

## Forsaken (The Epic of the Cross Series – Part IV)

3/22/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. Based on the comments made by Pastor Steve early in the sermon, how is our modern understanding of the word “scandal” different from the use of the word in the time of Jesus?

We currently think of a scandal as involving immoral activities, often involving breaking the law, which includes serious attempts to cover up the misdeeds. However, at the time of Jesus a scandal was something that caused one to stumble, to fall away from faith (1 Cor. 1:23).

2. Throughout the Bible a scandal is not a good thing, yet the cross is described as being a scandal, something that causes them to draw back. Does that make any sense?

That’s just the point. The cross does not make any sense to those who first hear the story. Here is the Son of God, allowing himself to be nailed to a cross. That’s not how a God, a Messiah, a Savior, a King of Kings should act (or, for that matter, be treated). Those who followed Jesus were confused and perplexed, so there is no reason people living 2000 years later would have fewer questions about this turn of events.

On the other hand, it does make sense that we would draw back, because it is hard to look at. The crucifixion was meant to be offensive. We recoil from the sight of Jesus dying on the cross. We like to envision the powerful Messiah coming to rule with authority, but the predominant theme in Revelation is of the slaughtered lamb.

3. Some of those who were with Jesus as He approached Jerusalem for the last time had difficulty dealing with the reality of what He told them. Read Matt 16:21-23 and consider why the conversation between Jesus and Peter went the way it did.

There is nothing wrong with wanting your mentor and best friend to avoid a preventable death. Unfortunately, Peter was thinking in human terms and playing into the hands of Satan, while Jesus was simply following the will of His Heavenly Father. Thus, Peter and his misconceptions were a stumbling stone to Jesus, since he repeated the temptation Satan was already whispering in Jesus’s ear.

4. We again see Peter trying to put it all together in Matt. 26:31-33. What is his problem this time?

Peter would seem to be sincere, but he's also pretty emotional. Jesus is not doing things the way Peter expects a Messiah to act. One gets the feeling that ultimately he is truthful when he says he doesn't really know Jesus.

5. Jesus talks in parables and usually talks about himself indirectly. However, in John 6:52-61, he paints a pretty concrete picture that would shock nonbelievers. What is He trying to say?

Jesus must become a part of our very being. We are to be united with Him even while we are still on earth and then we are to serve in His place.

6. Turn now to the main scripture for this sermon (Mark 15:25-32). Is there any doubt that Jesus could have come down off that cross if He had wanted to? Wouldn't that have made a bigger impression on the people at that time, causing huge numbers to believe?

Your group may actually be split on this. Some may say that Jesus being God, of course He could come down, accompanied by a host of angels to help knock some sense into all those who caused Him pain and humiliation. Others may take the stance that His Father would not allow Him to come down, because that would be outside of the agreement they had made in heaven when it was decided that now was the time to send Jesus.

In any event, while coming down from the cross would have made an impression on those who saw it (and the many who would hear about it), it would have short-circuited the bigger purpose of Jesus being a final blood sacrifice for all sins of the world. It would have been a short-term miracle that would have forfeited the long-term miracle of grace.

The cross was God's plan and Jesus knew it. He didn't relish the idea (hence the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane), but He was more than willing to go through with it. Coming down from the cross before He died would be bodily conquest; dying and then being resurrected was a spiritual conquest. In doing so, Christ's death bridged the gap between God and man.

7. Finish the passage for today (Mark 15:33-39). Is it possible that there was something more frightful than the pain and suffering of death on the cross that bothered Jesus?

Having to separate Himself from God the Father, even for a brief period of time while taking on all our sins even though He was an innocent man, was a devastating step to have to take. Yet it required an innocent man to be the proper sacrifice on our behalf.

8. Pastor Steve described an altar as a place in our lives where God takes something from us and Jesus doesn't save us. Can you give examples of where that has occurred, either in the Bible or in your own life?

The obvious response would be that essentially every human who has ever lived (with a couple of exceptions, like Elijah, who was taken up into heaven while still alive), has

eventually died. The strong faith of a terminally ill patient is a powerful witness to those with whom they come in contact. God suffers when we suffer, because He is loyal to us, but He sees the bigger picture.

9. If God's plan is to use our suffering, then should we refrain from praying that God remove our suffering or heal our illnesses? Are our pleas to be delivered from unpleasant situations inappropriate?

While it is possible that God's plan takes us through difficult situations, it certainly is not inappropriate to make our plea to God. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane made his plea, but made it clear that He wanted only to do God's will. We need to remember to frame our conversation with God as Jesus did in Matt. 26:39 – nevertheless, not as I will but as You will.

10. So what does all this mean for us? How are we to approach our difficult times?

First, don't feel you are suffering because you did something wrong. Secondly, don't feel like God has forgotten you. He's thinking about you and suffering with you. We need to hang on, endure, be loyal, and be faithful. It is God's work to rescue us (or not) and our work to hold on. As Mary (the mother of Jesus) said, be it unto me as you have said (Luke 1:38).