

Answering Jesus' Question

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[0 : 00] Thank you so much, Phil. Yes, we're going to turn to this passage and we're going to focus, in particular on the words of verse 34. Let me read them again. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi Eloi Lema Sabah Thani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? One of the amazing things about Jesus, one of the many amazing things about Jesus, is his courage. You see that all through his life, but you especially see it in this chapter and also in the chapter before, in chapter 14. Jesus is so courageous as he approaches these final hours leading up to the cross. And if you were to read through the passages, the last couple of chapters, the chapter that we read there in chapter 14, in many ways, you would summarise Jesus by saying that he is strong. In many, many different ways, Jesus displays incredible strength, considering all that he was up against. You can see that in chapter 14. You can see in chapter 15, I'm going to pick out a couple of examples for you. I won't read all of that, but that passage on the screen before you is describing when Judas, one of the twelve disciples, came into the garden to betray Jesus. And there's a confrontation between Judas and the soldiers that are with him and Jesus and his disciples. And in it all, Jesus just seems so strong. He's wise and careful. He responds to Judas without panicking, without doing anything foolish. He just says to him, as you can see at the bottom of the screen there, have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to catch me? Day after day, I was with you in the temple teaching and you did not cease me, but let the scriptures be fulfilled. You see the same when Jesus is taken to the high priest. You see that just a few verses later in chapter 14, people stood up. They bore false witness against Jesus, accusing him of all sorts of things. He's being questioned and through it all, he's strong. He doesn't give an answer. He doesn't succumb to pressure. There's an incredible courage about Jesus in these moments. And it culminates when the high priest says to him, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed? In verse 61 there. And Jesus said, I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. Now, I don't know exactly what the scene would have looked like when Jesus was before the high priest, but I'm pretty sure he would have been surrounded by many, many threatening people. Most of all, the high priest, interrogating him. And yet Jesus had the strength and courage to say these words. The pattern continues into the chapter that's before us, that Phil read for us. Now we're with Pilate. He says to Jesus, are you the king of the Jews? Jesus says, you've said so. He's standing before the Roman governor, the symbol of all the power of the Roman Empire. At that time, Jesus remains so strong. They accused him of many things. Pilate against it. Have you no answer? To make see how many the charges they bring against you, but Jesus made no further answer so that Pilate was amazed. What strength and courage from Jesus. And you get the same pattern in other Gospels all the way to the cross itself. We go into John's Gospel. Jesus is on the cross and there on the cross, he looks at his mother and he sees John, the disciple whom he loves, standing nearby. He says to his mother, woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother. From that hour, the disciple took it into his own home. That's one of my favorite moments in the Gospels because you've got Jesus in the midst of his suffering, intensifying more and more and more. And yet he takes the time to care for his mother and to make sure that she will be okay. And the final example of Jesus' strength is with the feet from the cross from Luke's Gospel. The thief turned and said to Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And [4 : 35] Jesus replies with these incredible words. Truly I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise. Now, I was thinking a wee bit about this earlier. Often in my mind, you know, I've imagined the thief. In my mind, I have the thief on the left. I don't know why that's the one I have, but I have the thief looking this way in my mind saying, today will you remember me when you come into your kingdom. And in my mind, I have Jesus replying saying, truly, I say to you today, you'll be

with me in paradise. And you know, this kind of like a, in my mind, I've always imagined, you know, these words coming out just quite clearly and effortlessly from Jesus. But what I forget, what I've probably never even thought of is the fact that even to speak on the cross required incredible strength. Jesus would have been gasping for air. And as he said these words, you'll be with me in paradise. He'd have been mustering all of his strength to do so. So, throughout it all, from the garden, when Judas comes to the high priest, to pilot, to the cross, you see an incredible display of strength in Jesus. But by the time we get to this verse, everything's different. Here, we see weakness. Here, at the ninth hour, Jesus cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And instead of making us think in terms of courage and strength, it makes us think in terms of anguish, agony and weakness. And this is one of these verses which I'm sure is very familiar to us all, but we never wanted to lose its impact in terms of what it's actually saying. Here, we see just how much agony Jesus endured. Here, we see what perhaps I should better say. Here, we hear a cry of desperation. Jesus is weak and alone. And this is such a contrast to what we've seen in the Gospels beforehand. Because if you, in your mind, go back through the Gospels, you'll see that so often people came to Jesus with questions. And he always had the answer. That's one of the many amazing things about Jesus.

People would look at him. Sometimes people looked at him with suspicion. And so they would ask him a question to try and catch him out. Sometimes people would look at what he was doing. And they didn't understand what was going on. So they would ask him. And sometimes people were just curious to find out more. So they would ask Jesus about what he was doing. He was constantly facing questions. And he always had the answer. He always had brilliant examples. And here's just three examples of questions.

John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and the people came to Jesus and said, why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast? Jesus gave them an answer. A few verses later, the Pharisees were saying to, why are they doing what's not lawful on the Sabbath? Again, Jesus was able to answer.

Later on in Mark nine, they asked Jesus, why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? Jesus was bombarding with questions. He was always able to answer them. Jesus always had the answer.

[8 : 59] He was always asking the questions. But not now. Now it's different. Now Jesus is the one asking the question. Jesus is the one crying out. Why?

I think it's good to pause there for just a wee second because none of us will ever experience what Jesus is experiencing in this moment. But there's a tiny sense in which we can relate because there are so many times in life where we are confronted by that question why. Whether that's things we experience in our lives and that could be through things going wrong in our lives, maybe with our careers or our relationships or our health, it might be when we look on and see other people suffering, either people that we know or people in the world around us. It might be when we see the events of history going in a way that seems unthinkable, we find ourselves asking the question why, why, why. And at a basic level we're being reminded that it's okay to ask that question, it's okay to have that feeling.

So she's like why, why has this not worked out for me? Why did that have to happen? Even looking at events in Ukraine just now, you look on and you think why on earth is that happening? Why, why, why, why is that happening? It just seems so senseless. And so whether that's something massive like the Ukraine crisis or whether something just in your own life that's hurt you or left scarred or that you wish was different, either your physical health, your mental health, your career path, your relationships, whatever it may be, we often find ourselves asking the question why. And at perhaps the most simple level of all this verse is telling us that Jesus has been there. He's been there and actually way further because for the guy who's had all the answers all the way along to be crying out why, you know the situation must be utterly desperate. But it's just a great reminder that when you find yourself just kind of crushed and perplexed by that question why, you can go to Jesus and say look Lord, I am finding myself just asking why. It's okay to come to Jesus with that question. It's okay to feel like that. We actually all feel like that. And sometimes there's you know there's a sense in which it can't be answered. And I think that this is a really important lesson to learn in regard to sin. We'll say more about this in a moment but I want to just kind of mention this just now that there is a sense and it's important to remember this is a sense in which sin is always stupid and senseless and unreasonable and irrational. And sometimes we can find ourselves, you know we

want to try and have an explanation for everything. We want to kind of see why this has gone wrong in my life and we think well maybe it's because of this and oh well maybe it's because of that and if I can just figure out why that went wrong in my life. If I can just sort of piece together even though it didn't go the way I wanted it to go. If I can just piece it all together then I'll be able to get my head around it. I can understand why you want to do that but there's a sense in which we've actually got to recognise that sin doesn't work like that. Sin doesn't give out explanations. Sin doesn't follow coherent paths. Sin is just awful and messy and rubbish. That's why it's such a problem and that's why it will very very often leave us asking the question why. And sometimes you know instead of going to God and saying Lord give me an explanation as to why this went wrong in my life I think we'd be better off going to Jesus and saying please give me the comfort I need because this has gone wrong in my life and I don't really know why. I think we're far better going to Jesus for just a hug and a help rather than an explanation because very often sin provides no explanations. So Jesus is here at a point of total weakness and we see the wisest person who's ever lived crying out why. He's weak. He's in anguish. He doesn't understand and he's crying out to God. But what I want us to do tonight just for a few minutes is to ask can we answer Jesus's question. So in other words when Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me. What is the answer to that question. And you know Jesus doesn't provide it here and no no explanations given you know like at other times in the Gospels when a voice from heaven would speak doesn't happen here. But still can we answer this question. Can we explain why this had to happen. And I think we can or at least we can to a certain extent and whilst we have to remember that you know we'll never really get to the full depth so what this verse is pointing to I think we can offer some answers to Jesus's massive question. And I want to suggest three. So why did the Father forsake his son. Reason number one is because of the seriousness of sin. It's because of the seriousness of sin and that takes us back to the verse that we read at the start and that Phil highlighted in his prayer that's just a massively important verse in verse 21 of 2 Corinthians chapter five for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin. That's a wonderful explanation of what happened on the cross. Jesus was made sin in order for us to be saved. John spoke about that John the Baptist when he said behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world that was at the heart of Jesus's mission and he was the one to come and to solve the problem of sin. The one who's come to take sin away and a key part of that is because there is a need for reconciliation. You can see that spoken of here reconciliation, reconciliation, reconciliation. Oh it's there as well. It's there again. Now reconciliation is necessary where there's enmity, where a relationship has broken and that's exactly what sin has done to humanity. Sin has left humanity and God separated, has left us at enmity and it's so important that we recognise how big that problem is. I think one of the biggest problems that we face as Christians and as people who aren't yet Christians and actually as a society all around us is that we think that sin is not that big a deal and

[17 : 43] I think that's a huge problem both in terms of trying to reach out to the world, the Gospel but also in terms of our own discipleship we tend to play down the seriousness of sin and that's why it's a good prayer to pray Lord help me to see how awful sin actually is because sin is just awful. It's the worst. It causes so much problems, so much damage and it's caused such a massive gulf between us and God and of course that arises from the nature and character of God and from the nature and reality of sin. God is holy, he's pure, he's perfect and sin is the opposite of all of that and that's a really important thing to remember that sin is not the stuff that's just like not quite up to God's standard or not just quite compatible with God. Sin is just the absolute opposite of God. It's always good to remember that if you want to define sin, the key to defining sin is understanding what God is like because sin is the opposite of what God is like. Sin is the rebellion against God. Sin and God are totally incompatible and this is where I think we can sometimes make the mistake that we tend to think of sin in terms of being naughty or bad. So we think of like sin getting caught speeding or sin misbehaving in school or sin having a little bit too much to drink or something and it's like and we do all these things and we make these mistakes but we get away with them don't we? So you know when I drive too fast through Chorbus you get away with it 99 times out of 100 don't you? And you think well it's not that bad, it's not that serious and we tend to think of sin in those terms.

We mustn't do that, that's a poor illustration for sin. We need to think in terms that are much more categorical in the sense that they are totally incompatible with one another.

So what I sometimes find helpful to think about is you think about an operating table and you think about somebody, I've never been in a theatre, some of you may well have been in times but I often think of you've got these kind of tools or whatever you call it the surgeon uses, the scalpel, hook whatever, I don't know what they use, the needle and everything. How many of them is it okay to not bother sterilising? How many of them could you drop on the floor? How many of them would be okay if you hadn't actually cleaned them from the last person that you used? None, absolutely none. I think okay but one will be alright, one will be fine. Oh come on, we could just use one, you know, I mean that needle, you're not going to throw that away, just use that against, no way, absolutely no way. Can there be anything on sterile on that table? And it applies to every aspect of that kind of medical care. It's the same if you think of, you know, like an engine, how many cups of water can you put into your petrol tank? One, two, that's not that much, none. You put any water in your tank's contaminated, you just can't do it and it's in those terms that we need to think of sin, absolutely unacceptable. And that is how serious sin is. And so when

Jesus comes to be made sin, when Jesus comes to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, He is being made totally incompatible with God. And Isaiah describes it so powerfully, 700 years before it happened. Surely he's born or grieves and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we've turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that has led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shears is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Our sin placed on Christ, as we have it just described so powerfully here. The word that we use to describe that is the word imputation, whereby our sin is counted to Jesus, it's placed on him, but what we must never forget is that imputation will inevitably result in separation. That was true in the Old Testament when the scapegoat served as a shadow of all of this, was driven out of the community. Jesus as the Lamb of God was separated from his Father when he was made sin for us. So that's why he had to be forsaken. The minute he who knew no sin was made sin, there was nothing that the Father could do except turn away. So that's the first answer that we can give to this question, why? The second answer we can give is that this was the plan of God. So we're asking you, why have you forsaken me? And the answer is that this is God's plan. We see that again in the verses that we've been referring back to in 2 Corinthians. We've got this little statement here, all this is from God. Now in the immediate context that's talking about the fact that in Christ we're a new creation and that the oldest past and the new has come. All of this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

[24 : 33] But that ministry of reconciliation, that new creation, that old passing and new coming, all of that happened because of this. And none of it could have happened without it.

It was all part of God's plan. Now Jesus knew this all along even if those who were with him didn't. You see that several times in Max Gospel, Jesus began to teach that he would suffer many things and be rejected and killed and after three days rise again. He said this to them plainly, but Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. They didn't understand what was going on. Same in the next chapter, chapter 9. He spoke to them, said to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered to the hands of men, they'll kill him. And when he's killed after three days he will rise. But they did not understand the saying and they were afraid to ask him. The disciples did not understand that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die. But Jesus knew it and he knew it because it was the Father's plan. You see that in John 18, John 10 rather, when Jesus speaks about being the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep, he says, no one takes it from me. I lay down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. It's all part of God's plan. And after the resurrection, Peter came to understand this and spoke so powerfully of it in Acts 2 when he said, Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst. As you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. All of this is God's plan. And we know that the whole of the Old Testament has been pointed towards it. The whole of the Gospels are leading up to this point. The plan of God was that Jesus would come to be the Lamb of God, to take away this into the world, to die on the cross and rise again. Mark 15, 34

tells us how hard that would actually be. It tells us just how massive all of that really is. We all know John 3.16 really well. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Amazing words. That little word gave. That word gave in John 3.16 is directly connected to the cry of Jesus in Mark 15, 34. For God to give his Son that meant leaving his Son to cry out, why have you forsaken me? It's all God's plan but the pain, agony and cost of that plan is huge. But the fact that this is God's plan teaches us something very amazing. My watch just beeped for seven o'clock and I can't believe that it's done that but anyway let's try and get this to do this as fast as we can. Jesus' mission involved separation from his Father. So we call this Christ's humiliation. He left heaven and born in poverty and it was taken in the form of flesh, human form, all the way to death, even death on the cross.

So there's this progression from being united to the Father from all eternity which is the zero percent. Now I know you can't put a percentage on this but it's just a picture. So from no separation in eternity all the way to the cross where he's crying out why have you forsaken me? Jesus has gone from eternal fellowship with the Father to 100 percent separation on the cross and I wish we had time to think about that but that's just massive in terms of what Jesus had to experience. So there's this progression towards worse and worse and worse separation. That's one of the things that's going on in the mission of Jesus but at the same time because this is the plan of God as Jesus goes on that journey at every step he takes he is obeying the Father more and more. Now this is where we see something amazing that as Jesus moves towards the cross as he suffers and drifts closer and closer, I shouldn't say drifts as he directly moves closer and closer to that point where he cries out my God my God why have you forsaken me? He is obeying his Father at every step and so that obedience is filling up what God needs done is getting done and so there's this movement towards obedience as he goes along. So there's a progression there's further and further separation and then there's further and further obedience at the same time and what this means this is something that I think is well I don't know you might not think it's amazing but I think it's amazing because if you put these two graphs together you see this that at the point of separation here where Jesus cried my God my God why have you forsaken me? When separation reaches 100% at the very same time obedience reaches 100% and that's where you see something absolutely incredible happening that at that point when Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me? He is at the very bottom in terms of the depths of anguish but he's at the very peak of obedience and that's why that from this moment onwards Jesus' mission is accomplished and this is where that we see there's something quite amazing that in the separation there's also an obedience what God wanted to happen has happened and theologians will sometimes call this a volitional union. Now volitional just means in terms of will what you want a volitional union so in the separation it's the agony of separation but it's also the trigger for accomplishment and the thing that I think that confirms this is Psalm 22 because if you go to Psalm 22 you'll see that it starts with these words that Jesus quotes and it speaks so powerfully and prophetically about the agony of the cross but does Psalm 22 end there? No, Psalm 22 ends in triumph and praise and in terms of God's goodness being proclaimed to the nations which is exactly what the cross accomplished and so as Jesus fulfills God's plan and cries out in agony my God my God why have you forsaken me at that moment death is crushed and that's why I sometimes think and this is just for you to think about I'm not being like dogmatic when we hear Jesus say it is finished in our minds we might tend to think Jesus sort of saying it is finished in not an agony but

[32 : 49] I wonder whether we should actually think that Jesus is saying it is finished we have done it victory has been won why was Jesus forsaken because it was the plan of the Father so time has run out we're saying it's because of the seriousness of sin that's our first answer our second answer is because it was the plan of God but there's a third answer and I think it's the actually the most important answer of all when Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me the ultimate answer is not the seriousness of sin the ultimate answer is not because of the plan of God the ultimate answer is because of you all of this happened because of you all of this happened to save you and we know that when we go back to 2nd Corinthians 5 because when it says he made him to be sin who knew no sin is for our sake it's so that in him we might become the righteousness of God all of this happened for you if someone was to ask you the question which version of Bible speaks most about the love of God what would you say that Lord she could choose from John 3 16 we read it John 59 as the father loved me so I have loved you abide in my love also a brilliant verse John 17 23 I and them you and me that they may be perfectly one that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me if someone asked you the question which version the

Bible speaks most powerfully about the love of God you could go to John 3 16 you could go to John 59 you could go to John 17 23 you could go to loads of others but I want to suggest to you that the verse that speaks more powerfully about God's love for you than any other in the whole Bible is that one when Jesus says my God my God why have you forsaken me the answer to the question why is because of how much God loves you and so if you're trying to answer this question the answer is me the answer is you and the end result is incredible Jesus was forsaken remember we said imputation equals separation.

Our sin being placed on Jesus means forsakenness means separation the whole reason Jesus did that is so that these words will be true of you I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers 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 Christ Jesus our Lord Jesus was separated from his father so that nothing will ever separate you from him and his love that is just the most amazing message that the world has ever heard that's why Christianity is simultaneously the most incredible truth for us to admire and also the most precious personal promise that we can ever hear when you read these words my God my God why have you forsaken me that tells you how massive God's plan is that tells you how incredible Jesus is and it tells you how much he loves you. Rather we thank you for these words we thank you for Jesus we thank you that ultimately we are the answer to this question we just don't want to say except thank you so so much