

Words That Last Forever
“Forsaken!”

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

Epitaphs. Carved into stone, whittled into wood, burnished into bronze – they offer a tidy lasting message, readable long after bodies turn to dust and memories flicker and fade...

“Loving Mother, Faithful Wife.”

“Honest Man of Business.”:

“Suffer the Little Children To Come Unto Me.”

“Gave His Life in the Defense Of His Country.”

“Abides Forever In Light.”

More than that – through poetry, Scripture and prose, epitaphs seek to sum up in one lasting package the life, the love, the work, the passion, the very purpose – of those for whom they stand.

Jesus Christ had no epitaph. Buried in a borrowed tomb, he had no words emblazoned on his grave. If there had been, what might they have read?

“Rabbi.”

“Beloved Son.”

“Hard-working Carpenter, Itinerant Preacher.”

“Healer.”

“Crucified, Died and Buried.”

“Enemy Of The People.”

But Christ had no epitaph. Instead, during the final hours of his life, Christ mapped out his way of suffering with seven famous last words – seven final phrases, remembered and recited throughout the ages – tiny touchstones along his way of sorrows.

This Lent, as we gather to make sense out of his wretched suffering, his senseless death, our confusing lives, our miraculous relationship with him, we do so with these words as our guide.

He died alone, in a way and under circumstances that we will never understand. Yet these words provide tiny windows, tenuous glimpses into his suffering, loving, final thoughts. Listen to them. We may find that these last words have a lasting impact, even now, for us.

Why has God forsaken us? Truth to tell, it is the other way around. It is we who have forsaken God. Take Adam and Eve, for example. Not content with Paradise, with the fact that God had provided them with all that they would ever want or need, they forsook the Lord by reaching for what was forbidden.

God should have forsaken THEM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Adam and Eve in the garden. Why didn't God forsake them?

Instead God provided them skins to cover the nakedness of their shame, a promise, and a future hope beyond what they deserved for all their disobedience.

Come to think about it. WE have forsaken God as well. We've reached for what God has forbidden, in spite of all that God has given. Why hasn't God forsaken US?

Or take Cain, for example. Not content with farms and fields and family, with the honor of being "the firstborn of all creation," Cain forsook the Lord by reaching for a weapon. What was it? A rock, a stick, a tool? Whatever instrument of destruction he used; it was propelled by hate. Cain rose up and killed his brother.

God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Cain in his field. Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead God put a mark on him, making it possible for Cain to go on living in spite of his great shame.

Come to think of it, we have forsaken God as well. We've hated like that and been jealous, and there are times when it has led to serious situations. Why hasn't God forsaken us?

Or, take Noah, for example. Not content with being the only family in the world rescued from universal destruction, Noah forsook the Lord by reaching for the bottle. He thanked the Lord then got drunk. God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Noah in his stupor.

Why didn't God forsake him then? Instead, God let the rainbow stand as the blessing it symbolized. God went ahead as God had planned and began over anyway, with Noah.

Come to think of it, we have forsaken God as well. We've sought our own answers and hidden in our own solutions, in spite of the salvation God has given us so lavishly. Why hasn't God forsaken US?

Or, take David as an example. Not content with everything that God had given him – the kingdom, the power, and the glory – David forsook the Lord by reaching for another man's wife...eventually another man's life.

God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but David the adulterer in his sin. Why didn't God forsake him then?

Instead God claimed him yet as the apple of his eye, and gave him the honor of being the royal ancestor of the very Son of God, a man whose name would be revered throughout history: the city of David, the star of David, the house of David.

Come to think of it, we have forsaken God as well. We've lusted and leered, degraded and dirtied what God intended holy and good. Why hasn't God forsaken US?

Or take Jonah for example. Not content with God himself, to bear the honor of being the Lord's own messenger, Jonah forsook the Lord by reaching for distance between himself and God, between himself and God's Word, between himself and God's call, between himself and those who needed him.

God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Jonah in the belly of the great fish. Why didn't God forsake him then?

Instead God provided him a type of resurrection, the opportunity to change directions and begin again, and the kind of success that no other prophet in the Bible ever enjoyed.

Come to think of it, we have forsaken God as well. We've run away from our assignments from the Lord, neglected God's call, wanted justice my way rather than the mercy which the Lord desires. Why hasn't God forsaken US?

Or take the disciples, James and John, for example. Not content with the very fellowship of the Lord, with being the inner circle of those whom the Lord befriended and in whom he confided, they forsook the Lord by reaching for places of honor. "*Grant that we may sit at your right hand and at your left when you come into your kingdom.*" They sought the glory without the process, the crown without the cross.

God should have forsaken THEM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but James and John in their pride. Why didn't God forsake them then?

Instead God honored them with the crown of life, one with the glorious vision of heaven, the other with an early entrance into it. Jesus bore the cross instead, that they might wear the crowns.

Come to think of it, we have forsaken God as well. We've reached for glory, recognition, peace without pain. Why hasn't God forsaken US?

Or take Peter for example. Not content with the Savior's promise...and his warning, Peter forsook the Lord by reaching for security, the security of denial, the shadows of anonymity, a blatant failure to witness for the Lord.

God should have forsaken HIM, not Jesus Christ on his cross but Peter in his two-faced denial. Why didn't God forsake him then?

Instead God provided him a personal invitation back into the circle of the faithful, and personal assurance of the Lord's continued love and care, as personal as Baptism, as persistent as the Lord's supper.

Come to think of it, we have forsaken God as well. We have denied our Lord. We have remained silent when we should have spoken. And we have spoken when we should have remained silent. Why hasn't God forsaken US?

Other examples of forsaking the Lord could certainly be found. Thomas doubted. Sarah laughed, Judas coveted, Elijah despaired. Joseph was proud, Moses grew impatient. Gideon demanded signs.

And WE, WE are all of them! Why hasn't God forsaken US?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken US?

The answer is there. God LEFT his Son, his dear and only Son, to be forsaken that WE MIGHT NEVER BE!

My Savior was forsaken, was left to be hell in our place, SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE WITH JESUS FOREVER!!!