some kind – a lamb or a goat, or if a person couldn't afford that, then a pair of turtledoves or pigeons. It was always the best of whatever it was – flawless, in fact. Even before this all became formalized in Leviticus, sacrifice for sin was made. It's first seen in the Garden of Eden, where God gives Adam and Eve clothing made of animal skin, which he did because after they ate the fruit they weren't supposed to, they realized they were naked, and God said, "I will cover you." And so animals were sacrificed and blood was shed for the clothing that covered them – both physically and spiritually. Eventually, that kind of sacrifice became a part of worship and a part of the Jewish faith. Jesus' death on the cross is in that same vein. In fact, in John 1:29, John the Baptist sees Jesus coming and says to a couple people who were there with him, **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29)**. So as our sins were born by him on the cross, the judgment of God that should be upon us came upon Jesus instead. It is at that point that he cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Mark records for us that Jesus cried out in Aramaic **'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?'** In this region, there was the mixing of at least three different languages: Hebrew was the traditional language of the Jews; Greek came with the spread of the Roman Empire; and then there was Aramaic, which was the language of the Arameans, who were in the region from at least 2,000 B.C. Then, to confuse us all, everyone speaks Latin in the film, *The Passion of the Christ*. Aramaic was very similar to Hebrew. Because of the similarity between the Hebrew and Aramaic, they were often blended together in conversation and in writing.

Regardless, that leaves us wondering, "Why is he crying out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" Remember last week as we looked at Jesus' mother, Mary, standing at the foot of the cross, we talked about how it's hard to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and know exactly what they're thinking and feeling?

The same is true as we look at Jesus, and it's even more pronounced with him than it is with Mary. We can't possibly know what Jesus is going through, for several reasons. First off, we've never been nailed to a cross. We can have no idea what that would be like. Second, He had this perfect communion with his heavenly father that you and I will never know this side of heaven, because we constantly allow ourselves to get sucked into the vortex that is sin. Third, Jesus didn't have any idea what it meant to engage in sin. Jesus really was like an unblemished sacrificial lamb. He lived without sin, while we wallow in it and even seek it out.

And as he hung on the cross: the darkness came over the land, and God's judgment came upon him. That judgment happened because the sins of the world came upon Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul goes so far as to write in 2 Corinthians 5:21: **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).** The sins of all people for all time came upon him, it overwhelmed him to the point that he felt completely and totally separated from his heavenly Father, and the judgment from our Holy God that should be ours came upon him instead. For the first time in his life, he experienced the effects of sin – in a huge way; beyond what we've ever experienced. That put him in a spiritual condition unlike anything he had ever experienced. And the feeling of separation between him and his heavenly father that those sins brought caused him such pain and anguish that he cries out with these words.

So it's no wonder that he cries out as he does. **He was experiencing something he had never ever experienced before: sin, and the separation it causes from his Heavenly Father.** And there is no way we can understand what that was like for him. No person on the face of the planet has had the kind of relationship that Jesus had with his heavenly Father, and no person has been that engulfed in sin, either. He knew the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, from one end of the spectrum to the other. And even though he knows that the resurrection is coming – he told his disciples it would happen – he cries out “why?” in much the same way that you or I might. It's like someone who is going through chemo and radiation that they know will ultimately bring healing...but in the midst of it there come these doubts and

questions of, why...is this really going to be worth it.

Jesus has been there. He's gone before you and me and has asked that question. It's not a question that signals turning away from God – he hasn't given up on his heavenly Father, or why else would he cry out to him? He affirms his relationship with his heavenly Father, as he says, "My God." He's not giving up on Him. He never blames God. He never accuses God. I believe, deep down, he knew that his Father was right there with him, but in the midst of his pain and suffering, what else could he say? And we know, in the end, that God did not forsake him: We see that in the resurrection. His heavenly father was right there with him the whole time.

So here's what I want to highlight for us that brings us comfort and hope in the midst of the sufferings we experience: **You can trust God enough to take all of your questions to him – even the ones that question Him directly.** God can handle it and He won't hold it against you. It's ok to ask, to question. You can trust that God won't turn is back on you; that He will still love you, forgive you, welcome you. This is more crucial and foundational to our relationship with God than you or I may realize. In fact, this level of trust is more crucial and foundational to any of our relationships. This is not just predictive trust, which is a kind of trust that says, "I trust you'll do the job you say you're going to do." A quarterback has that kind of trust with his offensive line and his receivers: that the offensive line is going to protect him, and that the receive will run the route he's supposed to so the quarterback can throw the ball to the spot where the receiver will be. That's one kind of trust. We experience that in a lot of relationships, where we trust someone will do something, or behave a certain way, because they've done it before.

But the trust that Jesus shows here is a deeper trust...it's more of a relational trust. In his book, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," New York Times best-selling author and recognized expert on organizational health, Patrick Lencioni writes, **"...trust is the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group. In essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another...confident that their**

**vulnerabilities will not be used against them...As a result, they can focus their energy and attention completely on the job at hand” (Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, p. 195-196).<sup>1</sup>** That is exactly what we see here. Jesus is completely vulnerable in his crying out to his heavenly Father. And his Heavenly Father does not use that against him. In fact, Jesus is resurrected three days later. They are able to focus on the job at hand...and accomplish what needed to be accomplished. We need that kind of trust in our relationships and we can have it in our relationship with God.

In our earthly relationships, this is not a license to blast someone and tear them down or be rude and disrespectful because the other person “won’t hold it against you.” Rather: **This kind of trust does allow us to be honest and vulnerable with our thoughts and feelings, because they’re shared for the betterment of the team.** Think about if we had this kind of trust in our marriages. What if spouses were so committed to the job at hand of making their marriage great that they could be vulnerable with one another and share openly and honestly – without fear of retribution, blowing up, and so forth. What if we trusted that whatever our spouse may say - or co-worker, or congregant...pick the team you’re a part of ....What if we trusted that whatever they may say, that it’s intended to improve the relationship, and the teamwork? What if we were able to admit our doubts, our fears, our weaknesses, the places we need help or to share how it makes us feel when our spouse does something that hurts us...what if we had so much trust that could share and confess those kinds of vulnerabilities without fear of retaliation – like being fired or put out to the doghouse. That could transform a lot of our most important relationships. This is not an overnight kind of thing, of course. This kind of trust takes time to build, but it can be done. And with that trust at the foundation of our relationships, we can move forward together, working toward whatever the goal is that we have before us.

And we can have that same kind of vulnerability-based trust in God. **Jesus said, “Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1).** We oftentimes think of that as trusting that God will do what he says he will do – he will love us, forgive us, save us, that the cross means our forgiveness and the empty tomb gives hope for new life and all that. And that’s all true, and we can trust God in that way. But we can also trust God in this more vulnerable way, as well,

that Jesus demonstrates on the cross. We are, in a sense, teammates with God, working toward the same goals – a deep and abiding relationship with him, encouraging others in their relationship with him, living with abundant life, and so forth. But pain and struggle come our way. So in the midst of that you can ask God, “Why?” and “Where are you?” and he’s not going to hold it against you. You can ask: “Why cancer? Why death? Why no job? Why divorce? Why sickness? Why have you forsaken me?” You can tell God, “I feel weak right now. I’m struggling with this. Temptation is too strong.” And God won’t hold those questions and those vulnerabilities against you. The answer to may not always be evident right away...The final empty tomb answer, the purpose for it, may not be seen right away. But just as Jesus did, you can trust your heavenly Father that glorious and good goal toward which you’re working together will come. Let’s Pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Lenioini is a business consultant, but his style of writing and his approach to teamwork makes it easily accessible for anyone, and also makes his points easily applicable to a broad set of relationships. For instance, this book has moved to near the top of the list of books I recommend for married or engaged couples to read, because “trust” is so foundational in that relationship.