

The Forsaken King

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm a fighter, not a quitter. I wonder if you know who said those words this week. Somebody does. Liz Truss, of course. Somebody else said, I'm a fighter.

I will never quit anything. I wonder if you know who said those words. Those were words said by Stephen Gerrard, former Aston Villa boss. And I'm not sure whether Stephen Gerrard took his inspiration from Liz Truss.

Probably not a good idea. But if he did, he said pretty much exactly the same thing. Liz Truss, we know, resigned as prime minister the following day. And then Stephen Gerrard, he didn't last as long.

He was sacked as boss of Aston Villa within the hour of saying those words. So despite their bold claims to be fighters, both were forced to quit.

Both had a turbulent time in the different roles that they were performing, the different jobs they were doing. And both ended up losing those jobs. And I mention this because as Jesus moves towards his death in the Gospel of Mark, he has been making bold claims about his death.

[1 : 07] You could call what he is saying, fighting talk. Because it's been clear that Jesus knew that he would die. And so as he has approached his death, so far in the Gospel of Mark, he has had no intention whatsoever of quitting.

He has been steadfastly, calmly, and with composure moving towards his death, knowing that he is going to die. That is, until now, until we read of him praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Because in a reading from Mark chapter 14, Jesus is anything but bold, anything but calm and composed. We read that he is deeply distressed and troubled.

And he said, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. So why the change? What's happened to Jesus?

Why does it sound like he is falling apart in the Garden of Gethsemane? It's like he is caving in under the pressure, as if he wants to abort his mission.

[2 : 15] So what is going on here? Because Jesus knew that he was going to die. It was no surprise for him. And yet his words indicate that what he is about to experience is far worse than death itself.

What was it that he would experience? What could be worse than physical death? And not just physical death, but death by the torture of crucifixion.

Well, while Jesus knew he would be forsaken by his disciples, he also knew he would be condemned to physical death. Yet he knew that what he was about to experience, the physical nature, the physical aspect of his death, though he would be forsaken by his disciples and everybody else, he knew that he would face another kind of forsakenness as he hung on the cross. He would be God forsaken, which is infinitely worse than everything else. And it would make physical death seem like a paper cut in comparison.

And so this afternoon, what I'd like us to do is to consider why it had to be like this for Jesus and then what it means for us. And so three points. First of all, we're going to consider the forsakenness.

[3 : 40] Secondly, we're going to consider the greater forsakenness. And thirdly, how his forsakenness impacts us. So the forsakenness, the greater forsakenness, and how his forsakenness impacts us.

So first of all, the forsakenness. Jesus was forsaken by those closest to him. We saw that in our reading. It's there in verse 27 to 31, and then again in verse 43 to 52.

And Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is really sandwiched between these two stories, these two parts of the narrative where Jesus is forsaken by those closest to him.

And so as Jesus approaches his death, his focus is not merely on the human forsakenness by his disciples. The focus is also on the God-forsakenness that Jesus would experience.

And we'll come to the God-forsakenness in a moment, but first let's look at how the disciples would forsake him. Jesus makes a chilling prediction. Verse 27, You know all, you all will fall away, Jesus said to them.

[4 : 50] For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Jesus is quoting here from the prophet Zechariah, who speaks of a shepherd being struck and then his sheep being scattered.

And it's a prophecy about the death of Jesus. So Jesus is the shepherd who God would strike and the disciples are the sheep who would be scattered. And so it was no surprise for Jesus to be deserted by his disciples.

Peter, as always, makes a bold claim. He says he'll be loyal to Jesus come what may. Verse 29, Peter declared, Even if all fall away, I will not.

And he means well, but he would disown Jesus. Verse 30, Truly I tell you, Jesus answered today, yes, tonight, before the cock crows twice, you yourself will disown me three times.

But Peter insisted emphatically, Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And all the others said the same. So nobody thought they'd deny Jesus, especially Peter.

[5 : 58] But he would, not just once or twice, but three times. And all of this would play out exactly as Jesus said it would. So let's just skip to the beginning of this betrayal and the disciples deserting Jesus, then forsaking him, to verse 43 to 50.

And now we're going to come back and look at the incident in the Garden of Gethsemane. Because in 43 to 50, Judas appears with the religious authorities to arrest Jesus. He betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

Jesus was then seized and arrested. But Jesus says, verse 48 and 49, Am I leading a rebellion? That you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me.

Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the scriptures must be fulfilled. So Jesus is arrested, unjustly arrested, and yet he goes along with it. And we know why, because when you read his words, he says, but the scriptures must be fulfilled. So Jesus is saying, this is God's way. This is how it is supposed to happen.

[7 : 06] And so his death is no accident. He is not a victim here. Instead, he is a volunteer. So while his friends would forsake him, and his enemies would arrest him and seek to kill him, they're all in fact playing into God's hands, accomplishing God's purposes without even being aware of it.

And yet, through it all, Jesus is left. He's forsaken. And he would have felt it. Betrayed by those closest to him.

Then we read in verse 50, Then everyone deserted him and fled. Now, before we move on, did you notice the first streaker ever recorded in human history?

Verse 51 and 52, A young man wearing nothing but a linen garment was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. Now, it is such an odd detail to include, isn't it, at this point in the narrative.

Some suggest that this could be Mark himself, the author of this gospel. But Mark is just too embarrassed to say that it's him. And that he was there.

[8 : 19] And that he witnessed all of this. And yet he was just as bad as everybody else for forsaking Jesus. So the point is, every one of Jesus' friends had failed him, deserted him, betrayed him, forsaken him.

And yet this human forsakenness is nothing compared to the God forsakenness that Jesus would experience. So that's the first point, the forsakenness, human forsakenness, if you like.

Next, let's look at the greater forsakenness, which is the God forsakenness that Jesus would experience. Now, Jesus' reaction here in the Garden of Gethsemane is nothing like anything you read anywhere else in all of the four gospels.

Because what we get here is a rare insight into the emotional life of Jesus. Where we hear from his own lips the torment he feels on the inside.

Now, remember, Jesus was fully human. And so we get to see the depths of his agony right here. Let's read verse 32 to 34.

[9 : 31] They went to a place called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and

troubled.

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He said to them, stay here and keep watch. Now, Jesus' words reveal his mental, his emotional state.

The Greek word translated deeply distressed means astonished. And when we read that Jesus was troubled, the sense is that he was completely overwhelmed with horror.

This was an experience like no other. That's the intensity of emotion that Jesus was experiencing.

No wonder he says, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

So just think, before Jesus faced his body being tortured, it was his mind and it was his soul that were tortured first. Well, why?

[10:37] Why? Well, Jesus was shaken by the prospect of what would happen to him. And so he is praying in full awareness of what is coming just a short distance down the road.

Now, of course, Jesus knew his death was part of God's purposes for his life and for this world. And yet we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that Jesus' death was somehow easy for him to face. Because as the son of God, Jesus took to himself a truly human nature. And so while still fully God, Jesus became everything it means to be fully human.

And so it was natural that his human nature would fear suffering and death. And yet it wasn't just the physical aspect of his death that distressed Jesus.

Because there was something more painful than the suffering of crucifixion. Now, Jesus knew and frequently said that he would rise again.

[11:39] And so he knew the resurrection was coming. But what overwhelmed Jesus more than this physical suffering was this impending God-forsakenness that he would experience as he hung on the cross.

And he feared this terrible experience more than anything else. And that's why he cries out to his father, verse 35, going a little further, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him.

Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. He's praying, if possible, could this be avoided?

But it's not just what Jesus prays here that is significant. It is who Jesus prays to. Because he prays Abba, Father. Abba is the Aramaic word for Father.

And it's a term of intimacy, of closeness, of trust, and of affection. And it describes an exclusive relationship. One that Jesus had enjoyed for all eternity.

[12:49] And so Jesus prays to his father, take this cup from me. So what is the cup that he's talking about? Well, there is the cup of God's wrath.

Now, throughout the scriptures and the Old Testament, the prophets refer to the cup as the cup of God's wrath. It's a cup referring to God's anger, God's wrath, God's judgment on sin and evil. And it speaks of God pouring out his wrath on sinners in righteous judgment. So for example, in Jeremiah 25, God said, take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

So drinking from the cup would mean alienation from God, to be under God's anger, judgment, wrath. And so Jesus was well aware that his mission was to drink this cup, the cup of God's wrath as he hung on the cross.

And this is what began to weigh heavily upon Jesus as he prays in the garden. And he wants to be spared from it because he knew he would face the wrath of God against sin, even though he was sinless and innocent.

[14:07] And so in his humanity, he shrank from such an awful prospect. Just a quick illustration. A while back, I read about the tragic accident of an 18-month-old boy who was crushed under his father's Land Rover.

The dad didn't realize that his boy had escaped from the house and he had reversed his car back over his boy, not knowing he was there, and crushed him.

And the coroner called it a tragic accident. And it's a shocking story, but I simply mention it because the death of Jesus was no tragic accident.

And yet we can lose something of the shock of what was really going on as Jesus died. Because it was on the cross that Jesus took and drank the cup of God's anger against sin, our sin.

And so God the Father's wrath fell on Jesus as he died on the cross. And I think this is where many people have got a problem with God because they don't like the idea that God is a God of anger or

God is a God of wrath.

[15:19] And maybe you're one of those people. Yeah, I'm sure we can all accept that God is a loving God and that's a good thing. But it's maybe more difficult to accept that God could be angry because surely anger is a bad thing, isn't it?

And yet our mistake is that we tend to think of anger simply in human terms as something that is unpredictable, something that is uncontrolled. And yet God's anger is very different. It is his settled, controlled, righteous, just, personal hostility towards all sin and all evil.

And so God is right to be angry when it comes to sin. He can't just tolerate it as if it didn't matter or sweep it under the carpet as if it didn't need justice and punishment.

He's got to judge it. He's got to be angry if he is a loving God because God's anger is actually a product of his love. So God is a God of love and also a God of anger.

Or to push this further, just think loving people do get angry. If you love someone and they're being hurt or punished or abused in some way, then you're right to get angry.

[16:34] And the anger is not in opposition to your love, but the anger is because of your love. And this is why the death of Jesus is such good news for the world because the loving God is angry at our sin.

It does deserve his wrath. It must be punished. He must do something about it if he is going to be just. And he has done something about it. He did it at the cross where Jesus died because Jesus came to drink the cup of God's wrath against our sin so that we never have to.

And that's why Jesus prayed as he did in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew he was taking the cup and he knew he was making himself the object of God's wrath as he hung on the cross.

Let me try to illustrate. Just think of a magnifying glass for a moment. I got my first proper big, thick, round magnifying glass for collecting stamps when I was a wee boy.

I did enjoy using it for collecting stamps. That was fine. You could see small details. But I had even more fun with my magnifying glass when I got outside on a hot, sunny day.

[17:49] Because I realized you could set small things on fire. And you could set even bigger things on fire. And I soon discovered if I could hold my annoying cousin Kevin down for long enough, I could cause him a bit of pain as well.

And isn't it amazing how all these rays from the sun can bend into such a sharp point of intensity that they can burn something? And so as we think about what Christ endured on the cross, just imagine somehow this giant magnifying glass through which passes all of God's wrath, his anger, his judgment on sin, and it all bends down to such a sharp point of intensity that it lands on one man at one moment in history.

And that's Jesus. That is the full and furious wrath of God that Jesus experienced as, if you like, all hell converged on him as he hung on the cross.

It's no wonder that he cried out to his father for this cup to be taken from him. Jonathan Edwards, who's an 18th century minister, he has a powerful sermon on this passage, the Garden of Gethsemane, and it's called Christ's Agony.

And he makes a fascinating observation by saying this. He says, if just the taste and glimpse of these sufferings were enough to throw the eternal Son of God into shock and to nearly kill him in the anticipation of them, what was the actual full experience of those sufferings on the cross really like?

[19:32] And so can you see it was in the garden that Jesus was anticipating the full extent of God's wrath. Jesus would have to drink the cup. And yet Jesus is willing to do it.

That's why he says, verse 36, yet not what I will, but what you will. So of course, Jesus was willing to die for you, for me, his enemies, out of love.

But he didn't just go to the cross because he loves us, though he does. He went to the cross out of obedience to the will of his Father.

So unlike the first Adam in the Garden of Eden who disobeyed, Jesus, the last Adam, here in the Garden, obeys. And it's with this courageous resolve that he allows himself to be arrested, he allows himself to be killed.

Because there's no other way for you, for me, for the world to escape the intense fire of God's burning wrath against our sin, no other way than for Jesus to take it at the cross.

[20:42] And so Jesus' ultimate desire we see here is to face the God-forsakenness of the cross. Why? So that we could avoid it. So there's the forsakenness and then there's the greater forsakenness.

But let's close and think about how his forsakenness impacts us. Because in the Garden, Jesus was willing to be forsaken by God on the cross so that you and I would never have to be. That's why his prayer in the Garden and then his death on the cross impact all of us. Whether you're here today and you'd call yourself a Christian or not, the death of Jesus impacts you and me. Because as Jesus prayed to his Father, he knew that either he would have to accept the cup of God's wrath or we would have to. Either he would face hell or we would have to. And so what did Jesus do? He said to his Father, not what I will, but what you will. He's saying to his Father God, I will obey you.

[21 : 49] That's what he's saying. If it's them or me, Jesus is saying, let it be me, not them. Save them. Let your anger fall on me. He was willing for God to pour out his anger on him, to go to the cross, to absorb the wrath of God so we could avoid it.

And that is why Christianity is such good news. It is the best news, better than any other religion or philosophy because no one but Jesus Christ can deal with our greatest problem in life. And that is our separation and our alienation from God because of our sin, which leads to God forsaken us forever in hell. And yet the good news is that Jesus was ready to come and bear the punishment we deserve so we could be set free.

And he did this fully on the cross, taking the weight of God's justice, anger, wrath against our sin on himself.

And so not only did Jesus have to die for us, but we can tell as we read what he says here, Jesus was glad to die for us. And isn't that why we need to turn away from our sin and believe in Jesus Christ and accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in our place?

[23 : 15] Because if we don't, the only alternative is to face the wrath of God for our sin ourselves. And that is the fear of everybody who hasn't gone to Jesus to receive forgiveness for their sins.

And so it is naive and it is foolish and stupid to believe that we can somehow excuse our sin or that our sin doesn't really matter. Why ever would God send his son, Jesus, to die and face this wrath on the cross if there was another way?

Clearly, there is no other way. And that's why Jesus submitted himself to the only way in the garden. Without that way, the alternative, the only alternative, is God forsakenness forever in hell. And so Jesus faced God forsakenness so we would never have to. And so if you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, then can you see the need to go to Jesus to have your sin forgiven, to have him pay for it on the cross so you don't pay for it yourself on God's judgment day?

And if you are a follower of Jesus, then how does this apply to you and to me? Well, like the disciples, the reality is that we all fail Jesus Christ.

[24 : 43] We all let him down. We forsake him, we deny him, we disown him, we desert him. So often, we are not the followers of Jesus that we ought to be.

And so do you think that Jesus is surprised by our sin and failure? Of course he isn't. He's no more surprised when we let him down than he was when his disciples let him down.

And so we should never think that there is no way back for us when we failed. How can you say that? Well, we pick this up in Jesus' words to his disciples after he tells them they'll all fall away. Verse 27 and 28. Jesus said, but after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Well, what does he mean going ahead of them into Galilee? He means that he would die and then he would rise and then he would meet them after his resurrection in Galilee.

And of course, he didn't pick this up at the time, but what a promise for weak failures like his disciples. Jesus is saying, I'll see you again. You'll be forgiven.

[25 : 52] You've failed me. You've let me down at my point of greatest need, but I'll see you again. Even before they'd failed, Jesus was offering grace to them.

And so don't ever think there is no grace for you when you fail. Even if you've blown it and you wonder whether, could God still love me?

He knows what I've done, but does he still love me? Well, don't ever doubt that he does. No matter what the failure or sin, there's always forgiveness.

Isn't that the very reason why Jesus came to die? So that our sins could be forgiven. And so the first thing we must do when we fail is run to Jesus and confess our sin and our weakness and our failure and ask for his forgiveness.

Because though we forsake Jesus, he will never ever forsake us. How do we know? Well, he's proved it, hasn't he? If Jesus went through the overwhelming sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane for you and he didn't forsake you there, and if Jesus went all the way to the cross to experience God forsakenness for you and he didn't even forsake you there, then there's absolutely no way that he'll ever forsake you.

[27 : 17] Not now, not in this life, not ever. because Jesus was forsaken by God on the cross so you can be accepted by God forever.

So go and live. Live for him in the light of that amazing reality. ■ ting Stretch Come Let's learn him we are artificial matter if he has all that country and let's take home to Parkinson's brown Spider by Mothererver that