

One of my seminary professors Donald Dawe in his book *Jesus: The Death and Resurrection of God* begins his thoughts about Jesus death by saying “The immediate context for understanding *Jesus* death is the crisis of faith it created for Jesus and his disciples.” He goes on to point out that we are more apt to see Jesus as the “object of faith” than to see him as a “person of faith”, as someone who himself had to have faith. Yet, Jesus had to face life and death just as we do, struggling with faith. On the cross in the midst of feeling utterly abandoned by the Father for the first time in his life he had to trust that he would be vindicated in resurrection. He had to take it on faith that he is who he is as Son of God and that he had been sent to be the Christ for all creation. He had to trust his Father and himself that he was not some mystic fool suffering from Messiah complex and do said trusting in the midst of everything in reality telling him he was just a mystic fool suffering from Messiah complex who took things a little too far. He was a man whose life culminated in dying by being nailed to a wooden on public display all the while being mocked as the “King of the Jews” by the Jews themselves. He called God his Father, blasphemy to the Jews. This crucifixion is what Jews had the Romans do to blaspheming fools with Messiah complexes because they feared the Romans might punish the whole nation because of a fool; so much for their faith.

The Gospels do not portray Jesus as one who faced death in calm assurance of its outcome. His anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane was so intense that he sweated blood. He did not go to the cross shouting songs of victory as if he were on some *jihad* in which martyrdom was the most honourable way to die. Moreover, the sense of overwhelming peace that so many Christian martyrs throughout history are accounted as experiencing while they died wasn't there for Jesus. Jesus died in despair, badly beaten, abandoned, and ashamed.

All he had to hang onto was his faith, a faith fostered by day after day after hour after hour after moment after moment of prayer while striving and struggling to do his Father's will. All the while the fallen humanity, our fallen humanity, which he bore everyday of his life kept battering him at the level of basic instinct tempting him “Do your own will, Jesus. Do it your own way. You're the Son of God. To thine own self be true and you won't have to die.” For us it's reversed. We instinctively struggle and strive to do it our own way and it seems the Holy Spirit calls us to pray and prods us to do the Father's will as if he were a tempter who we struggle to ignore. Jesus maintained his faith as I said earlier by prayer, but also by memorization and meditation upon the Scriptures and recitation of the Psalms. Jesus relationship with the Scriptures was so deep that he saw himself in them. I don't know if you've ever had that experience, where the Scriptures come alive to you personally and through them God addresses you specifically about your life. That's where Jesus was at 24/7. It happens to us infrequently, but to Jesus the Living Word in Scripture was his life and home. He lived in them.

Jesus said seven things from the cross as he died. The first three more or less concerned with the effect his living in the Scriptures had on him. First, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The remarkable love of this man; after being betrayed, deserted, and denied by his closest friends and by his own people to the point of being beaten and crucified, he can still ask the

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Father who has abandoned him too to forgive them. A forgiving person is what living in and by the Scriptures creates. Next he tells the thief dying beside him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise.” Jesus speaks by faith here. Then he entrusts his mother to one of his disciples. “Honour your Father and Mother so that it will go well for you in the land I am giving you.”

Next, he begins to live within the Psalms. He quotes the first line of Psalm 22, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” Jesus is screaming his awareness of having been abandoned by the Father. A dark cloud had covered the city. In other parts of the Gospels and the rest of the Bible whenever the dark cloud gathered it was the glory of the LORD coming among his people and God would speak. It happened in the Exodus at Sinai and twice it happened in the Gospels. Only, this time the Father does not speak. There is no “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to whom.” The Father did not send an army of angels to rescue his Beloved Son. Yet, Jesus himself remained faithful to the end not calling down angels to save himself. He does the Father’s will even when the Father has abandoned him to death.

Psalm 22 ends with the forsaken one being raised in vindication to praise God before the people. Jesus knew in this moment that this entire Psalm not just the first line was about him. Next he says, “I thirst” reminiscent of Psalm 22:15, “My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.” It is also reflective of Psalm 69:21, “They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Psalm 69 also describes a person in Jesus situation of being wrongly tortured and left to die who cries out to God for help. It ends with the Psalmist saying he will praise God and that Zion will be given to those who truly love the LORD.

Finally, Jesus says, “It is finished” (also possibly Ps. 22:15) and “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” which comes from Psalm 31:5, “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.” Jesus last sentence comes from a Psalm in which the Psalmist is pleading for God to be his refuge and save him. The Psalm is a declaration of faith. Verse five says, “But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” The last verses of Psalm 31 read, “O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you, and accomplished for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of everyone! In the shelter of your presence you hide them from human plots; you hold them safe under your shelter from contentious tongues. Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as a city under siege. I had said in my alarm, “I am driven far from your sight.” But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help. Love the LORD, all you his saints. The LORD preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD.”

So, Jesus in the midst of dying by crucifixion having no assurance at all that he is anything more than a blaspheming mystic fool with Messiah complex who took things a bit too far, having no assurance of the presence of God with him, Jesus on the cross in the midst of the crisis of faith has to choose whether to

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continue to have faith or turn back. He chooses to proclaim his faith in the Father and does so with his last breath. The only confidence that he could possibly have to stand on was Psalms that he believed he was living within. I don't know if you have ever been to the point where you have felt utterly forsaken by God while life was utterly out of control and all you've had to hold onto is something that you feel or think God said to you through the Scriptures. If you have then you know something of the faith of Jesus Christ. That faith, his faith, is his free gift by the Holy Spirit he's given to us, to those who love him. We find this free gift of Jesus own faith in the living Word of the Bible. That living Word in the midst of those words is our home, it's a mansion and in it there are many rooms, rooms enough for everyone, for you, for me, for everyone. Living in our room within the Living Word in Scripture is where we find ourselves strengthened for the crisis of faith that will beset us, when we must choose to believe or simply turn back. Amen.