



DEAN WELCH - TEACHER



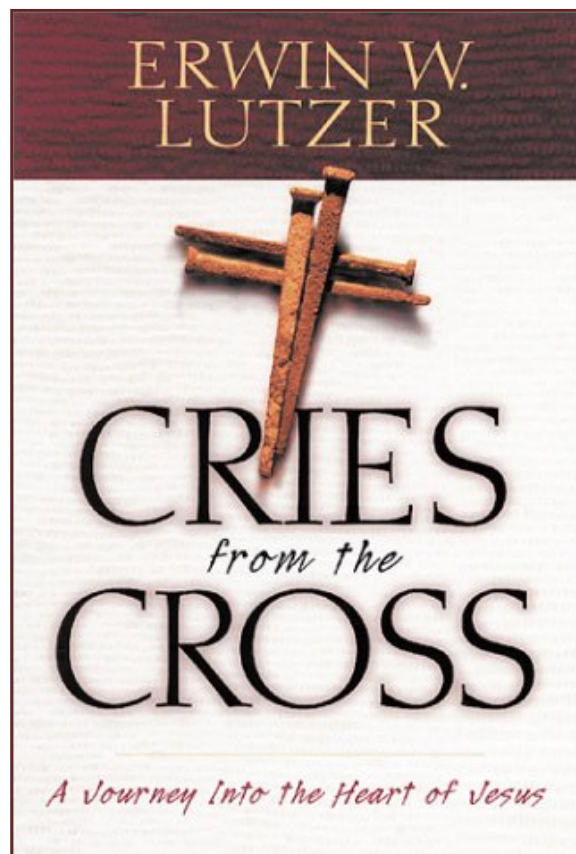
THE CRY OF LONELINESS & THIRST

[MATTHEWS 27:46 & JOHN 19:28]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

MARCH 15, 2009

LESSON #3 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:





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THE CRY OF LONELINESS & THIRST

[MATTHEW 27:46 & JOHN 19:28]

How many of you recognize these words? *"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways..."* Although I remember very little from my college study of Victorian England or English poetry, I do remember being fascinated with the love story of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning and eventual marriage. Their love story was like something right out of the movies. Listen to the words from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's [*Sonnet 43*](#):

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

When Elizabeth Browning asked and answered the question about *"How do I love thee?"* in her *Sonnet 43*, she implied that the ways of expressing love are limited only by man's ability to be creative. **To love and be loved—what could be more important?** Now, let's change this around and I want you to tell me what the opposite of being loved is? I think it's got to be **ABANDONED** or **FORSAKEN**?

And today we are going to talk about just that—being **FORSAKEN** or **ABANDONED**—as we discuss the third and the fourth sayings of Christ from the cross in our 4-week study of Dr. Lutzer's *THE CRIES FROM THE CROSS—A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF JESUS*. As we begin, let's try to recall all **SEVEN** of the last words of Jesus from the cross:



1. "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM" (LUKE 23:34).
2. "TODAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE" (LUKE 23:43)
3. "WOMAN, BEHOLD THY SON" (JOHN 19:25-27).
- [THREE HOURS OF DARKNESS; JESUS IS SILENT]
4. "WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" (MATT. 27:46)
5. "I THIRST" (JOHN 19:28).
6. "IT IS FINISHED!" (JOHN 19:30)
7. "FATHER, INTO THY HANDS" (LUKE 23:46)

Turn to **MATTHEW 27: 46-56 (NLT)** and follow along as we look at the fourth words of Christ from the cross: ⁴⁵At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ⁴⁶At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" which means "**My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**" ⁴⁷Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. ⁴⁸One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. ⁴⁹But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him." ⁵⁰Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, ⁵²and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. ⁵³They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. ⁵⁴The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, "This man truly was the Son of God!" ⁵⁵And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

The fourth statement in **verse 46** is the most anguishing of all. Called by one man the most staggering sentence in Gospel record, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" There was a thick

darkness all around. It seemed as though nature bowed in sympathy as its Creator was put to death. It seems as though its heart is broken and it give no light. [The darkness at the crucifixion of Christ represents God's divine judgment on sin. Why couldn't God just forget it and wipe the slate clean?](#) Recall the words from **ROMANS 6:23**, "*The wages of sin is death.*" God is a just and righteous God and that, in and of itself, demands that the penalty be paid by someone, doesn't it?

The cross became the place for the pouring out of His wrath. Jesus was the recipient of divine judgment, God's judgment upon sin. And in the darkness, out of that place where death existed, from that crown at Calvary, the words came. **"MY GOD! WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"** But look back at verse 45 (NIV) again: *From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over ALL THE LAND.* Matthew prepares the scene for us, doesn't he? From noon until 3 in the afternoon there were two things present: **DARKNESS** and **SILENCE**. Somewhere around three o'clock Matthew records Jesus making this statement.

Think about it for a moment. This three-hour period was so black that creation itself became dark as well. From noon to 3 P.M., normally the brightest and hottest time of day, darkness covered the land. Creation mourned its Creator's spiritual death (separation from his Father) and turned its back on the One the Father now turned away from because of the sin he became.

I opened with the famous line by Elizabeth Barrett Browning but would like to give you another view of her life that may help you in putting our scripture passage from Matthew 27: 46 into a little better perspective. [At the age of 41, Elizabeth Barrett became the wife of Robert Browning, the famous English poet. Her father, a widower, disowned her. He objected to the marriage and disowned her simply because he didn't want any of his children to leave home and break up the family! Elizabeth's biographer wrote that her father "ruthlessly sought to obliterate every trace of his daughter."](#) Elizabeth and Robert Browning moved to Italy where

they lived for five years. Believing that, with the passing of time, her father's heart would soften, Elizabeth wrote **HUNDREDS** of letters to him. Almost every week she wrote telling him how much she loved him and how she longed for reconciliation. He never answered one of those hundreds of letters. Returning to England Elizabeth sought, through intermediaries, to restore the relationship. Her father steadfastly refused, deciding instead, to carry his rancor and unreasonableness to the grave.

Shortly after his daughter had arrived back in England seeking to restore the relationship, Mr. Barrett sent a package to his daughter. It contained every letter she had written him during the five years of her absence. The letters were all unopened, their seals unbroken. What shocked Elizabeth Browning was the fact that even the special letters that she had sent in black-edged envelopes and sealed in black wax, had been left intact. Surely, she thought, her father would have been concerned, thinking that the letters indicated that something was wrong with her or the baby. Yet he had not even bothered to open these letters. She resigned herself to the inevitable end, and, in a disconsolate mood, once again left England. **FORSAKEN BY HER FATHER** whom she loved was more than she could bear.

Forsaken! It is one of the most haunting words of human life and one of the most dreadful of human experiences. In paying the just penalty of your sin, Christ was forsaken by God. His cry, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*" was the cry of one who was at the point of death, the bearer of sin. **Why did He leave Him alone on the cross at that moment?** The memory verse from **1 CORINTHIANS 5: 21 (NIV)** that I put in your chairs this morning explains this principle: *²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* See, Jesus became legally guilty of our sin, and for that He was judged. As Dr. Lutzer commented this week in Day One, how appropriate that when the *SINLESS ONE* was "*made sin for us,*" the event was veiled from human eyes.

Jesus had taken upon Himself the doom which that entailed, and it meant that He was exposed to the wrath and judgment of God so **WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO BE.** It would recall something of the ritual on the day of atonement when the sin of Israel was put away in a symbolic ceremony. A scapegoat was driven out into the desert, bearing the sins of the people into unknown wastelands of separation and oblivion. That element of estrangement was part of the darkness, part of the penalty of sin. The Savior was forsaken by the Father so we might never be forsaken. He endured the darkness that we might have light. In dying on the cross, Christ was not spared until He had endured all that sin must entail, and the last dread result of sin is to shut man out from the presence of God. This proves that God does not take sin lightly; neither should we! Being absolutely holy and just, God cannot just overlook our sin.

Let me ask you, "Had the Father forsaken Jesus?" The question has been asked, "**But how could God forsake God?**" The answer must be that God the Father deserted his Son's **HUMAN NATURE**, and even this in a limited, though very real and agonizing, sense. The meaning cannot be that there was ever a time when God the Father stopped loving his Son. Nor can it mean that the Son ever rejected his Father. Far from it. He kept on calling him "My God, my God." And for that very reason we may be sure that the Father loved him as much as ever.

How, then, can we put any sensible meaning to this cry of deep distress? Perhaps an illustration may be of some help, though it should be added immediately that no analogy taken from things that happen to humans on earth can ever begin to do justice to the Son of God's unique experience. Nevertheless, the illustration may be helpful in some slight degree. *A few years ago, my daughter Ashley and her husband had to take their son, Jax, to the hospital. Jax was probably only 18 months of age. He was very sick and certainly was too young to understand why he had to be taken to the hospital, and especially why, while there, he may have to be in the Intensive Care Unit, where his parents could not always be with him. I know Ashley and Duke love Jax as much as ever, but*

there may be moments when the child misses the presence of his father or mother so much that he experiences profound anguish. So also the Mediator. His soul reaches out for the One whom he calls "my God," but his God does not answer him. Abandoned!

Our Savior's fourth word from the cross is also a reminder of the seriousness of sin in another costly way. In spite of the fact that so much that is sinful has become so acceptable today, sin is serious and costly in that it brings untold **HEARTACHE, REGRET, MISERY AND EVEN DEATH**. Sin ruins lives, wrecks homes and destroys the very fabric of society. We must not, therefore, view sin from the world's benign perspective. Because sin is far too costly; it harms and destroys. *One of the worst prairie fires on record was started inadvertently by an army officer stationed at Fort Hayes, Ohio. He and some friends had been hunting wild turkeys and had paused to rest. While they were relaxing, the officer carelessly touched a match to some dry grass. He never dreamed what dreadful consequences would follow his thoughtless act! Within minutes the entire area was ablaze and the men were powerless to stop it. The flames, fanned and driven by a strong wind, raged furiously and swept rapidly across the prairie. The fire burned up everything that stood in its path - thousands of acres of land, homes, buildings and countless head of livestock. As you can imagine, the tragic ruin and loss caused by that single act brought untold grief and heartache to the one responsible as well as countless others.* Sin quickly gets out of control and does more damage than you can imagine, just like the fire.

When God turned His head on His Son, that was more than Jesus could handle. Can't you just hear His screams and cry, "*Why? Why did you abandon me?*" I can't understand it. I honestly can't. Why did Jesus do it? Oh, I know, I know. I've heard the official answers: "*To gratify the old law.*" "*To fulfill prophecy.*" And these are right. They are. But there is something more here. Something more compassionate. Something yearning. Something personal. **What is it?** He did it so we wouldn't have to!

Let's turn to the **FIFTH WORDS** of Jesus from the cross. Turn with me to **JOHN 19: 28 (NIV)** and follow along: *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."* **How was it that all was completed? Since Jesus had not yet died, the atonement was not completed and beyond that lay the resurrection and the ascension. So, what does this mean?** [SOME OF THE COMMENTARIES SAY THAT "JESUS' KNOWLEDGE THAT ALL WAS NOW COMPLETED IS THE AWARENESS THAT ALL THE STEPS THAT BROUGHT HIM TO THIS POINT OF PAIN AND IMPENDING DEATH WERE IN THE DESIGN OF HIS HEAVENLY FATHER, AND DEATH ITSELF WAS IMMINENT."]

Why do these words by Jesus—"I am thirsty"—tell us about Him? [HE HAD FLESH! HE'S HUMAN] **Why does this verse seem out of character with His other statements at the cross? Why is it important to realize not only the divinity of Jesus, but also his humanity?** Turn with me to **HEBREWS 2:14-18 (MSG)** and listen to Peterson's paraphrase of a good explanation: ¹⁴⁻¹⁵*Since the children are made of flesh and blood, it's logical that the Savior took on flesh and blood in order to rescue them by his death. By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil's hold on death and freed all who cower through life, scared to death of death.* ¹⁶⁻¹⁸*It's obvious, of course, that he didn't go to all this trouble for angels. It was for people like us, children of Abraham. That's why he had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins, he would have already experienced it all himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed.*

Can't you recall other words of Jesus that show the same thing? Remember when He stopped at the well in Samaria, basically saying *"I'm tired. You go on and get the food. I'll rest right here."* Or what about that long day preaching where so many people had gathered that he had to preach from the bow of the boat? And when He finished and He and the disciples left, he basically said, *"I'm sleepy."* And he stretched, yawned and fell asleep as they crossed the Sea of Galilee when a violent storm hit. So deep

was His sleep, the thunder did not wake Him—nor did the tossing of the boat. Or, another incident when He became so angry with what was going on in the temple that He through the money-changers and others out on their head? We saw an angry Messiah making his point: don't go making money off religion, or God will make hay of you!

In all of these verses, we see tidbits of His humanity. He was human. Don't forget. He had flesh. But we are most indebted to John for choosing to include verse 28 of chapter 19. It reads simply: *"I'm thirsty."* That's not **THE CHRIST** that's thirsty. That's the **CARPENTER**. And those are words of humanity in the midst of divinity. This phrase messes up with what we expect from the Savior of the world. The other six statements are more "in character." They are cries we would expect: forgiving sinners, promising paradise, caring for his mother, even the cry "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" is one of power. But, "I thirst"?

As Max Lucado says in his book, *NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOR*, Jesus wants us to remember that He, too, was HUMAN. He wants us to know that he, too, knew the drone of the humdrum and the weariness that comes with long days. He wants us to remember that our trailblazer didn't wear bulletproof vests or rubber gloves or an impenetrable suit of armor. No, he pioneered our salvation through the world that you and I face daily.

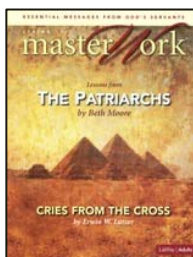
Think about His words again from verses 28 and 29 of **JOHN 19**:
²⁸Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.
Was this merely a spiritual thirst or is there a spiritual connotation? Our Lord knew what was going on; He was fully in control as He obeyed the Father's will. He had refused to drink the pain-deadening wine that was always offered to those about to be crucified (Matt. 27:34). Listen also to the words from

PSALM 69:21 (NIV), *²¹They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*

In order to fulfill the Scriptures we just read, He said, "I thirst." He was enduring real physical suffering, for He had a real human body. He had just emerged from three hours of darkness when He felt the wrath of God and separation from God, remember? When you combine darkness, thirst, and isolation, you have—**HELL!** There were physical reasons for His thirst, but there were also spiritual reasons. Turn to **PSALM 41:1-2 (NIV)** and we'll see the other side: *¹As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

So, how do we lay hold of a thirst-satisfying life, spiritually? Let's start with the closest parallel: Recall these words from **Ephesians 5:18**? *Don't be drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit!* How do you get drunk with wine? You drink it. Lots of it. So how then shall we get drunk (filled) with the Spirit? Drink it! Lots of it. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 12:13**, *"We were all made to drink of one Spirit."* Jesus explains the HOW to us in **JOHN 7:37-38 (NIV)**: *³⁷On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*

How have you found Christian living to be a **JOHN 7:38** and **JOHN 10:10** kind of experience, i. e., out of your heart are rivers of living waters flowing so that you can live the truly abundant life? Let's Pray.



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