



## CHRIST'S CRISIS ON THE CROSS

A crisis occurs when we experience something traumatic or stressful and it becomes a time of testing or abrupt change in our lives. Many people do not welcome crises. Some go into a state of denial when they cannot cope with a sudden or emergency situation. Very few actually thrive in a moment of crisis.

I have heard it said that the Chinese character that represents "crisis" also means "opportunity." If you think about it, a time of crisis also brings an opportunity for evaluation, change and growth. What many people might view as an unfavorable circumstance can actually be turned into something positive and productive.

How are we as Christians supposed to face crises in our lives? When Jesus talked about our life in this world, He said, *"In this world you will have trouble."* (John 16:33) It's clear that Christ's followers were not promised a crisis-free walk while here on earth. We are told in the same verse to *"be brave! I have defeated the world."* What makes the Christian brave in the face of crisis is his knowledge of the sovereign plan of God for His people. The divine destiny of believers is to become like Christ. Everything that happens to us – including life's crises – are used by God to accomplish His unchanging plan for us (Rom. 8:28-29).

Jesus had to face several crises in His Messianic work. Each crisis initiated a new move or phase in the arduous process of restoring lost humanity to God's Kingdom. Every critical event of His earthly life – His birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension – ushered a new order of things in the mission of Christ. Every crisis became an opportunity for Him to move on to the next stage of our redemption from sin.

The passion of Christ depicted a continuing and growing crisis that no human being has ever experienced. See Him in the night shadows of Gethsemane, prostrate in agonizing prayer, while His most trusted disciples slept. Sweating blood, He seemed to lose all of His human strength when He realized what He was about to go through. He experienced what seemed to be "withdrawal symptoms." He wondered aloud if there was another way. It was too much for one man to do alone. The crisis had only begun and there was only one way that He knew to move forward. He would trust His Father. He would follow His Father's way – the way of love, the way of grace.

Watch Him as He is betrayed by Judas, and then abandoned by all of His disciples, one by one. You try to look away when He is brutally tortured and spat on contemptuously by cruel and unjust men. Did He wonder if He truly was the Anointed One when they crowned Him with thorns? Did He cry out in anguish when the Roman whip opened up His back flesh? Was crying allowed in the supreme sacrifice?

What was He thinking about as they drove spikes through His hands and feet? Did He try to focus on something pleasant so He wouldn't think about the excruciating pain? Then you hear Him speaking. You're amazed at what you hear. *"Father, forgive them."* He was thinking about us – you and I, sinners all!

The crisis of the cross was Christ's alone. The work of the Messiah had to be completed in utter loneliness. Jesus walked the "winepress" alone. Calvary was a one-man job. No one could help, no person could sympathize, nobody could really understand.

And so, when you hear Him cry out, *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"* you are confused. Was Jesus really all alone? Where was God? Did God abandon Him in His crisis at the cross? What kind of a father would forsake his son in his greatest crisis?

It was a strange declaration about the absence of God during the dying moments of His Son. The words of Jesus, though strange, must be true. Truth is often found in the lips of dying men. This is the unpleasant truth: Jesus was God-forsaken at the cross! He had to be. He was not dying for Himself. At the cross, He was us. He was made sin when He took upon Himself all of our sins. God could not treat Him as the sinless person that He is. He was treated as the sinners that we are.

To be a sinner is to be God-abandoned. The logical end of sin is to be God-forsaken. Sin from its beginning has always been about rejecting the rule of God. Sin is separation from God by choice. Hell is the total fulfillment of that choice. Hell is to be absolutely forsaken by God.

No human being has ever been rejected and abandoned by God. Sinful men chose to be separated from Him. It was not God who left men. From the moment of the Adam's fall, God had offered His only Son to be the sacrificial Lamb. When Jesus took the sinners' place on Calvary, He submitted Himself to the destiny of all sinners – separation from God. He was God-forsaken.

Jesus' cry was not a quest for aid and comfort from His Father. It was His way of moving to the next phase of His Messianic mission. In experiencing the ultimate end of sin, He realized that His substitutionary work had been accepted. In the act of God's abandonment, He passed into the abyss of profound sorrow – hell – utterly forsaken by God. He stood where man should have stood. And now, because Christ faced His crisis on the cross, we have the opportunity to receive His completed Messianic work. When we do, we are saved from having to face the ultimate crisis of every sinner – to be God-forsaken in hell. Instead, we are reconciled into perfect communion with our loving Heavenly Father.