

## Forsaken

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, March 10, 2020)

Isaiah 49:13-16: <sup>13</sup> Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

<sup>14</sup> But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.”

<sup>15</sup> Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. <sup>16</sup> See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

1 Kings 19:1-10 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup>Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” <sup>3</sup>Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup>But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” <sup>5</sup>Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” <sup>6</sup>He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. <sup>7</sup>The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” <sup>8</sup>He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. <sup>9</sup>At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>10</sup>He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

Matthew 27:45-49 <sup>45</sup>From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>46</sup>And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” <sup>47</sup>When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” <sup>48</sup>At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. <sup>49</sup>But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

Have you ever felt forsaken? Have you ever given your best to do a good job, and nobody seems to notice or care? Or maybe you have been like Elijah, steadfast in your faith, zealous for the Lord, and convinced there was not another person in the whole world who was as faithful to God. Or maybe you have suffered illness accompanied by great pain, and all you want is to be left alone, convinced that even God has abandoned you, forsaken you, leaving you struggle through these bleak hours on your own failing strength. Whatever your circumstances, whenever you felt alone, abandoned, forsaken, I suspect that your situation, your pain, your probable outcome, were in no way as bleak as our Lord faced as he hung on the cross. Remember, he died alone, in a way and under circumstances that we may never fully comprehend. Perhaps it was Psalm 22 that came to his mind, but certainly the feelings expressed in that Psalm must have been his own. The pain, the agony, the hatred that surrounded him, all must have made him feel forsaken.

Why do we get the feeling that God has forsaken us? Where does that feeling come from, because to tell the truth, it is the other way around. It is we who have forsaken God. Take Adam and Eve, for example. Not content with Paradise, with the fact that God had provided them with all that they would ever want or need, they forsook the Lord by reaching for what God had forbidden. God should have forsaken THEM, not Jesus Christ on his cross, but Adam and Eve in the garden. Why didn’t God forsake them then? Instead God provided them skins to cover the nakedness of their shame, as well as a promise, and a future hope beyond what they deserved for their disobedience. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. We’ve reached for what God has forbidden, in spite of all that God has given. Why hasn’t God forsaken us?

Or take Cain, for example. Not content with farms and fields and family, with the honor of being “the first-born of all creation,” Cain forsook the Lord by reaching for a weapon. What was it? A rock, a stick, a tool?

Whatever instrument of destruction he used, it was propelled by hate. Cain rose up and murdered his brother. God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Cain in his field. Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead God put a mark on him, making it possible for Cain to go on living in spite of his great shame. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. We've hated like that and been jealous, and there are times when it has led to serious situations, hopefully not involving rocks or sticks, but still hurtful. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Or take Noah, for example. Not content with being the only family in the world rescued from universal destruction, Noah forsook the Lord by reaching for the bottle. He thanked the Lord and then tried to escape his troubles by getting roaring drunk. God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Noah in his stupor. Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead God let the rainbow stand as well as the blessing it symbolized. God went ahead as he had planned and began over anyway, with Noah. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. We've sought our own answers or searched for escapes from reality, in spite of the salvation God has given us so lavishly. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Or take David, for example. Not content with everything that God had given him—the kingdom, the power, and the glory—David forsook the Lord by reaching for another man's wife, and eventually another man's life. God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but David the adulterer in his sin. Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead God claimed him yet as the apple of his eye, and gave him the honor of being the royal ancestor of the very Son of God, a man whose name would be revered throughout history: the city of David, the star of David, the house of David. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. Maybe not exactly the same way, but don't we always seem to want more? We never seem to have enough of anything, and we so often want the very thing that is beyond our reach, as we say, the grass that is greener on the other side of the fence. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Or take Jonah, for example. Not content with a call from God himself, to bear the honor of being the Lord's own messenger, Jonah forsook the Lord by trying to put some distance between himself and God, between himself and God's Word, between himself and God's call, between himself and those who needed him. God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Jonah in the belly of the great fish. Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead God provided him a type of resurrection, the opportunity to change directions and begin again, and the kind of success that no other prophet in the Bible ever enjoyed. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. We've run away from our assignments from the Lord, neglected his call, we have wanted justice our way rather than the mercy which the Lord desires. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Or take the disciples James and John, for example. Not content with the very fellowship of the Lord, with being the inner circle of those whom the Lord befriended and in whom he confided, they forsook the Lord by reaching for places of honor, saying, "Grant that we may sit at your right hand and at your left when you come in your kingdom." They sought the glory without the process, the crown without the cross. God should have forsaken THEM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but James and John in their pride. Why didn't God forsake them then? Instead God honored them with the crown of life, one with a glorious vision of heaven, the other with an early entrance into it. Jesus bore the cross instead, that they might wear the crowns. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. We've reached for glory, recognition, peace without pain. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Or take Peter, for example. Not content with the Savior's promise ... and his warning, Peter forsook the Lord by reaching for safety, the shadows of anonymity, a blatant failure to witness for the Lord. God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Peter in his denial. Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead God provided him a personal invitation back into the circle of the faithful, and personal assurance of the Lord's continued love and care. Come to think of it, I have forsaken God in this way, as we all have. We have denied our Lord. remaining silent when we should have spoken. And we have spoken when we should have remained silent. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Other examples of forsaking the Lord could certainly be found. Thomas doubted. Sarah laughed. Judas coveted. Elijah despaired. Joseph was proud. Moses grew impatient. And you and I, we are among all of them! Why hasn't God forsaken ME? Why hasn't God forsaken us? We can all cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken ME?" The answer is there. God left his Son, his dear and only Son, to be forsaken that I might never be! My Savior was forsaken there ... for ME and for YOU! Amen