

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

Matthew 27:45-47

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” **47** And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Before we discuss what Christ *said*, we must acknowledge the fact that some of the bystanders watching Him die did not hear Him correctly. The reason they thought He was calling out for Elijah was a linguistic issue. St. Matthew reflects this in his writing. “Eli” is a Hebrew phrase, which means “my God,” but St. Mark renders the first part “Eloi,”¹ which is the same phrase but in Aramaic. Yet more of them heard “Elijah” - in Greek, where Elijah's name is rendered “Elias” sounds quite a bit like “Eloi” if spoken under one's breath. For the rest of the pronunciation, both Hebrew and Aramaic share a lot of words (linguistically they are like Spanish and Italian, with a lot of mutual intelligibility to them), so “lema” or “lama” both mean “why.” And for the last part, “sabachthani,” it is from a root Aramaic word – but sounds a lot like the Hebrew rendering *azavthani*, which means the same thing: “you have abandoned me.”

What is going on here, is Christ mixing Hebrew and Aramaic? Are the Gospel writers contradicting each other? Neither my friend. Both Sts. Matthew and Mark are writing *phonetically*. Some people heard what Jesus muttered out as the Hebrew words, others could have sworn He was speaking Aramaic, and then some of them thought He called out Elijah's name in Greek. But none of them heard Him quite clearly because He was *dying*. Drenched in blood, much of it running over His mouth, He sputtered this phrase through labored breathing and few could make it out accurately.

Such was the suffering of Christ at this point, that His pain made speaking clearly difficult. Thus few of the people who heard Him could understand what He was truly doing here (and even fewer cared), when what He intended was to quote Psalm 22 and telling the whole world that it was a prophecy about the Crucifixion He was going through. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” is the very first line from David's Psalm, and the rest of it points to the Crucifixion with astonishing accuracy.

David writes in a prophetic style about everything that would happen to Jesus one thousand years later. “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”² And just so, the people around Jesus mocked Him while He was hanging from the Cross. David writes “they have pierced my hands and feet,” and “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” - and indeed, both of these things happened to our Savior.³ When He quotes the twenty second Psalm, He is telling everyone around Him exactly what has been spoken concerning Him. Sadly, none of them were listening. How forlorn He must have felt, to squeeze these words from His strained vocal cords, trying to reassure His weeping mother and sorrowful follower St. John that all was going to plan! How lonely

1 Mark 15:34

2 Psalm 22:7-8

3 Psalm 22:16-18

it must have been to remind the people who had Him crucified of this prophecy, only for them to start arguing about whether He was calling Elijah!

Had they understood what Jesus was saying, their countenance would have changed. If, instead of asking about Elijah they remembered what the *rest* of Psalm 22 says, they would not have mocked Him any further. David predicts the Resurrection when he writes,

“From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!⁴

So despite being pierced in hands and feet and suffering immensely, not only will the afflicted one in the Psalm eat and be satisfied, but men shall seek Him. David does not only prophesy the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, he also adds that Christ shall establish a kingdom for Himself and that every knee shall bow:

All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.
Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.⁵

In other words, Jesus was not *just* proclaiming His sorrow at the anguish and loneliness He was experiencing. By referring back to David's prophecy, He predicts His Resurrection, and lets whoever has an ear to hear that He will still be the King of all. In a word, He proclaims victory over sin, death and the devil, showing that God's Word has been unbroken no matter what the scoffers were saying. Though in the moment it was extremely painful and exhausting, He knew that it was *worth it* to die for you and me, for by saving us He received the people yet unborn, *us* who worship and trust in His Name.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

4 Psalm 22:25-26

5 Psalm 22:29-31