



---

## THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF JESUS | DESOLATION

April 18, 2025

---

Throughout the season of Lent, we have been engaged in a series in which we are considering the emotional life of Jesus inspired by an essay written by the theologian B.B. Warfield well over a hundred years ago. Rather than focusing exclusively on Jesus' words or his actions, we're looking underneath the surface to try to gain insight into Jesus' interior life and to understand what he might have been sensing and experiencing. What we've discovered is that Jesus not only clothed himself with human flesh, but Jesus clothed himself with human feeling. Jesus not only identifies with us, but he can sympathize with us even in all of our weakness, because he experienced everything that we do and more, yet without sin — including his emotion.

Warfield makes the point that many of Jesus' emotions manifested themselves in physical reactions. So the same one who hungered and thirsted and grew weary and tired also expressed his emotions in bodily physical form. He wept, and he wailed, and he sighed, and he groaned. But perhaps the link between the outer physical manifestation of Jesus' inner emotions is nowhere stronger or more striking than when we consider what Jesus experienced on the cross.

So very briefly tonight, what I would like us to do is to spend some time considering what Jesus might have actually been feeling when he cries out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" So I'd like us to consider: 1) *What Jesus felt on the cross*, and 2) *What we can learn from what Jesus felt*.

<sup>22</sup>And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). <sup>23</sup>And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup>And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. <sup>25</sup>And it was the third hour when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup>And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." <sup>27</sup>And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>29</sup>And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, <sup>30</sup>save yourself, and come down from the cross!" <sup>31</sup>So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup>Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

<sup>33</sup>And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup>And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>35</sup>And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." <sup>36</sup>And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." <sup>37</sup>And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. <sup>38</sup>And the curtain of the

temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup>And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

*Mark 15:22-39*

## **What Jesus Felt on the Cross**

First, let's consider what Jesus was feeling on the cross. We know that Jesus experienced severe physical pain as he was beaten and tortured and crucified, but the physical torture which he endured may pale in comparison to the emotional suffering. Jesus first began to experience the emotional horror of the cross while he was still in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the garden, Jesus prays, “Father, if it is possible, remove this cup from me,” but it wasn't, and so the father didn't. Therefore Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done.” See, there's no other way, and therefore the Father didn't remove the cup. Jesus then willingly takes the cup into his hands.

But what is this cup? Well, as Hansol Kang reminded us last night, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke of a foaming cup of wine which represented the cup of God's wrath. But when we speak of God's wrath, we're not suggesting that God has anger management problems. It's not as if God has a tendency to lose it or to fly off the handle and to fall into some kind of uncontrollable rage. No, God doesn't have problems controlling his anger. That's not what we mean by wrath. Rather, God's wrath is his simple and settled opposition to all sin, evil, and injustice — to anything that violates his good and perfect will.

We have to remember that the opposite of love is not hate; it is indifference. And the more that God loves us, the more he hates our sin. Think of the parent of an addict; the more that that parent loves his child, the more he hates the addiction that is destroying him. And so what we often fail to realize is how much God hates sin. God simply cannot tolerate the presence of sin, evil, or injustice. It has to be destroyed. But the only way for God to destroy sin without destroying you or me is if God bears that sin in our place in order to do away with it forever.

So it is while Jesus is praying in the garden that he willingly takes that cup into his hands. And that is why he says to Peter and James and John, “My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death,” or as Hansol paraphrased it for us last night, it's as Jesus begins this process of undertaking the emotional strain of the cross that he tells them — and us — that this emotional stress is already killing him. So the cup first touches Jesus' lips in the garden, but it has to be drained to the dregs, and that final drop is not drunk until Jesus screams from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And it is at this moment that Jesus experiences the full curse of sin.

Paul spoke about this in Galatians 3: In order to lift the curse of sin from us, Jesus had to bear the curse of sin for us. And Deuteronomy 21 spells it out for us: Cursed is the one who is hung on a tree. Now, let's be clear: It's not that Jesus was cursed *because* he was hung on the cross; rather, because he was hung on the cross that becomes the sign that Jesus is cursed by God — because to be hung was the ultimate sign of rejection, the ultimate sign of separation, the ultimate sign of God-forsakenness. So

Jesus takes the full curse of sin upon himself and screams out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Now, we may not realize this — we can’t see what God could see — but in that moment, on that day, God could recognize that the sight of the cross was the most obscene, the most grotesque, the most ungodly place in the whole history of human life, because in that moment all of our defiling, corrupting, filthy, destructive sin was piled up in one place. It was all piled up on Jesus, and that is why God *had* to turn his back on it. God is of pure eyes that can’t behold evil. God can’t even look at our sin. So God turns his face away, and that’s why Jesus screams. Jesus screams not because of the thorns or because of the nails or because of the cross itself. No, he screams because he is forsaken by God.

So what was Jesus feeling on the cross? The answer is that Jesus was feeling complete and utter desolation. Jesus never felt more alone than in that moment. Now, if we don’t know God, if we don’t have any kind of connection to God, if we don’t have any sort of relationship with God, we might say, “Well, what’s the big deal? What’s the big deal being cut off or separated or forsaken from God? It would probably feel like nothing at all.” But if you think that, it’s because you don’t know what you’re missing out on.

But consider what this must have been like from the standpoint of Jesus. From all eternity, Jesus had enjoyed the closest possible intimacy with God the father. There was never a moment when he wasn’t perfectly in touch, perfectly in tune with the Father. There was never ever a time when there was ever anything standing in or blocking the way. So now, for the very first time — not just in Jesus’ earthly life, mind you, but for the first time in all of eternity — Jesus is completely and utterly alone. He is forsaken and cut off from the Father. Now, for the very first time, his cries are met with a deafening silence.

It would be almost impossible for us to imagine what that might have been like. C.S. Lewis gives us a mere taste of it. After his wife died, he kept a journal capturing his moments of grief, and he later published it as a book called “A Grief Observed.” His grief gives us just a mere taste of what Jesus must have felt on the cross. Lewis writes:

Where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms.

But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in our time of trouble?

Lewis' words just give us a mere taste of what Jesus must have experienced on the cross. Because for the first time ever, since before the very beginning of time itself, the one who always had the Father's ear now receives a deafening silence. The one to whom heaven had always stood wide open now finds the door slammed in his face and bolted from the inside. So what did Jesus feel on the cross? He felt complete and utter desolation. But that's not all.

As I reflected on the cross over the last couple weeks, I came to a deeper appreciation of something I knew but hadn't fully grasped. Because what we see here is that, though Jesus felt complete and utter desolation, he didn't experience despair. And this is truly astounding to me. Even though in that moment Jesus felt completely abandoned by the Father, Jesus did not abandon his faith. If it were you or me, we never would've gotten through the Garden of Gethsemane. The moment that we first touched the cup to our lips, we would've been out of there. We would've run away at the first sight of pain. But not Jesus. No, Jesus remained faithful all the way to the very bitter end.

Now some people say that this is the only place where Jesus refers to God as "my God" rather than "my Father," "my Abba Father," "my dad." And that is true, but it does not reflect a loss of faith. Jesus does not die renouncing God. No, Jesus dies with Scripture on his lips. Even in his emotional distress, Jesus is quoting the Bible. This is an act of faith. He directs the opening line of Psalm 22 to his Heavenly Father in prayer. And so even though he feels abandoned by God, he refuses to abandon his faith. He cries out even in the midst of his agony, but it is the cry of a child to the Father whom he still loves and trusts despite it all. And so Jesus experiences desolation but not despair. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus, just before he breathes his last, says, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He commits his spirit into the hands of his father before his final breath.

## **What We Can Learn from What Jesus Felt**

Let us also stop and ask not only what did Jesus feel on the cross, but what can we learn from what Jesus felt? What did Jesus' emotions show us? B.B. Warfield suggests that Jesus' emotions on the cross reveal three truths.

### **Show His True Humanity**

First of all, Jesus' emotions show us his true humanity. He really did become a human being just like us, and this is not something to be taken for granted. There have been some even very great theologians down through the ages who have suggested that the emotional life of Jesus was really nothing more than a show, because how could he *really* experience what we experience if he was fully God at the same time? But what the Scriptures show us is that Jesus experienced the full range of human emotions; nothing is left out. He really did experience everything we do and more. And that is why he can not only identify with us, but he can sympathize with us even in all of our greatest weaknesses.

### **Provide an Example to Imitate**

So Jesus' emotions reveal his true humanity, but they also provide us with an example that we're meant to imitate. Jesus not only shares the same emotions with us, but he

also shows us how to handle those emotions. Because we all know that there are right and there are wrong ways of handling our emotions of love or compassion or anger or zeal, and most of the time we don't get it right. But in Jesus we find the most perfect example of a human life ever lived, and that extends all the way to his emotional life. And so in dependence upon his Spirit and his enabling grace, we're called to imitate Jesus' life, including his emotional life.

### **Demonstrate His Salvation**

But we can't stop there, because if we think that Jesus' emotions merely prove his humanity or provide us with an example to follow, then what we're left with is nothing more than moralistic religion rather than the gospel. The emotional life of Jesus is not intended to merely tell us to go out there and be like Jesus. No, the final thing that we need to realize is that the emotions of Jesus not only point us to his humanity, not only give us an example to follow, but they demonstrate his salvation.

Do you realize that there are some things that Jesus experienced — some feelings that he endured — that he never would have, he never could have, unless he bore our sin in our place. The author of Hebrews puts it best, perhaps, in Hebrews 2:17, where the author writes that Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service of God to make propitiation for his people. See, there are some emotions that Jesus never would have experienced unless he willingly took our sin upon himself.

Look, Jesus experienced sadness, but everybody experiences sadness. The point is that Jesus not only experienced sadness, but he bore our griefs and he carried our sorrows. And now, as a result of that, Jesus is forever in touch with our feelings. And that is the basis upon which he intercedes before the throne of God continually for us. He's always in touch with us, but more than that. Everybody experiences loneliness. But Jesus not only experienced loneliness, he experienced God-forsaken desolation. And it was not because of his sin; it was because of our sin.

The cup that Jesus drank wasn't his cup; it was our cup. And when Jesus drained that cup down to the final drop, rather than hearing his cries, the father returned his screams with silence. But why? So that you might hear the Heavenly Father say to you, "You are my beloved child whom I love, with whom I am well pleased." When Jesus drank that cup down to the final drop, the one to whom heaven had always stood open now found the door slammed in his face. Why? So that the door into God's presence for you would forever stand open. Jesus' emotions not only prove his humanity, they not only provide us with an example to follow, but they demonstrate his salvation.

And so in closing, let me ask you a question. What was it that caused Jesus' death? What did he really die of? Some might say, well, Jesus died because he eventually succumbed to his wounds. He died because of his injuries to his back, to his head, to his wrists, to his legs. So he died of his injuries. And to a certain extent, that's true.

Or you might say, well, what was the cause of Jesus' death? Asphyxiation. Eventually, over time, he lost the power, he lost the strength to be able to hoist himself up in

order to breathe, and so eventually he shouts one last time, commits his spirit into the hands of his Father, and then breathes his last. So Jesus died of suffocation.

But if we were to ask, “Well what was the cause of Jesus’ death?” the best answer, the most accurate answer is that Jesus died of a broken heart — under the emotional stress and strain that he first began to experience in the garden and which came to full climax on the cross. But Jesus’ heart was broken so that your heart might be mended. And so when you consider this Good Friday any of the emotional stress or strain or suffering that you have endured or that you are enduring right now, know that the cross is God’s way to bind up the brokenhearted.

*Let me pray for us.*

*Father, we thank you that you have given us a merciful and faithful High Priest who is not only able to identify with us and sympathize with us in all of our weaknesses, but one who has experienced far more than we ever will, precisely because he became an atoning sacrifice for our sin. And so Father, help us to understand and to appreciate anew the depth of Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross so that we might receive new life. Help us to see that he endured not only physical pain but emotional suffering for us. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*