

# Jesus Forsaken of God, and the consequences.

Psalm 22.

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The substance of a lecture in Ryde in 1873 by W. Kelly.

The scripture that I have read is pre-eminently the psalm of One forsaken of God. In this it stands alone; not that there are not other psalms which refer to that most solemn hour, and to the blessed Person who here speaks to God; but this psalm above all. It is not merely here that we have the Lord taking His place among men, the trusting One, which Psalm 16 gives — His trust carried on unbrokenly, looking on through death unto resurrection, yea to glory at God's right hand.

But here what a contrast! He is abandoned of God, yet cleaves to Him wholly and vindicates Him absolutely. But He is forsaken of God. Now it is not His enemies that say so, though, they too did; it is Himself, and it is Himself to God Himself. No believer had ever been thus forsaken, or can be. "Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on Jehovah that he would deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." (vers. 4-8) Never was there such an hour even for Jesus; never can there be such an hour again. Good and evil were then brought to an issue in the only Person who could solve the riddle; good and evil met in One that was perfectly good, and yet then bearing evil at the hand of God. It was atonement. Not that this alone appears in the psalm; but Jesus made sin is the first and deepest thought and fact. There was no sorrow that He knew not; there was no shame that He was saved from. Bulls of Bashan were there; shameless dogs compassed Him about the ravening lion was not absent. In truth these are but figures, and man was more cruel than all, baser and most deliberate, he alone indeed guilty, led on by a subtler, mightier enemy; but, deepest and most wondrous of all, God was there, and there first of all, as it could not but be — God as Judge of sin, who made His Son that knew no sin to be sin for us.

First, I repeat, was this mysterious judgment of evil on the Holy One; not merely first in point of fact, but because it stands necessarily to itself the most solemn and solitary of all things for God and man, in time or eternity, in earth or heaven or hell. Befittingly therefore with this the psalm opens, for what could compare with it, past, present, future? The Lord Jesus had met Satan at the beginning in the wilderness, at the end in Gethsemane. He had broken his power for the earth and for man on it, spoiling the strong man's goods; but it was another and in conceivably profounder question now. It was sin before God. It was no mere conflict, it was nothing that could be broken or won in the power of obedience. There had been living goodness, and God's seal was upon it. But here was another thing. He had glorified the Father all His life, but now it was a question of glorifying God in His death, for God is the Judge of sin. It was not a question with the Father as such, but with God as God touching sin. He who had glorified the Father in a life of obedience glorified God in the death

in which that very obedience was consummated; and not merely this: evil was laid on Him in whom all was good, and they met. What a meeting!

Yes, God was there, not the approver of what was good only, but the Judge of all evil laid upon that blessed Head. It was God forsaking the faithful, obedient Servant. Yet it was His God; this would — could — never be given up; for, on the contrary, He even then firmly holds to it — "My God, my God"; yet He has to add now, "why hast thou forsaken me?" It was the Son of the Father, but as Son of man necessarily that He so cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then, and then only, did God desert His one unswerving Servant, the Man Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, we bow before the mystery of mysteries in His person — God manifested in flesh. Had He not been Man, of what avail for us? Had He not been God, all must have failed to give to His suffering for sins the infinite worth of Himself. This is atonement. And atonement has two parts in its character and range. It is expiation before God; it is also substitution for our sins, (Lev. 16: 7-10, Jehovah's lot and the people's lot), though the latter part be not so much the subject of the psalmist here, and I do not therefore dwell on it now. The ground, the most important part, of the atonement, though all be of the deepest moment, is Jehovah's lot.

Here then we have God in His majesty and righteous judgment of evil; God in the display of His moral being dealing with sin, where alone it could be dealt with to bring out blessing and glory, in the Person of His own Son; One who could, when forsaken of God, reach the lowest, but morally highest, point of glorifying God, made sin for us on the cross. It was the very perfection of His bearing sin that He should not be heard. There was the sharpest pain and anguish and bitterness of rejection; and did He not feel it? Did the glory of His Person render Him incapable of suffering? The idea denies His humanity. Rather was His deity that which made Him endure and feel it most, and as none other could. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Jehovah: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog." (vers. 14-20)

Nevertheless the Lord Christ perfectly vindicates God who forsook Him there and then. Others had cried, and there was not one who had not been delivered; but it was His not to be. For the suffering must go to the uttermost, and sin be righteously atoned for, and this, too, not by power, but by suffering.

But what is this that breaks on our ears when the last drop in the cup is drained? "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee," says the Saviour. He says, now He is risen from the dead, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." He had declared it; such was His ministry here below, but now on an entirely new ground. Death and death alone disposed of sin; death, but His death alone, could dispose of sin, so that the sinner could bow to God's righteousness about it, and be brought without sin into the presence of God. And this is what God Himself declares.

Mark here, too, the consequence of it: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." Now the Lord Jesus shows us in the gospels the wonderful adaptation of the truth of the Old Testament. "Thy name" what name? When bearing sin He speaks of God. When looking on to deliverance, or in enjoyed relationship, the godly Israelite speaks of Jehovah. But in the New Testament, while God remains God and must be ever the Judge of sin, *Father* is the characteristic term of a relationship which the Son of God knew from eternity, yet knew none the less as man, but in a truth and fulness which belonged to Him only. This in its reality and intimateness He would give them as far as it could be, in redemption,

as many a soul here knows with joy. But I shall repeat it for some hearts which know not that blessed word in its sweetness and real meaning to the soul. Jesus could bring it out now.

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren," and so He says, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." He had never said so before. He had been declaring the name of the Father, but He had never presented it thus; and your particular attention is called to the fact. It supposes not merely love, but this on a foundation of righteousness. Undoubtedly grace was that which gave Him, and thus wrought for sinful man; but here He gives us, when sin was judged and put away, to know that His God is ours, and when the life was bearing much fruit in resurrection, that His Father is ours. The glory of the Father and the nature of God were now engaged in blessing us with Him, as just before only the holy vengeance of God came out against sin. It was indeed glory in the highest, it was grace in the lowest, but all was on the footing of righteousness, without which all else would only inflate the soul and expose it to be dragged down into worse depths. The basis of God's righteousness is needed for the sinner, and he who in himself was but a lost sinner is now entitled to know God not merely as God, but as Father. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." There was pardon now, and peace; but not these only; there was association with Christ Himself. Far more than this indeed, but as it is not here we need not now go beyond what is before us, with only the modification given by the scriptures of the New Testament already referred to.

Now mark how the declaration of His name comes out. "My God, my God," says Jesus when and because He was forsaken on the cross, made sin and bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. It is the true and simple and strong answer to those who suppose that He had been all His life here below bearing sin; had this been so He must have been all through forsaken of God, unless God shine with complacency while judging sin. It would be the virtual denial of His life in the joy and communion of His Father's love. Son of God here below, He had ever walked in the intimate and perfect acknowledgment of His Father's presence and of His own relationship, and hence so much the more did He feel what it was to be abandoned. But now the sin that was charged upon Him is gone by His dying for it; and as the witness that all was gone, He is raised up from the dead, and then declares that very name — not first "your" Father, nor our Father (this were beneath His glory, whatever may be His love), but "My Father, and your Father; and my God, and your God." Thus what God is as Father to Him rests now on those for whom He died, on those whose sins had been blotted out by the blood of His cross.

But this is not all. The perfect and manifested acceptance of the Man that God made sin is altogether theirs now; not merely the love of the Father, but the glorified character and light of God. Thus it is love, not solely in relationship, but in nature: yea, more than this: all that God feels as God, all that pertains to Him vindicated for ever, not merely is Christ's, but by Christ's work consequently belongs to those who rest on that Person and that work. Such is the virtue and fruit of atonement; nor is it only for *heaven*, for it was brought out by Himself *on earth*. He was going to heaven, but it was expressly for wise and weighty reasons made known here to the souls that needed it most. To the poor in spirit, to the meek, His disciples, He had shown Himself the pattern of dependence and obedience, of grace and righteousness, of bright and peaceful communion with His Father; but all this of itself could only aggravate their condition, which was so far beneath His, and thus must be the more humiliating to His own, had not He by grace wrought their deliverance. With what force, then, the blessed truth broke upon their souls! God Himself, the Father of the Lord Jesus, was their Father, even as He was their God; all that is in God as completely in their favour by what He had wrought on the cross as all that is in Him as Father. And remark, it is not merely "as a father pitieth his children," for there is incomparably more now. He is the Father as the Christ knew Him. "I will declare thy name unto my

brethren," brethren brought, and brought righteously, into the selfsame relation, so that all the satisfaction and delight of God (not only of the Father, which relationship He has given us to enjoy, but of God) Himself in Christ is shared fully with us because of the acceptance we have in Christ our Lord.

But we have more still to hear. "in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." It is not merely "will I praise thee," nor yet "in the congregation," but "in the midst of the congregation." The Apostle Paul quotes this scripture in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and we find its spirit fulfilled in the little company gathered on that day (John 20), "the assembly." The Lord is at once found in the midst of them, not reproving them for their just proved cowardice, unbelief and unfaithfulness, to say nothing of lack of love for His person and suffering for His name. I say not that He had not His dealings with one or another, but He brings them at once into the highest relation and best blessings by His sacrifice. With more than one of them we know He dealt, but this did not hinder or postpone His grace at all.

"In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." Think, beloved friends, for a moment what the praise of Christ was in such an hour, what His feelings must have been when emerging from the darkness, from the dust of death, from the abandonment of God! He alone could rightly estimate the immensity of it all who, having suffered once for sins, now rests in the hard-won victory. Then it was that He bore our sins; then He who knew no sin was made sin. Risen from the dead, He is bearing sins no more; He is praising, and not alone, but "in the midst of the congregation."

Let me add another word. There is a day coming when this earth shall be filled no more with groans, but with hallelujahs; the day hastens when every one born shall join in the chorus of blessing, when heaven and earth shall be filled with joy and glory; but never will come a day when such praise will burst forth as that which He began that day. It is not that they who praise with Him, being brought into such association of blessing, will ever lose it — they never will; but if it began with Him then, it will be theirs for ever, but it is theirs only with Him in their midst; and the psalm before us proves it the more strikingly because it was written expressly with a view to the earthly people. The praise of the resurrection day is peculiar, being Christ's praise in the midst of the congregation — that is, of His brethren.

And who could declare it as He? And when could even He have declared it as when raised from the dead by the Father's glory after having been brought into the dust of death for sin? None but He could feel to the uttermost what it was to be forsaken of God and not heard when He cried; but now, heard from the horns of the unicorns, He enters as the risen Man into the light and glory of God shining for ever on the accepted sacrifice of Himself, and declares to His brethren the name (now we can say) of His Father and their Father, of His God and their God; and there and thus, in the midst of the church now set free for ever by and in Him, He sings praises. Oh! what praises were Christ's, delivered now at length and from so great a death! But are they not our praises too? And is it not in "our midst" that He sings them? What a character does not this communion imprint on the church's worship! The praise of Christ, after sin was judged as it never can be again, and He who was crucified in weakness lives. by the power of God, gives the just and only full idea of what becomes God's assembly.

Are these your thoughts, brethren beloved of the Lord? Is this the standard by which you try your hearts and lips when you present your spiritual sacrifices to your God and Father? Be assured, He values none compared with those of the risen Christ, who deigns to be the Leader of such as cleave to Him in this the day of His still continued rejection, though He be, as we know, glorified on high.

Truly His is in the highest sense a new song. Alone He has thus suffered; not alone does He praise, but in the full chorus of the consciously redeemed. How wondrous that it is not here merely "in" the congregation, but "in the midst" of it that He thus sings! In the day of His power it will not be so for

"the great congregation." Not that His praises will be lacking in that day; not that high and low will not praise in the earth when all Jehovah's works shall praise Him and all His saints shall bless Him. Still it remains true that there is a revealed association with Him of those who are now being called and gathered since His resurrection, which exceeds in depth anything said of those who follow in that bright and blessed day. Not to the great congregation is He said to declare His God and Father's name. In it, indeed, will His praise of Jehovah be, but not in its midst as on the resurrection day for those who have not seen and yet have believed. (Compare vers. 22, etc., with 25, etc.) For what is said of that jubilee for Israel and the earth would still be true if He praised alone on His ground and all others on theirs. Neither does He call them His brethren — as now, however He may pay His vows (in itself another distinctive mark) before those that fear Jehovah, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Him Lord to God's glory, even to the ends of the world and throughout all kindreds of the nations.

Is not all this grace indeed to us who deserve nothing less, even the true grace of God wherein we stand? May we appreciate the counsels and the ways of the God of all grace who has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus! To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen! May our praises then abound; but may they be *Christ's* praises in our midst, who deigns to be where two or three are gathered to His name! He is not absent if we are called in aught to vindicate the truth or holiness of God; is He when we gather to worship His and our God and Father? By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually — that is, fruit of lips confessing His name.

This is followed by a call to others founded on the resurrection of the suffering Messiah. "Ye that fear Jehovah, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." (vers. 23, 24) This was at least anticipated, we may note in passing, in those words which the Lord uttered before departing, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The public answer to His cry was when God raised Him from the dead.

Thus we find Messiah no longer suffering, but heard, His God and Father's name declared to His brethren, and Himself in the midst of the church praising; and then a call to every one who fears Jehovah to praise Him, on the ground of atonement. For by the cross of Christ the whole question of sin and sins before God and for the believer was settled for ever.

But there is a new scene in the verses that follow, which may help to bring out more distinctly what I have already endeavoured to explain. Here the Messiah says, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation." Thus "the great congregation" is distinguished from "the congregation" in verse 22. There it is clearly the assembly surrounding Him when risen from the dead, whereas in verse 22 we read, "My praise shall be of thee in the *great* congregation." Remark that it is not in the *midst* of them. There is no such association with Christ spoken of.

Observe in John 20 (which has already furnished us with the illustration, and indeed fulfilment, of His name declared to His brethren, and the congregation in the midst of which He praises) that there also we have what answers to "the great congregation." For Thomas came eight days after and exclaims to the Lord, when convicted of his unbelief, "My Lord and my God." Not a word is hinted here about "My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God." There is no longer the association of Christ with the disciples traced here, but another confession which grace will draw out from "the great congregation," as from Thomas, when they too repent and confess their long despised and rejected Messiah. They too will then say, "My Lord and my God." It is most true, the striking type of what Israel will know and confess in that day. (Compare Zech. 12)

How wide will be the praise! But it is not association with Christ, it is not He praising in the midst of the congregation. There is no such blessedness of fellowship with Him. Of Christ in that day it is said, "I will pay my vows before them that fear him." Could anything more strikingly show that this is on Jewish ground? And still further, it is not only what *is* said which distinguishes them from those in verse 22, but what is *not* said. Thus there is not a hint of declaring the name of His Father and God here, nor are they here called His brethren. There will be a blessed people, but as a people round Him who is at once the reigning Messiah and Jehovah their God. Even He praises and pays vows in that day.

There had been Christ's praise in the midst of the assembly of His brethren when He rose from among the dead, their Leader; and there followed also a suited testimony of God to those who feared Him (compare Acts 10: 35), as well as to all the seed of Jacob or Israel. The day when grace assembles the children of God is also a day of good news to every creature, Jew or Gentile, that they may believe. But now it is more than testimony. Messiah's praises are of Jehovah in the great congregation; Messiah pays His vows before them that fear Him. There is the sure and open accomplishment of all promises. Now every prophecy of coming glory for the earth and the nations is being fulfilled. Accordingly the "meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise Jehovah that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto Jehovah: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is Jehovah's: and he is the governor among, the nations." (vers. 27, 28) Not a word of this was given in the former connection. Henceforth it is not merely calling on all the ends of the earth to remember, but they shall remember. It will not be the gospel of grace as now, nor the church, but the kingdom in its display of power. All therefore shall turn to Jehovah, as we are here assured, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." It is no longer a question of the Christian place (this was given us in verse 22) when the testimony goes out in verse 23, the ground of faith being laid in verse 24. After that (vers. 25-31) comes what supposes and characterises the millennial days. It is when Christ asks (Ps. 2) and gets the earth that He is in the "great congregation."

Now, on the contrary, His is a "little flock," and everything great among men is opposed to God. By-and-by it will not be so; but Christ will have "the great congregation," and be Himself the Governor of all nations. Then "all they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him." Then is a day of confessed dependence, though of the richest blessing, for "none can keep alive his own soul." He is the life and strength of all, as He is the exalted of all. "A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation." The old Christ-rejecting generation is gone, but the returned remnant, after undergoing judgment and consumption, shall be a holy seed and a new stock. "They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness (weaned now at length from all conceit of their own) unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this." (Vers. 29-31) It is neither heaven nor eternity, nor is it the present evil age, but the bright and holy age to come, when the Lord Jehovah is blessed and blesses, the God of Israel who only doeth wondrous things; and in that day His glorious name is blessed for ever, and the whole earth is filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.