

By a show of hands how many of y'all have seen the movie, "O Brother Where Art Thou"? There is this great scene early on in the movie where the protagonists are arguing and bickering with one another about a pocket watch.

Pete raises his fist and says, "You stole from my kin!"

"Who was fixin to betray us," is Everett's smug reply.

Pete shouts back, "But you didn't know that when you took it."

Everett replies, "So I took it till I did know."

Pete stops for just a minute to make sure he understood what Everett just said, and then he fires back (twice as mad as before), "Dat don't make no sense!"

That don't make no sense. Have y'all ever looked at the Bible and thought, "That does not make sense!" "Do wha...?" **(pause for a response)** Yeah... Maybe... Here's one I have been puzzling on for a week. In Romans

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"

(Romans 8:38-39, RSV)

8:38-39 the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome;

But in this morning's passage Jesus is hanging on the cross. Jesus has been nailed to the cross like a piece of meat. Jesus has been betrayed by those He came to save; falsely convicted and handed over to those who occupied the Promised Land. The Romans then beat Him, caned Him, scourged Him and made fun of him before forcing Jesus to carry His own cross and nailing Jesus to it. There on the cross Jesus cries out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, la'ma sabach-tha'ni," that is, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me' (Matthew 27:46)?

How can the Apostle Paul write to the Romans saying nothing can separate us from the love of God when Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" **(pause)** I have wondered about this all week long. At first I thought well maybe Paul did not know about this story of Jesus asking God why God had left Jesus to die on the cross. So I did some digging. I discovered this text is not just in Matthew. This text is in Mark as well. We know Mark is the oldest of the four Gospels and was around while Paul was preaching and starting churches. It is not likely Paul would have missed or not heard this story. So I did a little more digging.

I discovered what Jesus said on the cross is actually a prayer. It was a well-known prayer found in the Psalms. Psalm 22:1 says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" **(pause)** Well how do you like that? Jesus wasn't whining and complaining on the cross. Jesus was actually meditating on Scripture. In Jesus' darkest hour Jesus was putting His thoughts on Scripture. I spent a little time on the Psalm Jesus was praying and meditating on from the cross. Here's what I discovered about Psalm 22. Psalm 22 starts with the Psalmist struggling with feeling alone and separated from God. Then the Psalmist remembers just who God is and where God is found. The Psalmist remembers all of the ways God has looked out, and provided for the Psalmist. Even though the Psalmist is surrounded by those who would make fun of them, and seem intent on hurting the Psalmist the Psalmist chooses to remember what God has done and to trust that God is never really far off. The Psalmist then transitions away from their current situation, and instead focuses on the ways the Psalmist can share with others the good news of what God has done. This leads me to the question, was Jesus really asking why God had forsaken Him, or was Jesus once again encouraging us to seek God in our times of trial?

Jesus' body was unable to escape the misery this world can offer. Jesus' body was in terrible shape. I cannot imagine a way Jesus' body did not ache, itch, bleed, and in all imaginable ways scream out in pain. If Jesus

had just focused on the pain then I imagine Jesus would have absolutely felt very far from God. (pause) I know I have done that. Have y'all ever done that? There is something about pain – whether physical or mental which causes a tape, like a tape recorder to be played over and over again in the mind. Think about it this way. By a show of hands how many of y'all remember thinking as a kid, "I'll never say that to my kids," and then low and behold when we have kids of our own it flies out of our mouths, "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about," or, "You're not leaving this table until you eat those vegetables," or, "couches are for sitting and not standing," or my favorite and yours: y', "as long as you live under my roof you'll live by my rules!" Have any of y'all caught yourselves doing that? (pause) We all have those tapes in our heads, and they get replayed all the time. The frustrating thing is we make new tapes and play those tapes over and over again in our heads as well. The new tapes sound like, "I'm sad, I'm hurting, It's all my fault. It can't be my fault. It has to be their fault." We fall into the trap of those tapes all the time and the more we listen to them the further and further away from God we feel.

The price of playing those tapes over and over again is we become focused on the tape. We become focused on the story those tapes tell. "My life hurts, and it must be their fault." The story the tapes in our heads tell and the blame they lay become all we think about. We stop thinking about God. Before you know it we feel as though God has forsaken us. There is an earthquake, a tornado, a drought, a flood, a hurricane. God has forsaken us because of our sinfulness. These natural disasters are God's punishment because of what "they" did. In Germany in the 1940's it was the Jews. In the United States in the mist of World War II it was the Japanese immigrants. In the 1960's it was African-Americans. After 911 it was the Muslims. Today it might as well be the gays. (pause) My sisters and brothers I am going to tell you the truth. It is not any of those things, or people. The pain and misery we feel is largely the result of the tapes we play over and over again in our heads.

Now I think I can say with certainty that Jesus' crucifixion was bad. God willing, Jesus' crucifixion was a worse thing than anything any of us will ever experience. There as Jesus' was slowly, agonizingly dying on the cross Jesus did not focus on His pain. Jesus did not focus on his sorrow. Jesus meditated upon God's Word. Jesus understood how the Psalmist felt; cut off from God with the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." I sincerely believe in Jesus' meditation Jesus remembered the words in Psalm 22:3-5;

I think Jesus is giving us a clue about how we all should act in our moments of pain, and sorrow and loss. Jesus is

"Yet thou art holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In thee our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and thou didst deliver
them.
To thee they cried, and were saved;
in thee they trusted, and were not
disappointed."

(Psalm 22:3-5, RSV)

reminding us we have a choice. The powers of this world are going to try to pull us away from God's love, but they cannot unless we let them. I think Paul is right when he says nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We have a choice. Will we chose to play the tapes we have always played in our minds? Will we choose to only listen to the voices which affirm our fears and sorrows? Or will we choose to put God first, to read God's word and to let God's word become the tape that plays over and over again in our heads? Hear the good news. Let this be your new tape. You are not alone. None of us are ever alone, or separated from God's love. God sent God's only Son so that every one of us can have the choice to put God first and experience abundant life even in our moments of pain and want and despair. Even when we feel lonelier than we have ever felt before. Even when we have felt forsaken by God putting our focus on God helps us to remember what is truly good. God has never left us alone. God will never leave us alone. That is good news. Put that in your tape recorder, hit repeat and push play.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen