

We now need to turn to Matthew 27:45-47... First we see that for three hours there was an unusual darkness that filled the land. This was appropriate, for it could represent the great darkness of the evil event that was occurring here. The next statement that Jesus makes here is one of the most important in the Bible, in a sense. Christ is quoting from Psalms 22, which is a very strongly Messianic piece. Some say that Christ quoted extensively from it, and that the only part noted was the first phrase. This could be, for the Psalm mentions the rejection, the piercing of hands and feet, and the division of his garments which has just occurred.

This passage used to bother me a great deal, for I could not imagine God turning his back so completely on his precious Son. And yet now I feel that this situation has a profound meaning to us as we think deeply about the great suffering that Christ bore for us. We read in Isaiah 53.5, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.' It is so clear that he stepped into the path of our impending punishment and took the impact of it himself.

To understand what is going on here, we need to think about what our punishment really consists of. We think of physical pain, fire, perhaps darkness. But hell is really going to be the absence of God and all Goodness. We must not think of this absence as just not having someone we like around us; it is the total absence of any form of Good. Imagine the horror of that existence! Now, I believe that Christ had to undergo our full punishment, though not for eternity, but a brief time. But what greater punishment could there be that to be without God? And what greater suffering could there be for Christ to be without God and be locked in the grave for three days? To me, when Christ utters this statement about being forsaken by God, he is signaling this period of suffering. It means more to me than the physical pain of the cross, or the bearing of our sins that must have been so repugnant to him. Here was Christ giving up everything so that we would not also have to live without God. Of course, we know that Christ was there only temporarily in worldly terms, but I feel that this is something that he feels for all time. But our joy is that he conquered death for himself and for us, too. We will be able to live forever because he bore our punishment, and this should cause us to respond tremendously to him.