“If Jesus Was God, Why Did He Cry Out ‘My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me’?”

If Jesus really claimed to be a god then why did he say on the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Response #1:
Thanks for your letter. I find D. A. Carson’s comments on this passage helpful. Like him, I think that Jesus is conscious of having in some sense been abandoned by His Father. This would doubtless be related to the fact that, on the cross, he was bearing the sins of the world, thus causing God the Father to turn away from His Son.

His cry, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,” addresses God the Father as “My God.” This is really not odd on the lips of Jesus, for we elsewhere read of Him referring to the Father in this way (see John 20:17). In addition, as the God-Man, Jesus was not only truly God (God the Son), but He was also truly man. It does not strike me as odd, therefore, that the man Jesus should refer to the Father as “My God”—indeed, it would not necessarily even be odd for the Son to address the Father in this way. For although God is one, the Father is a distinct person from the Son.

At any rate, this is essentially how I would understand Jesus’ cry of dereliction.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Response #2:
My colleague Michael forwarded his reply to me. I have recently come across an intriguing, very different paradigm

for understanding why Jesus would say these words, that I find myself thinking about a lot.

It could be that Jesus *felt* that He was abandoned by His Father because at the point He became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), He fully descended into the darkness and blindness of fallen and judged humanity—and sin makes us blind and deaf to the reality of God. At that point, like astronauts on the dark side of the moon experiencing being completely cut off from Mission Control, perhaps He couldn't have sensed that His Father's love for Him never changed (because God does not change; that's one of His attributes). As Michael has remarked to me, Jesus, as our sin-bearer, experienced "God-forsakenness" on our behalf. In other words, He experienced in some sense the same sort of "God-forsakenness" that those in hell will experience. He experienced the horrible reality of the consequences (or wages) of sin (Rom. 6:23).

The Lord Jesus could have cried out, "why have You forsaken Me" because that is the *effect* of sin on humanity—it can *feel* like God has forsaken us—but it doesn't mean He has. He had promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Deut. 31:6,8).

Secondly, there is a very compelling observation about what has been called "the cry of dereliction" that was a major light bulb moment for me when I heard it: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" is the opening line to Psalm 22. The Psalms are songs, so He wasn't just quoting scripture, He was crying out the first line of a song very familiar to any Jews who were within earshot. And when we hear the first line of a familiar song, it's like hitting the "play" button, and the rest of the song continues to play in our heads.

I think that when Jesus called out the first line of Psalm 22, he was reminding those around Him of the rest of the song, which not only makes it clear He was the fulfillment of the prophecies of crucifixion, but it unfolds into a song of trust

and praise in Yahweh.

Anyone who knew Psalm 22 could have been struck by the fact that Jesus was a living picture, the very fulfillment, of the words of that song running through their heads:

> 6 But I am a worm and not a man.
> I am scorned and despised by all!
> 7 Everyone who sees me mocks me.
> They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
> 8 “Is this the one who relies on the Lord?
> Then let the Lord save him!
> If the Lord loves him so much,
> let the Lord rescue him!”

> 11 Do not stay so far from me,
> for trouble is near,
> and no one else can help me.
> 12 My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;
> fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!
> 13 Like lions they open their jaws against me,
> roaring and tearing into their prey.
> 14 My life is poured out like water,
> and all my bones are out of joint.
> My heart is like wax,
> melting within me.
> 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.
> 16 My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
> an evil gang closes in on me.
> They have pierced my hands and feet.
> 17 I can count all my bones.
> My enemies stare at me and gloat.
> 18 They divide my garments among themselves
> and throw dice for my clothing.

And yet there is a faith-filled insistence on praising the

Father despite what the Son was feeling:

> 22 I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.
> I will praise you among your assembled people.
> 23 Praise the Lord, all you who fear him!
> Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!
> Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!

Verse 24 is especially powerful, since it would indicate that Jesus knew His Father had not abandoned Him even if He couldn't see or sense His presence:

> 24 For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.
> He has not turned his back on them,
> but has listened to their cries for help.

I think it's very interesting that there is a completely different way of interpreting the Lord Jesus' plaintive cry on the cross. Compelling, even. I hope you find it helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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