

Today, we are going to start a series in which we look at some of the things that Jesus said while hanging on the cross. I know that we have had Easter and celebrated the empty tomb, however, I thought it would be helpful if we look at the phrases, the phenomenally powerful and theologically deep phrases that Jesus uttered while on the cross.

Let's start in Matthew 27:37, to give you context on the first words we are going to look at, Jesus on the cross. The Bible says:

*Above (Jesus') head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

This is both mocking Jesus and having a dig at the Jews. Verse 38:

*Two robbers were crucified with him, one on His right and one on his left.*

We are going to look at these two thieves in the weeks to come. Verse 39 says:

*Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"*

They were quoting what He had said earlier, basically saying; "You said you were going to do this, so now here you are, where is your God in the middle of this time? Verse 41:

*In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked Him. "He saved others," they said, "but He can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him."*

The next four words really hit the heart of their mockery when they said:

*"He trusts in God."*

Where is your God now? Now admittedly, if you were there looking on at Jesus hanging on the cross, you might say something like they did as well. He trusts in God? Where is his God now? Because the bible tells us very clearly what they did to Jesus. They beat Him and abused Him so severely, that He didn't even look like a human being. Think about this; they took His shirt off, His clothing off, and whipped Him 39 times across the back with a leather whip that would have had pieces of glass and metal and sharp objects, that literally would rip His back open. Often times, this kind of scourging would leave His internal organs exposed. They blind folded Him, and with their big signet rings, they pounded Him again and again in the face, crying out, "Prophecy! Tell us who hit you!" Until His face was black and blue, and bloody. Then they put the crown of thorns, just to make fun of Him upon His brow. The sharpest thorns you can imagine and pushed it down where blood just covered His face. They kicked Him again and again, they spit on Him. They took the creation, the creator, put Him down on the ground on pieces of wood and drove stakes through His flesh, through His heels. History tells us that they would have stripped Him down naked. There He is, looking more like an animal than a man, hanging naked on the cross, and they were saying, "You still trust in God? Where is He now? Where is He now?"

Trust, the root word that is translated as trust in this portion of Scripture is spelled, peitho (pi'-tho). It means *to convince or to rely on with inward certainty*; to have full confidence or complete trust. You still trust in God? You see, it's very easy to trust in God when things are going well, but it's difficult to trust in God, for many of us, when life goes dark. All of us must answer at some point, the most fundamental question of life; Do you really trust God? From the beginning of creation, every force in hell would try to undermine the character and authority, and nature and goodness of God. Even in the form of a serpent, the evil one came to talk, he even said, "Are you going to trust Him? Did He really say, 'Don't eat from that fruit?' Are you really going to trust Him?" Because it is easy to trust Him in the light, but it's so much more difficult to trust Him when life goes dark.

Speaking of dark, here is what the Bible says about this time on the cross, Matthew 27:45-46: *From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all of the land.*

Midnight darkness at midday, as if God would say, I'm not going to let my sun shine on this event: *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice.*

In the Greek language, this means He was screaming. He had endured all of the abuse of men without complaining. But the moment God withdrew His presence, Jesus cried out, screaming: "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*"

And in the middle of darkness he screamed: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Matthew 27:45-46

Never one time did He complain when men did their worst. But, when God withdraws He screams out in agony, I can't take this, I don't understand this; why?

It's interesting to me that all through the Gospels, Jesus referred to God as His Father, His Abba, His Daddy. But at this moment, something happened. I don't know what it is, but instead of saying Daddy, Abba, Papa, Father; He says, "My God, my God, why..?" This is perhaps one of the saddest verses in the Bible. And unquestionably is one of the most confusing. Martin Luther, centuries ago said, "How can God forsake God?" Because that is what happened. The answer is I don't know, I cannot explain this. There are so many theological challenges in this question that I could not even begin to answer. How? Why? What? God His Son, forsake Him? I mean, Jesus had to know, did He know? Did He not know? Surely He knew, He was God! All these questions. He embraces the one question that almost all of us ask at some point in our lives. When it goes dark and we don't understand, we end up asking why.

All of us, at sometime or another, ask why? Why has this happened to me? I don't understand. And the reality is, we have to understand that we are not always going to understand. That's truth, because we only see part of the story. We can't understand everything from God's perspective. In fact, Paul said this very clearly in 1 Corinthians 13:12, when he was comparing now with eternity, he said: "*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*"

We just can't understand it all right now. We only see a part. It's a little bit like this: If I held up this and ask you, "What two words do you see?" Many of you would say, "I see nowhere." Others of you would say, "No, actually I see now here." You only see part at the beginning. A lot of people at hard times they say, God is nowhere to be found. Others who truly get to know God they say, "No He's now here, even though I don't understand, He is here." Even though I don't understand.

Here is what God says, Isaiah 55:8-9: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*" declares the Lord. "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*"

But the good news is that God's Word gives us some things that we need to remember when we don't understand.

There are three things that I believe: God is good! God is for me! God is with me! How do we get from the place in life where we are like, God is nowhere to be found in this circumstance, to the place that we say without a doubt that God is now here? Life moves. Things change. How do we get from here to here? We hold on to a God that is unchangeable. That's what we do.

Let's be honest, some of us are not in a crisis. Some of you here today, you feel blessed and praise God for it! You feel the presence of God in your life, and remembering who God is and holding on to Him in your life probably looks a little like this: It's calming, time with Him, you're reassured that He is good and He loves you. But in every life the winds change directions and the storms of life begin to blow. The challenges and the difficulties, and the betrayals, and the things you didn't expect, and all of a sudden holding on to who God is becomes a bit harder. Sometimes in life, you get to the point where the chaos and the hurt and the confusion are so great that holding on to who God is leaves you with white knuckles and worn out spiritual muscles. Today, we are going to focus on holding on to an unchanging and an immovable God. We are going to remember that God is good.

Here's why it's important: Because we tend to project our present situation on God. When we are confused and when things happen that we don't

understand, we say; "God, why have you left me in this place, I don't get it, where are you?" When things happen that are bad, we sometimes think maybe God isn't good because He's allowing this thing. But, our God transcends circumstance. That's what we hold onto. In the middle of cancer, God is good. In abuse, in hurts so deep that we can't even explain it, things that affect our lives for years, even then God is good. In grieving a loss, God is good. In war, in atrocious things like genocide, God is still good; and that will never change. He is always good. We remember, we cling onto that. God is always good.

The second thing: It's that God is for me. God is for me. Romans 8:31, Paul writes this: *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

I want you to just think about how ridiculous this idea is, it's unbelievable! God authored everything. The Bible says that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the great I am! He breathed the stars into space, and yet Scripture says He is for you. If that is true, and Scripture says that it is, that the God that created everything is for you; then friends, who and what circumstance could dare phase you? The all powerful God is your advocate, He believes in you, He has a dream and a purpose that is beyond the confusion of today. We hold onto that and we remember that God is always good. He is always for us.

Finally; He is with me! He is with us! In Hebrews 13:5, Scripture says: *Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*

Never, that is good news! No matter how alone you may feel. No matter how betrayed you may have been, God promises that He will never leave, that He is good, that He is for you, and that He is with you.

So, the question I would ask you is this: Do you trust God? Because it's easy to trust God in the light, but it's more difficult to trust God when life is dark.

Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us this: We are to *trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*

We are not going to understand everything.

But...

*In all of your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

The word in the Hebrew that is translated as acknowledge, is actually the word, Yada. Very literally, this word means to know. In all your ways, know God. In all you do know God. Even when you don't understand, know God; and He will make your paths straight.

Here's what I'm finding in my life: The better I know God the less I ask, "Why?" And the better I know God the more I ask, "What?" Instead of, "God, why is this happening? God, why are you doing this? Why aren't you doing what I want?" The better I get to know God, the more I ask, "What? God, what are you doing? God, what do you want me to see? God, what is your purpose? God, what is your plan?" When people say, "God is nowhere to be found." I say, "No, no, no! Because I know Him, God is now here." Instead of asking, "Why?" I'm learning to ask, "What?"

You may ask, why did God forsake Jesus? My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me? The answer is found in Scripture, 2 Corinthians 5:21, The Bible says:

*Christ never sinned! But God treated him as a sinner, so that Christ could make us acceptable to God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

Why did God have to forsake Jesus? Because Jesus took all humanity's sin on himself and God had to look away because he is too holy to allow sin in his presence sin. He died for our sins, so that our sins can be forgiven.

So, no matter what you're going through; never, ever forget that God is good. He is for you, and He will never, ever leave you. Trust him and learn to turn your 'why?' to a 'what?'