



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 27:45–49; Psalm 22:1–3

Gospel of Matthew

“Immanuel’s Orphaned Cry:
Disillusionment or Dependence?”

TRANSCRIPT

Now if you have your New Testaments or Bibles with you, I would like for you to turn with me first to the 22nd Psalm in the Old Testament, and I want to read a few verses, beginning with the first verse of that Psalm, and then a few verses from Matthew 27:45-49 there. Psalm 22:1–3. David writes, in the Psalm that is recognized by all biblical students as messianic,

“My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me,

Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Oh my God I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not;

and in the night season, and am not silent.

But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.”

Now will you turn with me to our passage in Matthew chapter 27? We are going to look at verse 45 through 49. As all of us who have read the Gospel of Matthew know or have been keeping up with the messages, this is the climatic treatment of the death of Christ. And we read in the 45th verse:

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“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.”

Remember that our Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross from the third hour in the morning until the ninth hour in the afternoon, and these hours are hours of the day. The Jewish day was divided into 12 hours, and regardless of the length of the sunlight, there were twelve hours, so that three o’clock would be nine o’clock in the morning according to our time, and the sixth hour would be the middle of the day or noon, and the ninth hour would be three in the afternoon, so our Lord was on the cross from nine o’clock in the morning until three in the afternoon, or six hours in all. And then, in verse 46 we read:

“And about the ninth (incidentally, I am putting together information from the other Gospels, too; it does not say here in this passage of course that he was put on the cross at nine o’clock in the morning, the third hour; but it does in the other Gospel accounts. Verse 46) And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, *Eli, Eli, lama, sabachthani?*”

This is a very interesting expression in itself, because it is a combination of Hebrew and Aramaic. *Eli*, *Eli* is the Hebrew expression for, “My God, my God,” *El* being the Word for God and *i* the suffix. My God my God. But then, *lama sabach’thani* is Aramaic, so we have a combination of Hebrew and Aramaic.

It might seem rather strange, but the reason for this is most likely the Old Testament paraphrased in the Aramaic language which was read in the synagogues in the days of our Lord, rather than the Hebrew text, or in conjunction with the Hebrew text, as an explanation, as a kind of commentary when the text of Scripture was read. The Aramaic of Psalm 22 which we just read in our Scripture reading at that point is a combination of the Hebrew and Aramaic: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*,

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and so what we have here in the Gospel of Matthew is true to the old paraphrase of Psalm 22, which would be very familiar to anyone who attended the synagogue meetings.

Now this is translated that is to say, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me? I did want to say this, that if you turn over to the Markan account, you will find the words are slightly different, and the reason for that is simply that Mark has, in the light of the fact that one of the expressions is Aramaic, he has also turned the Hebrew words for my God into the Aramaic, and so you will read over there something like *Eloi, Eloi, lama sa-bachthani*. The chances are this Matthean account is actually what our Lord did say, because the name for Elijah, *Eli’abu*, is very similar, and so there would be the possibility of confusion as we shall see that is what happened. So verse 46 there reads,

“At the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice saying *Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani*.” That is to say, my God my God why has thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there when they heard that, said, this man calleth for Elijah (or *Eli’abu*) And straightway, one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

May the Lord who inspired the Word illumine our minds as we read and ponder Holy Scripture.

The message this morning from the Gospel of Matthew is entitled, “Immanuel’s Orphaned Cry: Disillusionment or Dependence?” Some of you I’m sure will recognize that the title has come partially from a poem that Mrs. Browning wrote, in which she wrote, “Yea once Emmanuel’s orphaned cry, his universe hath shaken, it went up single echoless, my God I am forsaken / It went up from the holy’s lips, amidst his lost creation, that of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation.”

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I am sure that as you think about the death of Jesus Christ, there is one thing that stands out about it: it was a very strange exodus. “The death of Jesus Christ was not as radiant Stephen’s death,” as someone has said, “a martyr’s death under a hail of stones.” It was not as Socrates died in scornfully superior resignation. Rather, the Lord Jesus died with a helpless, despairing cry in the most desolate isolation.

It is strange from that standpoint, and I don’t think that we shall ever get over the fact that that characteristic pertains to our Lord’s death. Joseph Klaussner, a Jewish student, who wrote a very important book on the Lord Jesus entitled *Jesus of Nazareth* said, “The dream of his life had vanished. His life’s work had perished. The thought was unbearable. In his terrible, anguished heart he summoned up all his remaining strength and cried out in his mother tongue, in the language of the book that he loved most, my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” H. G. Wells, who has never been noted as a fundamentalist, said, “The symbol of the crucifixion, the jolting pain-drenched figure of Christ, the sorrowful cry to his father, my God why hast thou forsaken me, these things jar within our spirit. And finally, someone else has said, Jesus died in agony as an outcast and a criminal. His father failed him at last. Jesus died utterly disappointed. He was deserted and disillusioned.

Was our Lord deserted and disillusioned by his death on the cross? If that were true, it would be very difficult to explain how Christians have thought about the cross of the Lord Jesus down from the centuries. After all, was not the Apostle Paul the person who said, when he wrote to the Corinthians, “When I was in your midst I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified?” He said, “God forbid I shall glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified unto me and I the world.” How is it possible for Christians to so revere him and his cross and at the same time make the claim that the Lord Jesus died utterly deserted and disillusioned?

Luther did not feel that way. He wrote, *Theologia cruxus theologia lucus*, or The Theology of the Cross is the Theology of Light. I think it’s interesting—at least it has been to me—that even those who are not Christians at all, Unitarians, have recognized that in the cross of Jesus Christ is the heart

of the Christian faith. Now, Unitarians like to say that they are Christians, that is the average person; but they are not Christians because they are Unitarians. Christians are Trinitarians, and it is impossible for anyone to be a Christian who is a Unitarian. That’s one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, the Trinitarian doctrine, that there is one God who so exists in three persons: Father, Son and Spirit, but the striking thing about Unitarians, who are not Christians, who do not know and recognize the deity of Jesus Christ, nor his atoning sacrifice, have recognized that the cross is the center of the faith.

So John Bowering who wrote *In the Cross of Christ*—a hymn, incidentally, written by a Unitarian which is often sung by Christian congregations—wrote these words: “In the cross of Christ, I glory towering o’er the wrecks of time / all the light of sacred story gathers round it’s head sublime.” I wish that all of my Unitarian friends had listened to that Unitarian. It is true; all the light of sacred story does gather round his head sublime, and the statement, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, rather than being a stumbling block, might well be the insight that would lead us to a full and true understanding of what happened when Jesus Christ died.

Now if you look at all of the statements that our Lord uttered when he was upon the cross, and there are seven of them, one of the things you notice is that this statement is the central one of the seven. On the cross, the Lord Jesus said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,” and then second he said, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Thirdly he said, “Woman behold thy son; behold thy mother,” as he turned to John. Then the fifth statement was, “I thirst,” and the sixth, “It is finished,” and the seventh, “Father into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” The fourth one, the central one, is, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

Now when you look at these seven statements, you discover another interesting thing about them. Three of them are found in the Gospel of Luke in the 23rd chapter, and three of them are found in the Gospel of John in the 19th chapter. Incidentally, those three are not found in Matthew and Mark, so three are found in Luke and three are found in John. One statement is found in two

Gospels—only one of them is found in two Gospels. It is the statement here, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, which is found in Matthew and Mark.

Now if you were sitting in a theological classroom and taking a course on the introduction of the New Testament, or if you were in a religion class at one of our universities or colleges and studying the introduction to the New Testament or to the Bible, you would probably hear professors say that the first Gospel of the four written was the Gospel of Mark. It is the general opinion of contemporary scholarship that the first Gospel written was the Gospel of Mark. That is the viewpoint of modern scholarship.

Ancient believers believed however that the Gospel of Matthew was the first, and generally speaking that is their viewpoint. Although there is some question about the precise meaning of some of the testimonies, it is generally regarded that the early church thought Matthew was the first Gospel written. There are a few scholars who believe that Matthew is the first Gospel written.

It doesn’t really make a bit of difference so far as the point I want to make is concerned. The facts are that the first statement of our Lord from the cross that was written in Christian literature, in the inspired literature, the first of the statements that he made from the cross was this statement, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me. In other words, it would appear from this that the early church, the earliest church, thought that of all the seven statements that he did make, perhaps the most important is this very one, because it is found in our earliest Gospel whether it be Matthew or Mark. It is almost as if they felt that in this statement we have the lesson the doctrine the revelation concerning the significance of the death of Jesus Christ. It is my opinion that they were right in this, whether that was their intention or not. It is true that in this statement, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, we have in truth the lesson of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus when he suffered and died upon the cross.

Now let us review the situation and then we will get the address, my God my God, and then at the question, why hast thou forsaken me. We know from our studies last week that our Lord Jesus is hanging upon a cross at a place called Golgotha. Generally speaking now, we feel that this was a

place outside the city walls; not inside the city where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is today.

Probably our Lord was crucified near the place called Gordon’s Calvary. He was crucified outside the walls. That was very fitting in itself, because it was stated in the Old Testament in the book of Leviticus, in those typical sections that the sin offering should be offered outside the gate. In other words, the taking of the animal outside the gate, and in the burning of the animal outside the gate, there was an expression of the fact that this individual, whom the offerings pointed to, was a curse of utter divine judgment, and therefore should be put to death, outside the city, the place of communion. It was very fitting and typical and consequently, it would be the fulfillment of the type in beautiful fashion, if our Lord should be taken as the sin offering outside the gate, and there put to death. So probably he did die outside the gate.

The time we have said was from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon, but at noon there came a supernatural darkness over the land which lasted until the conclusion of our Lord’s stay upon the cross. It may have been a repulsive spectacle. Someone has suggested that God brought the darkness over the land because of the repulsiveness of the spectacle, since our Lord had suffered greatly in a physical way from the Roman soldiers and the others who had crowned him with a crown of thorns and who had scourged him—a terrible punishment in itself.

The Old Testament does have a statement in Isaiah 52:14 in which the prophet there speaking of our Lord Jesus said that his visage was so marred, more than that of any man. So it is possible that the darkness had something to do with it, but I doubt that is the primary significance of it. Thomas Spurgeon said it was midnight at midday.

Now the darkness is a typical thing. In Scripture as you probably know, darkness is generally associated with that which is evil. Now it is a striking thing is it not, in the Bible, how often the physical events have typical or spiritual significance? Let me remind you that at the birth of our Lord Jesus it is a star that is prominent, a star suggestive of light from heaven; a heavenly significance in the birth of the son. So the star itself has significance.

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Associated also with the birth of our Lord Jesus were angels, angelic messengers who come from heaven above to give messages to men here. Angels are also associated with his resurrection, for his resurrection suggests of course the fact that he shall ultimately ascend to heaven.

We have other things. We have earthquakes which took place and are figurative of judgment. An earthquake took place at the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as we shall see. In the accomplishment of the Exodus of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, there was unearthly darkness that came over the land in the midst of the miracles that Moses performed. That was the sign that the land of Egypt was under the curse, so the darkness at the time that our Lord suffered is very significant. As a matter of fact, it is the darkness that gives us a clue to the meaning of the cry, and it is the cry that explains the darkness. My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me—in the midst of darkness, the darkness itself is a word that says what is happening has to do with a curse or with judgment upon sin, and the cry itself, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, gives us the significance of the darkness. It is a forsaking, a judging on the part of the father.

Now let’s look at the address, my God my God. I have often said two—at least in the studies that I have given—that we must beware of two emphases when we talk about the doctrine of the cross of Christ, or the atonement. We must first of all, beware of an emphasis which is often expressed that we really can know nothing of the atonement of the Lord Jesus. That to have a theory of the atonement itself is probably wrong, and if anyone should ever give biblical justification for that, they turn, if they want to do that, to a text like First Corinthians 13:12 which says, “Now we know in part then we shall know as we are known.”

On the other hand there are some who give you the impression that they know everything there is to know about what happened when the Lord Jesus died upon the cross. They point us to Isaiah 53:6 which says, “All we are like sheep who have gone astray; we’ve turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,” and say that expresses the significance of the atonement, and expresses it fully. When we have said the Lord Jesus died a penal substitutionary atonement we have said all there is to say of the atonement.

Well, now, of course you’ve heard me preach enough to know that I think that a great part of the doctrine of the atonement is expressed in the theory of penal substitution. In fact, as far as I am concerned, that to me is the significance of our Lord’s death, and it explains, as far as I understand, the primary significance of his death. But I think it is well for us to remember that there are things about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, just as there are things about the Trinity and about the person of our Lord that we shall probably be studying when we leave this snow-cursed atmosphere and move into heaven to enjoy some Bible teaching that is truly good Bible teaching. Then we shall learn not only what we should not have learned down here, but we shall also learn some of the deeper things concerning the significance of the Lord’s death. If it is true that our God is an infinite God and the Bible expresses it throughout we can expect to continue to learn things about God throughout all eternity. We shall never know him fully.

So I just utter these words as a kind of warning that we do not want to go to the extreme of saying we cannot know anything about the atonement, nor the other extreme that we know everything about it. We should it seems to me listen carefully to that which the Bible tells us. Study it with infinite patience and prayer and seek to understand what God has in the way of illumination, realizing that there is probably more here than we at the present time have the capacity to comprehend. O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God, the apostle says in Romans chapter 11. How true that is.

Now looking at the statement, my God my God. I want you to notice this. The first statement our Lord made from the cross was, Father—notice the word—forgive them, for they know not what they do. The final statement that he uttered from the cross was, Father into thy hands I commit my spirit. He began by using the term, Father. He concludes by using the term, Father, but in the middle he says, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Now let’s stop for just a moment and ask ourselves, is it possible that there is some significance in the statement, my God my God, since in the other six statements twice he has said, Father. Well, it’s a very interesting thing. If you will take your concordance and look at the New

Testament, you will discover that the Lord Jesus, when he refers to God almost two hundred times—I really think it’s about a hundred and seventy times—about a hundred and seventy times he refers to God as Father. So it was a very common thing for him to do.

Incidentally, in the messianic Psalms of the Old Testament in Psalm 89 specifically, the Davidic Psalm of the Davidic covenant, it was said by the Holy Spirit to David, that when the Messiah came, he would call God his Father. Now that’s a striking thing. That might not seem strange to you right now, because we are so used to calling God, Father, but that is something unique.

Let me point out this. Fourteen times in the whole of the Old Testament, God is referred to as Father. Never is he referred to as Father by any individual Israelite; no individual Israelite ever looked up to God and said, my Father. As a matter of fact, in Palestinian Judaism there is, it seems, only one possible instance—and there is some question about that—of any individual ever addressing God as Father, and yet when our Lord came, he said, after this man of therefore pray ye, our Father who art in heaven, and he himself used that term as his term for God in heaven.

Now he did that because he was the Messiah, and it was said that the messiah when he came would do that and as a matter of fact, Father is expressive of the revelation that came to him, as we read back in chapter 11 in verse 27. I will not refer to that great passage because we spent an entire morning on it, but you will remember it as it was the clue and the key to our Lord’s revelation. It was as Father that he reveals God to us, he the son, and he has the sovereign right to do it. No one else is able to do it, only he is able to do it and he does that revealing work to whomsoever he wills. The term, Father; it qualified him as a revealing God.

By the way, the term that was used, *Abba*, which became very prominent in Christian circles, and Paul says, “the Holy Spirit has been sent into our hearts whereby we cry *Abba* father”—the term *Abba* was a term that little children used of their father. It was not like pop-pop, but it was very similar to it, and it had a connotation to that type of familiarity. That is one of the reasons why the

Jews did not speak of God in that way, because it was so familiar, but our Lord used it and the apostles were so impressed by it, they repeated that fact.

Now the thing I’m getting to is this: that our Lord Jesus characteristically used the term, Father, when he spoke to God. He used it many times—a hundred and seventy times at least—it was a messianic sign. But here in the midst of his suffering on the cross, he cries out, my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Oh well, of course he can use God every now and then can he not, just for stylistic purposes? Well did you know that our Lord, we have a record of twenty-one of his prayers in the New Testament.

Now these prayers some of them are parallel and I am using the total figure (there would be about sixteen or seventeen prayers in all) of all of the prayers that our Lord uttered to the Father, only one of them, in only one of them did he ever address God as God in them. In every other petition that he addressed to heaven, he said, Father. Father into thy hands I commit my spirit. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. The only time that he ever addressed God as God is here. My God my God why hast thou forsaken me? Why? Well for the simple reason that when he was hanging upon the cross the relationship that existed between him and God in heaven was no longer simply paternal. It was judicial. It is not now a son and a father. It is as a human being under thy hand of his creating and judging God. My God my God why hast thou forsaken me? Never forget that. It is as a judicial substitute and sacrifice that he addresses God here.

Now we asked in the beginning, was our Lord’s cry a disillusion, or was it a cry of dependence? Well will you look at what he said. He said, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me. Even in the midst of this suffering of the punishment for our sin, he was separated from the Father. Even in the midst of that, his trust did not fail. It is not, O God, O God, why has thou forsaken me. It is, *my* God *my* God, why hast thou forsaken me. It is, as Arthur Pink said, “it is a cry of distress but not a cry of distrust.” As Mr. Spurgeon said, “It was an instance of man in weakness but not man in revolt.”

And the way in which our Lord acted in the midst of his suffering is so different in the way in which we act. When we get into difficulty, we don’t address God, we talk to our friends. We complain to them and we speak of what God has done to us. We address ourselves to the world. We address ourselves to the world and talk about our distress. But he addressed himself to God. And incidentally, this is not a thoughtless word that our Lord uttered, and that’s why I had you read Psalm 22. Our Lord in the midst of this suffering reached back in the Old Testament picked out a specific passage from Psalm 22 which he knew as a messianic Psalm, and took that statement, my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me as his own, and then offered it back in prayer to God, recognizing at that very moment that he was the Messiah and therefore identified completely with the statements that David had written hundreds of years before. As someone had said, “He was not in some cosmic darkness, in some deserted no man’s land, but he was praying within the congregation of the faithful, my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me.

Now when we come to the interrogation, why hast thou forsaken me, we immediately launch into a discussion of questions concerning the atonement. I will pass over historical interpretations of the atonement, I’ve made reference to them before. If you have a copy of the *Believers Bible Bulletin*, there are a few sentences there concerning the Abelardian or moral influence theory of the atonement preached so often in our Christian churches today, which while having a truth and expressing a truth, is so fundamentally limiting in the understanding of the atonement of Jesus Christ, and is, if it is the only understanding of the atonement that we have, sub-Christian. A person who preaches only a moral influence for exemplary theory, the Selcinan view of the atonement, is preaching a theory of the atonement that is not Christian.

There is the so-called classic theory of the atonement which was so prominent, probably in the writings of some of the early church fathers like Irenaeus, and then there was the Anselmic view of the penal of the satisfaction of God’s honor. These theories of the atonement are interesting because the moral influence theory of the atonement terminates on man. The classic theory of the atonement terminates on Satan; it is the penal substitutionary theory that terminates upon God. And

while truth is found in each of these theories, if we are to have a theory of the atonement that is satisfactory, we must include the ideas that our Lord died as a substitute and that he died bearing the penalty for our sins.

Now the statement says, why hast thou forsaken me, one might ask the question, why did the Lord Jesus have to ask a question like that? Well, our Lord was a divine person who possessed a human nature, and in his human nature it was necessary for him to have all of the legitimate experiences, and so consequently he, as he was hanging upon the cross, had to, in his human nature ask all of the legitimate questions that a human nature might ask, apart from sin. And this question is a question, a cry for information. It is a cry for more information, though as a divine person he actually understood all of this, and had actually participated in the plans of it in the ages before our worlds ever began. But as a human being he must enter into the experience of it in order that he might be perfected as our high priest. Later, the Epistle of the Hebrews explains all of that in his marvelous exposition in the work of Christ as our high priest.

Incidentally when our Lord said, why hast thou forsaken me, it was evident that he was consciously innocent of having given in himself any ground of why God should forsake him. Now I would never pray anything like this, why hast thou forsaken me; I could think of ten thousand reasons why God would forsake me. But he said why hast thou forsaken me and in that very cry expresses the fact that he does not know any basis in himself for the forsaking of God.

Now we come to what it means when he says, why hast thou forsaken me. And I would like to suggest that there are some questions that I may rhetorically pass onto you that indicate that substitution is the only explanation of this question that our Lord asks. Let me ask you this: would a loving God forsake the only good man who ever lived? David said, “I had been young, now I’m old, but never have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor is seed baking bread.” But our Lord Jesus was forsaken.

The father said with reference to him, “In him I am well pleased. Well, then, would a loving God forsake the only good man who ever lived? No, not for his own sins or on account of his own

goodness. That very fact indicates to us that there must be something else in this forsaking. Would a loving God injure the only innocent man who ever lived? Would he allow him to be? I can understand why he might allow others who are not innocent to be injured, but in his case, no. Why were our Lord’s prayers always answered elsewhere, but it seems if the psalmist is correct, that this petition is a petition that has no answer but the suffering of eternal judgment. “I cry unto thee in the daytime and in the night seasons I am not silent, and thou hearest not,” the psalmist said. My God my God why hast thou forsaken me? No answer comes.

The only explanation of this is our Lord Jesus is dying as a substitute for others; not for his own sin but for others. He is being forsaken for other’s sake. It is true that God is forsaking him, but it is not on account of anything in him it is on account of others. Substitution can only explain it. As one of my teachers in Scotland used to say, the heart of the atonement is simply this: Jesus Christ stood in the stead of others.

Now it seems to me that it is very strange in the light of this that many of our modern theologians seek to avoid the implications of the cross of Christ. A great Presbyterian leader has said, “If God had dealt with him as if he were a sinner and the greatest sinner, then we must say of God, as a cynical Frenchman did say God of these penal theologies, your God is my devil.” But I must say I prefer to follow our Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul and the other apostles than George Buttrick. The Bible it seems to me makes very plain that our Lord died as a substitute, and he died under the judgment of God. Penal substitution.

It is an offense. It is an offense to be told that Jesus Christ bears the penalty of other’s sins. It is an offense because it tells us that we should die, and that is an offense to us. We do not like to be told, ye must be born again. We do not like to be told that someone must die in our stead. We do not like to be told we are under divine judgment. We do not even like to mention the word sin in the 20th century. It is a bad word. It’s too true. We cannot take it. But the Bible says very plainly; we are sinners; we are guilty; we are under divine judgment.

The cross and this statement especially is the inevitable sequel to Gethsemane. We studied a few weeks back our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, and there he was writhing upon the ground crying, O my God if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Now the inevitable sequel of that is this cry which has in itself a kind of ruthless authenticity, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me. That’s what he was groveling on the ground about in Gethsemane. He knew what faced him here.

Is substitution necessary? Why substitution is necessary for these simple reasons: the law says that a man must love the Lord his God with all his heart with all his soul with all his mind, and his neighbor as himself. Thou shalt. Do you know my dear friends sitting in the audience that you will never get to heaven unless you have perfectly kept that law? Have you done it? Thou shalt love the Lord his God with all his heart—don’t hold up your hand. If we were to ask the apostles to stand on this platform and the prophets and all of the other great saints of the Bible to explain to us how they kept the law perfectly, they would all shout in thundering tones, we have not kept the law perfectly we have sinned.

Abraham: I am but dust and ashes. Job: I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear but now mine eyes see Thee, wherefore I repent, implore by myself repenting dust and ashes. Daniel: my comeliness, after I’ve seen Thee, turned into corruption. Isaiah: I am a man of wicked and unclean life and lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people who are similar, and all of the others down through the years—they have all confessed it. That’s why substitution is necessary.

Did you notice the third verse of the Psalm? After he had said, I cry unto Thee in the daytime and in the night seasons, I’m not silent. Thou hearest not. The text goes on to say, but Thou art holy. In other words, it is the holiness and righteousness of God that condemns us; for we must have a holiness and righteousness that is satisfactory to this holy and righteous God. We cannot present it to him apart from our Lord’s saving work. The law says, you either keep the law perfectly which we have not done and cannot do, or you pay the penalty, and the penalty is eternal death, and if we therefore pay the penalty we are lost forever. There is no hope of our having any relationship to God. We have broken the law. We cannot pay the penalty. We need a substitute in whom we may

pay the penalty, and that is what God has given us. That’s the Gospel. He has given us a substitute, a surety, a Redeemer in whom we have paid the penalty.

His people. He came to die for his people. He came to save his people from their sins, and when he suffered he paid that penalty. Therefore, since he has paid it, there is no way in which heaven can command additional payment. Heaven is satisfied. The holiness and righteousness of God is satisfied. Toplady is right, “Payment God cannot twice demand, first from my bleeding surety’s hand, and then again at mine. I have paid the penalty in my substitute.

That’s why incidentally the Lord Jesus came to die for his people. For he paid a penalty. He was a true substitute. He really paid it. Therefore it would be unjust for heaven to demand further payment. Don’t you see that? Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that wonderful to have a substitute in whom I have paid the penalty? That is what is happening when our Lord Jesus cries out, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, for he is becoming at that point the curse. The darkness points that out. He is the curse. Christ has redeemed us from the law, being made a curse for us. He has made us to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. A curse for us; sin for us. My God my God why hast thou forsaken me—that’s why. And as a result of that we say, as we so often do, he will never leave us nor forsake us.

Well I wish I had time to expatiate upon this, but we don’t. It is a significant fact that our Lord, the light of the world, died in darkness. It’s almost as if the light went out. There is a solemn warning I think in this. We have often wondered, what is it to be in hell? Well this gives us a kind of clue. One of the things hell is is infinite and eternal separation from God. The Apostle Paul writes about the fact that when he shall come in the second coming he shall mete out everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. That’s what we have here, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me?

Many years ago I was coming back from Charleston, South Carolina, my home, and I was giving a series on the seven last words of our Lord. And I was to give a message on Sunday and this was Saturday, on this very text, and I had my Greek testament with me, and I was meditating on the

great text and as I left Atlanta on Delta Airlines and made my way back toward Dallas, I remember still sitting in my seat with the Greek testament before me, just looking at the various words in the text and thinking about the message that I would be giving.

And I was impressed as I was trying to look at this text by the words Jesus cried with a loud voice. That seemed rather strange. Why did he cry with a loud voice? Why was that necessary in the first place? As I meditated upon it, it finally came to me that it is possible our Lord cried with a loud voice not for himself at all but rather for those around the cross. In other words, it was something that he uttered in the terror and anguish of that moment but also since, he was in full control of his faculties, with a view to others understanding what was happening there. So when he cried out with a loud voice, my God my God why hast thou forsaken me, it was not primarily for him it was for them around the cross that they might have this illuminating word concerning the sufferings that he was undergoing and what they really meant. And I am convinced that’s why we have, Jesus cried with a loud voice. I cannot prove that.

I think my studies of the death of the Christ goes back many, many years as most Christians do. There was a man by the name of Henry Mabry who was a missionary statesman who has written several books on the cross. They are simple books but nevertheless, at one time they were very good books as far as I was concerned, and I remember a story that he told of the preaching of the gospel in a tribe for the first time.

The missionary repeated the story of the cross, and as he finished, the chief of the tribe asked him to go over it again. So he repeated it again and finally when he came to the story of the cross again, and he was unfolding that, the chief stood up and interrupted him and said, “Hold on hold on. Take Jesus Christ down from the cross. Take him down I say Jesus Christ doesn’t belong on the cross. I belong on the cross.” And the Holy Spirit had illuminated his heart so that he understood that it really was someone dying in the stead of others. In perfect love he dies; for me he dies for me/ O all atoning sacrifice, I cling by faith to thee. May God help us to respond in that way. Let’s stand for the benediction.

“Immanuel’s Orphaned Cry: Disillusionment or Dependence?” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father we know that we shall never exhaust, shall only touch the fringes of the great truth of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee, Lord however, that the Scriptures do tell us that Thou has laid our iniquity upon him. What a heavy burden. And we praise Thee that our penalty is paid in our substitute, and we are free.

Lord we thank Thee, we worship Thee. We pray if there are some who have not believed in our Lord Jesus, O God touch their hearts and minds bring them to faith in whom to know is life eternal.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.