

East Hill Church Sermon Discussion Guide: Forsaken No More

Guest Speaker: Pastor Keith Jenkins

Date: March 29th, 2024

Introduction:

On Good Friday, Pastor Keith Jenkins led the congregation in a time of reflection and contemplation on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. He emphasized the importance of pausing to remember and give thanks for the ultimate sacrifice that purchased our salvation. Pastor Keith focused on Jesus' cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46), exploring the profound implications of Jesus being forsaken by the Father so that we might never be forsaken again.

The Pain of Abandonment:

Pastor Keith began by discussing the deep pain of abandonment and the human longing to belong. He noted that we often seek acceptance and affirmation from others, even contorting ourselves to fit in, but ultimately find ourselves disappointed and hurt when people inevitably fail us. Jesus experienced this abandonment from his closest friends and disciples, who fled and denied him in his darkest hour.

Discussion Questions:

1. Share about a time when you felt abandoned or betrayed by someone close to you. How did that experience impact your view of relationships and your ability to trust others?
2. Why do you think we often seek acceptance and belonging from people, even when we know they may disappoint us? What does this reveal about our deeper needs?
3. How can the reality of Jesus' abandonment comfort us in our own experiences of rejection or loneliness?

Supporting Verses:

Matthew 26:56b - "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** The disciples, who had spent years living and ministering with Jesus, abandoned him in his greatest hour of need.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse highlights the frailty of human loyalty and the depth of Jesus' suffering, as he faced the cross alone, forsaken even by his closest friends.
- **Application:** When we face abandonment or betrayal, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus understands our pain, having experienced the ultimate desertion on the cross.

Matthew 26:34-35 - "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** Peter, the disciple known for his bold faith and loyalty, adamantly declared his devotion to Jesus, only to deny him three times hours later.
 - **Theological Significance:** This exchange reveals the weakness of human resolve and the need for divine grace and strength to remain faithful in the face of fear and pressure.
 - **Application:** Like Peter, we may have the best intentions to follow Jesus faithfully, but we must recognize our own frailty and dependence on God's grace to sustain us.
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Forsaken for Us:

Pastor Keith then turned to the heart of his message, exploring the profound significance of Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He explained that in this moment, Jesus took on the full weight of sin and experienced the abandonment of the Father so that we might never be forsaken. Because of the cross, we can have confidence that God will never leave us or turn his back on us, no matter what we face.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be forsaken by the Father on the cross? What did this abandonment accomplish for us?
2. How does the reality that Jesus was forsaken for you personally impact your view of God's love and commitment to you?
3. In what areas of your life do you need to embrace the truth that you are never forsaken by God? How can this truth bring comfort and strength in the midst of difficult circumstances?

Supporting Verses:

Isaiah 53:4-5 - "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** This prophetic passage, written centuries before Christ, vividly describes the suffering and abandonment Jesus would endure on the cross.
- **Theological Significance:** These verses reveal the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death, as he took upon himself the punishment and abandonment we deserved, securing our peace and healing.
- **Application:** When we feel overwhelmed by our sin or the weight of suffering, we can find hope in the truth that Jesus bore it all for us, taking our place and purchasing our healing through his wounds.

Matthew 27:45-46 - "From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')."

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** Jesus' cry from the cross, quoting Psalm 22:1, marked the climax of his suffering and the moment of his abandonment by the Father.
 - **Theological Significance:** In this moment, Jesus took on the full weight of sin and experienced the separation from God that we deserved, becoming the ultimate sacrifice for our redemption.
 - **Application:** Because Jesus was forsaken for us, we can have confidence that we are never alone and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38-39).
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Conclusion/Reflection:

Pastor Keith's Good Friday message invites us to pause and reflect on the profound significance of Jesus' suffering and abandonment on the cross. As we contemplate the depth of his love and the price he paid for our salvation, we are reminded that we are never forsaken by God, no matter what we face. Because Jesus was forsaken for us, we can find comfort, strength, and belonging in our relationship with the Father, trusting in his unfailing love and commitment to us.

Reflection Questions:

1. Take a moment to reflect on the specific ways Jesus' abandonment on the cross speaks to your own experiences of rejection, loneliness, or fear. How does his sacrifice bring comfort and hope in these areas?
 2. In what practical ways can you daily embrace the truth that you are never forsaken by God? How might this truth change the way you approach challenges or difficult relationships?
 3. As you contemplate Jesus' suffering and death on this Good Friday, what specific aspect of his sacrifice stands out to you the most? Take time to thank him for his incredible love and the price he paid for your salvation.
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Prayer Requests:

[Share any personal prayer requests, and pray over the week ahead]

References:

Primary Sources:

- "Forsaken No More" Good Friday Service, East Hill Church, 04/07/2024. Delivered by Pastor Keith Jenkins.
- Sermon Discussion Guide, Provided by Kelly Paxton, and East Hill Church.
- The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Biblica, Inc.™, 2011.

Secondary Sources:

- Contextual and Theological Insights: Derived from general biblical scholarship and commentaries relevant to the verses from Matthew 26-27 and Isaiah 53.

General Sources on Biblical Studies:

- Stott, John. "The Cross of Christ." InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Keller, Timothy. "Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God." Penguin Books, 2013.
- Carson, D. A. "Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus." Crossway, 2010.

Collaborative Contributions:

- LLM Contributions: Based on a mixture of licensed data, data created by AI models, and publicly available data, synthesized for the study of the provided sermon transcript and biblical verses.

LLM Training Data:

- LLM Training Data. Includes a diverse range of texts (books, websites, and other publications) up to September 2023.

East Hill Church Sermon Discussion Guide:

The Heart of the Father

Guest Speaker: Pastor Keith Jenkins

Date: March 31st, 2024

Introduction:

In this Easter message, Pastor Keith Jenkins explored the well-known parable of the prodigal son, focusing on the heart of the father towards his lost son. He highlighted the scandalous love and grace of God, who welcomes and celebrates the return of sinners, no matter how far they have strayed. Pastor Keith challenged the church to embody the father's heart, creating a community where the broken and lost can find acceptance, belonging, and restoration.

The Audience: Two Groups

Pastor Keith drew attention to the two distinct groups in Jesus' audience: the tax collectors and "notorious sinners," and the Pharisees and teachers of the law. These groups represented opposite ends of the religious spectrum, yet Jesus welcomed and ate with both. This scandalous behavior revealed the heart of God, who desires relationship with all people, regardless of their moral or social status.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus intentionally spent time with both "sinners" and religious leaders? What does this reveal about God's heart?
2. How can we, as a church, create a welcoming environment for people from all backgrounds and lifestyles?
3. In what ways might we unconsciously create barriers or distinctions that keep certain people from feeling accepted in our church community?

Supporting Verses:

Luke 15:1-2 - "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** In Jesus' day, tax collectors and "sinners" were despised and considered unclean by religious leaders. Eating with them was a sign of acceptance and friendship.
- **Theological Significance:** Jesus' actions demonstrated that God's love and grace extend to all people, regardless of their past or social status. He came to seek and save the lost.
- **Application:** As followers of Christ, we are called to imitate His inclusive love and to break down barriers that prevent people from experiencing God's grace.

Mark 2:17 - "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** The religious leaders criticized Jesus for associating with "sinners," believing that righteous people should avoid them.
- **Theological Significance:** Jesus clarified that His mission was to call sinners to repentance and restoration, not to affirm the self-righteous.
- **Application:** We must recognize our own need for God's grace and extend that same grace to others, rather than judging or excluding them.

The Prodigal Son: Rebellion and Return

Pastor Keith walked through the first part of the prodigal son story, highlighting the younger son's rebellion, his squandering of his inheritance, and his eventual return to the father. He emphasized the father's unconditional love and scandalous acceptance of his lost son, running to embrace him and welcome him home.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you experienced the Father's unconditional love in your own life, even in moments of rebellion or doubt?

2. What can we learn from the father's response to his son's return? How should this shape the way we treat those who are far from God?
3. Share about a time when you "came to your senses" and returned to the Father after a season of wandering. What prompted your return?

Supporting Verses:

Luke 15:20 - "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** In Jesus' culture, a father running to embrace his wayward son was considered undignified and scandalous. It demonstrated an extreme love and acceptance.
- **Theological Significance:** The father's response illustrates God's unconditional love and eagerness to welcome repentant sinners back into His family.
- **Application:** We should never feel too far gone or too ashamed to return to our Heavenly Father. He is always ready to run to us with open arms.

Luke 15:24 - "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** In the parable, the father's celebration of his lost son's return was extravagant and joyful, reflecting the value he placed on his son's life.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse emphasizes the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents and the Father's delight in restoring the lost to Himself.
- **Application:** As the church, we should celebrate and rejoice when the lost are found, creating an atmosphere of joy and acceptance for those who return to God.

Conclusion/Reflection:

Pastor Keith's message powerfully illustrates the scandalous love and grace of our Heavenly Father, who welcomes and celebrates the return of every lost son and daughter. As the church, we are called to embody this same heart, creating a community where the broken and hurting can find acceptance, belonging, and restoration. We must be willing to break down barriers, extend grace, and joyfully embrace those who are far from God, remembering that we too were once lost but have been found and welcomed home by the Father.

Reflection Questions:

1. How can you personally extend the Father's love and acceptance to someone in your life who is far from God?
2. What practical steps can our church take to become a more welcoming and inclusive community, reflecting the heart of the Father?

3. Take a moment to reflect on the Father's unconditional love for you. How does this truth impact the way you view yourself and others?
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Prayer Requests:

[Share any personal prayer requests, and pray over the week ahead]

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- Sermon Discussion Guide, Provided by Kelly Paxton, and East Hill Church.
- The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Biblica, Inc.™, 2011.

Secondary Sources:

- Contextual and Theological Insights: Derived from general biblical scholarship and commentaries relevant to the verses from Luke 15 and Mark 2.

General Sources on Biblical Studies:

- Bailey, Kenneth E. "The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants." InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Keller, Timothy. "The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith." Dutton, 2008.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. "The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming." Convergent Books, 1994.

Linguistic and Grammatical Resources:

- Strong, James. "The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible." Thomas Nelson, 2010.
- Vine, W.E., Merrill F. Unger, and William White. "Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words." Thomas Nelson, 1996.

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