

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!”

The Cup of Separation

Matthew 27:46

I have written about this before, but it deserves another look, so bear with me.

I like Rob Bell. We watched his NOOMA short films and learned a lot. I loved them. But you have to watch what he says and measure his words against the Bible and its message. Because he has the tendency to take scripture out of context to fit his ideas about God and the Church and living the Christian life. The film on the moving of the Spirit is a good example.

On 28 July 2017, John Blake of CNN published a story called *Outlaw Pastor Rob Bell Shakes Up Bible Belt*. <http://www.cnn.com/.../28/us/rob-bell-bible-belt/index.html> In typical Rob Bell fashion, he challenged the fundamental ideas of what it means to be a Christian, especially when we walk alongside those in need. Toward the end of the article, talking about grieving people, the author wrote, “He [Rob Bell] told the audience he doesn't like those YouTube videos where Christians "destroy" atheists in debates. Respect people's doubts, he said. You can't lead them to where they don't want to go. Doubt is part of the biblical narrative, he said, quoting Jesus' cry on the cross: ‘My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?’”

This is exactly what I am talking about.

He takes a statement by Jesus, which means one thing, and twists the meaning to fit his own evolving theology.

Why did Jesus cry out on the cross?

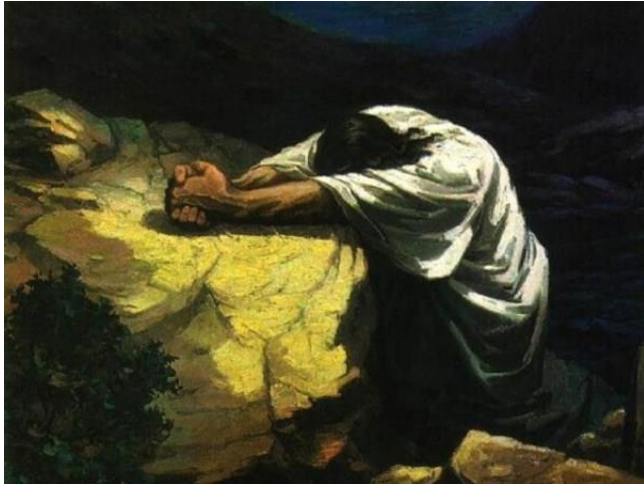
What was happening? Was Jesus filled with doubt about his mission and purpose in life? Was Jesus unsure of his role as God and Savior and Messiah, as the Pascal Lamb of God who would – in a few moments – take away the sins of the world?

Don't you believe it!

Jesus knew this moment would come. He feared this moment, and he was not afraid of anything. But this was different. Unprecedented. Something was about to happen to Jesus that had not happened *since the founding of the universe*. He feared it so much, that as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he sweat blood, asking his Father if it was possible to avoid this part of his mission. In the end, in obedience, he finally relented.

So why did Jesus sweat blood?

What event in your own life would worry you so much, would cause you such anxiety and fear—to grieve so deeply, that you would pray for God to make it pass, if possible, and sweat blood in the agony of your prayer to him?



Just before Judas walked up the hill with the detachment of soldiers, Jesus was praying on the Mount of Olives.

Luke 22:39-44 tells us Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray [as was his custom], and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will,

but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling on the ground."

The medical term for bloody sweat is hematidrosis. Although rare, it occurs when a person is under great emotional stress, and the tiny capillaries in the sweat glands break.

Why was Jesus sweating blood? Was Jesus worried about receiving a horrific beating in a few hours followed by an agonizing death by torture?

No.

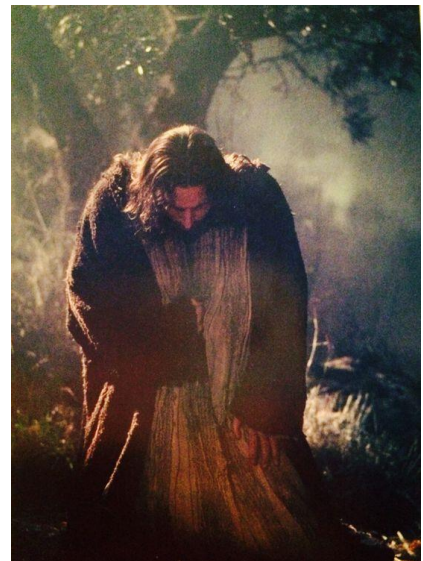
Jesus was sweating blood, because he had never, ever been separated from the Father in all of eternity. Later that day, he would find himself separated from God for the first time on this cross.

Jesus said it himself: "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." (John 17:5).

The Apostle John wrote about it: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

He knew God when he was born in the manger. Psalm 22:9, "Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God."

From the beginning of eternity, Jesus was with God. He was with God in the womb of Mary, and knew God at his birth.



In Isaiah 49, Isaiah was not talking about himself. As in other passages, he was speaking of the Messiah. “Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.”

In Luke chapter 2, we learn that when Jesus was eleven years old, the family went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Without telling anyone, he stayed behind, talking to the priests in the temple. When his parents found him three days later, he said, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them.”



In all of history, Jesus had never been separated from his Father—they were one (think Trinity). But at the crucifixion, they would be separated for the first time. That is why he prayed for the cup to pass, if there was any other way. This is why he was sweating blood. He could not imagine what it must be like to be separated from God. (I do not think of it as the cup of his death or the cup of crucifixion, but the Cup of Separation).



From the cross, as Jesus took on the sins of the whole world, he felt the presence of the Father depart, and what did he say? “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit” (Matthew 27:46,

50).

Jesus completed his mission to save the earth—and us. He did not die of the scourging or the crucifixion; he gave up his spirit and died (John 10:18). When the Roman soldier pierced his side, out came water and blood, the sign of a broken heart.

How long was Jesus separated from God on the cross?

I always wondered about this passage in Isaiah—it does not quite fit with the story of Israel that Isaiah is telling. Instead, inserted in the middle, like Isaiah often does, is another mention of the Messiah. “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the LORD your Redeemer” (Isaiah 54:7-8).



Why was Jesus sweating blood?

Why did he cry out from the cross?

Jesus was not suffering from a lack of faith or doubts or delusional thinking due to the horrific beating. Not for a second.

He cried out because he had never, ever been separated from God.

And when it does happen, when the separation from his eternal and loving Father finally takes place, it breaks his heart – and he dies.

Joel Graves