

Have you ever been separated from those you love for several days? When you were a kid, did you ever go away to camp for a week? Things can get pretty lonely. Even though there are people all around you, they may not be people you knew.

I would like to think about the impact of being alone as we remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 27:46. As He hung on the cross, he said, 'My God, my God; why hast Thou forsaken me?' I think that the statement that Jesus makes here is one of the most important in the Bible. But it used to bother me a great deal, for I could not imagine how God could turn his back so completely on his precious Son. Now I feel that this situation can have a profound meaning to us as we think deeply about the great suffering that Christ went through 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 took our punishment upon himself.

To understand the forsakenness of Christ, we need to think about what our punishment really consists of. We usually 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 particular 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 for a brief time in earthly terms. But what greater punishment could there be than to be without God? And what greater suffering could there be for Christ, the Son of God, to be without God and be locked in the grave for three days? We can only visualize partially the aloneness Christ felt. It means more to me than the physical pain of the cross, or the bearing of our sins that must have been so terrible for him. Here was Christ giving up everything so that we would not also have to live without God. How can we keep from glorifying him in our joy, because he conquered that separation from God 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.