

Lee Mount Baptist Church Bible Study

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

John R Hudson

Matthew records in chapter 27:

46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'). 47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.'

So Jesus is speaking in Aramaic and at least some of the bystanders do not understand what he is saying. We are not clear why he is speaking in Aramaic as he is quoting the first line of Psalm 22 in much the same way as we say, 'Away in a manger,' 'Once in Royal David's city,' or 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' to identify some poetry. If he had learned Psalm 22 by heart, he would have learned it in Hebrew. Perhaps it is because people are more comfortable expressing their faith in their first language (Eklund, 2016) or because he wanted to address the Jews, rather than the non-Jews, around the cross.

So why is Jesus quoting Psalm 22? Well, among other things, it says:

7 All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
8 'He trusts in the Lord,' they say,
'let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.'

14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
15 My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16 Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

17 All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

18 They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

which is a description of what Jesus has gone through on Good Friday. In other words, he is saying to the scribes and Pharisees who were present,

‘You may think that you have got the better of me. But, in reality, all you have done is to ensure that this thousand year old prophesy is fulfilled. What is more, if you read to the end of the psalm, you will find that you have brought about the very thing you were trying to prevent.’

The psalm goes on to say:

27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
28 for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.
29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him —
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

‘All the ends of the earth,’ says Jesus, ‘will remember and turn to the Lord — not just the Jews — and future generations will be told about this and pass on to a people yet unborn: He has done it!’
Matthew then records:

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

but John, who was standing near the cross, records in chapter 19 that:

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.
30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

However, ‘It is finished’ is a very weak translation of the Greek ‘τετελεσται’ which is linked to the word ‘τελος’ or ‘end’ in the sense of goal, purpose or aim. Jesus is really saying, ‘the goal has been reached.’ The purpose for which he came to earth has been accomplished and all the suffering which he knew, when he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, would be coming to him is over. He can now return to the Father having achieved the aim for which he originally came to earth.

In effect, he is repeating in his own words the very last line of Psalm 22 ‘He has done it!’ Far from being a cry of despair, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ is a cry of triumph and a message that the Jews alone will not be God’s chosen people but that ‘whoever believes in him — Jews and non-Jews and their future generations — shall not perish but have eternal life’ (Jn 3:16) as God’s chosen people in God’s kingdom.

References

Eklund, E. H. (2016, 17 November). Do scientists believe in God? Results from an eight-nation study. <http://www.elainehowardecklund.com/videos/>.