

## **The Fourth Word from the Cross: Martha**

Let's consider for a moment what someone like Jesus' friend, Martha, might have been feeling and thinking about if she was present to hear what Jesus said when He was on the cross. We don't know for certain rather she was, but let us look for a moment what may have gone through her head if she happened to pass by Jesus when He spoke the forth phrase from the cross.

When Jesus said His fourth word of the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Imagine how those words might have stirred Martha in her heart, mind, and soul.

Think about it, Martha had experienced what it feels like to be forsaken. She felt forsaken by her friend, Jesus, when He was not present at the time her brother, Lazarus, died.

She was no doubt disappointed and distraught that Jesus was not there when Lazarus' sickness led not to another of

Jesus' miraculous recoveries, but rather to his death and a tomb.

Martha's feelings ended up shifting shortly after Jesus did arrive, but once a person feels the sting of being forsaken, even if only perceived that way, one does not forget that sting.

When Jesus spoke those words dealing with feeling forsaken from the cross, He was on His way to breathing His final breath before death.

Afterwards, He would be taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb as a dead man just as His friend, Lazarus was a few days earlier.

At that time all Martha and her sister Mary could do was watch, hope, pray and send word to their friend, Jesus, asking Him for help. Jesus did come to them. At first, they thought He was too late. They felt forsaken by their friend.

They felt hurt. They were at a loss. But their loss turned

around before too long.

If Martha heard Jesus say what He said on the cross, did this whole scene from John 11 race back to her mind?

Let me share with you the story from John 11 verses 1 - 44. John 11:1–44 (NIV): Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” 4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, 7 and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” 8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?” 9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s

light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.” 11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” 12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” 17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at

the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” 28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But

some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

What I find interesting here is that Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. Even after we are told that Jesus loved this family. But it is also interesting to note that as our text mentioned Bethany is less than two miles from

Jerusalem yet Jesus found Lazarus in the tomb for four days when He finally arrived.

No wonder Martha felt forsaken.

Proverbs 13:12 (NIV): Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

While Martha may have felt forsaken at first, there is indeed always hope for a different ending in the story.

She experienced that first hand with Jesus and Lazarus when He called her brother out from death and darkness.

**Video: Martha** ([www.skitguys.com](http://www.skitguys.com))

She said I felt that He had abandoned us, and church when you feel that way you must remember that there is always hope for a different ending.

Perhaps what seemed imminent and final at the cross

might have a twist in time as well. Regardless, at the moment Jesus uttered the fourth word, He was feeling forsaken.

The fourth word Jesus spoke from the cross was a magnificent word that has been hard to understand fully as words coming from the lips of the Son of God about His Heavenly Father.

However, make no mistake about it, He meant to say them and did not regret what He said. Let's face it church we sometimes say things we regret. After we say some words and they escape the safety of our lips, there has been times at least for me, (maybe your more spiritual than I am), but there has been times I wish that I could grab those words, stuff them back in my mouth and swallow them.

Have you ever had one of those moments when right after you said something, you had an "OH NO," experience? You wanted those words back and would stuff them deep down inside if you only could do it?



There is a moment in one of the classic Christmas movies called A Christmas Story starring Peter Billingsley, that his character has an “OH NO” moment. His character named Ralphie says something that he wishes with all his might he would not have said. In this scene, Ralphie and his family are coming back home from a family outing, and are singing Christmas songs, when all the sudden we hear the car they are riding in have a blowout.

Ralphie’s dad gets out of the car to change the flat, and his mom turns to Ralphie and suggests that he go and help his dad change the tire. It was intended to be kind of a father-son bonding time. The dad gives Ralphie the job of holding the hubcap while his dad puts the spare tire on, and then all the sudden Ralphie ends up messing up the moment with his dad as the hubcap and lug nuts from the tire go flying when the tire is being changed. That’s when the “OH NO” moment occurs. We don’t hear exactly what he says, but we know that Ralphie says the “Queen Mother of all Dirty Words.” And he gets in so much trouble when he gets home as he gets his mouth washed out with soap.

While Ralphie's mom interrogates him about where he heard that "Queen Mother of all the Dirty Words" in the first place, he blames it on his friend Schwartz. However, Ralphie then says, "No I had heard my father say that word every day of my life."

It was his father who had sewn that word into Ralphie's soul over time. When his life got filled up with fear and anguish in the tire-changing-lug-nut-losing moment with his dad, those emotions flooded his insides and what was deep down inside of his heart overflowed out of his mouth.

It was as if Ralphie's dad had put something down in his son's soul; when his insides got flooded with emotion and fear in that moment, the flood that poured into him caused those sown in seeds of dirty words to rise to the top and then overflow out of his mouth.

Jesus said it like this,

Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Matthew 12:34, (NIV)

As we consider the fourth word from the cross, listen to it and look at it through that lens: “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” What we hear Jesus say during this moment on the cross is what is surfacing from the depths of His heart and soul as He is being flooded on the inside with everything that was in the cup He asked His Father not to make Him drink in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was having some FaceTime with His Heavenly Father. He tells His Father, “If there is any other way for Me to rescue the world from sin, death, Satan, and hell besides having to drink what is in this cup, let’s go to plan “B.” I would rather not drink the wrath of God and have My soul flooded with the sin of humanity if there is any other way.”

And God the Father says, “There is no other way. If You want to save the world, then You have to drink the cup.”

And Jesus says, “Not My will...but Your will be done. Let’s do it...I’ll take the flooding of My soul if it means We get FaceTime with humanity throughout eternity.”

If it will allow humanity to be in right relationship, then I’ll do it.

The scene leading to the fourth word from the cross then unfolds in Matthew 27.

Matthew 27:35–49 (NIV): 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the jews. 38 Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the

cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' ” 44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. 45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 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?”). 47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” 48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

Notice again the fourth words that Jesus cried out in verse 46? “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

It’s hard to hear Jesus say those words. What appears to be on the surface of that Scripture, those words are

bothersome. Those words seem to go against the nature and character of who we understand God to be. Nobody really wants to think about God being a God who might turn His back on someone. I don't want to think about God leaving me when I need Him the most.

After all Jesus did promise that He would never leave us or forsake us.

I do love the fact that Jesus seems to be one who if you asked Him in the moment when He is in his deepest pain, "How's everything going, Jesus?" He isn't one who just goes, "Fine. Everything's just fine."

We do that sometimes. Someone asks, "How's it going?"

We respond, "Fine."

However, things may be everything but "Fine." On the inside what we really feel like saying is: "I feel forsaken. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That's basically what Martha said to Jesus when her brother died, and Jesus showed up days later. "Jesus, I feel like you

have forsaken me!”

There is something refreshing and appealing in that Jesus is the God who gets raw, real and honest as He shares what’s in the depths of His soul. When the wrath of God began to flow from the cup into His life, what overflows out of the mouth of Jesus is what had been sown into the heart of Jesus for years and years and years.

“My God, My God...WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

Let’s explore what it means that these words were sown into the heart of Jesus for years and years. It goes back to the school curriculum for Jewish boys in the first century. Their school work was to memorize sections of the Old Testament.

That’s why David would write, thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.

The Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, was what was sown into their hearts and lives from a very young age.

Jesus was a Jewish boy who would have had the Old Testament sown into His mind, heart, and life. When Jesus cries out from the cross, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” What is overflowing from the depths of His heart is the first line from a Psalm that He would have memorized and had sown into His soul from the early years of His life.

Psalm 22:1 (NIV): My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

The fourth word from the cross that Jesus cries out are the lyrics to a song He would have memorized that were deep in His soul.

Psalm 22 is known as a song of lament. It was a song that people would sing and say when they were in a time of suffering. Most Jews in Jesus’ day would have recognized and known this song. This is the song people sang when they were experiencing pain in their lives.



It is interesting that in our day, the song people often turn to and even memorize is Psalm 23. However, few people likely memorize Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 has at least two parts. The first part of the Psalm is about all the pain, suffering and feelings of abandonment.

However, halfway through the Psalm, it shifts from pain and suffering to hope and what's coming around the corner: The Kingdom of God and a new day when God will deliver His people and bring forth a victory worth celebrating throughout the ages.

Jesus had the whole song in mind just as His contemporaries would have on that day. Some songs are just the songs you sing at different occasions.

On your birthday you sing: HAPPY BIRTHDAY. On New Year's Eve after the clock strikes midnight you sing: AULD LANG SYNE. During the 7th inning stretch of a baseball game you sing: TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME.

And in the first century when a Jewish person was in the midst of suffering and pain, the song that overflows from the depths of their heart was Psalm 22 which starts out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

That may be strange to you and I as twenty-first-century people living with a more modern-day mindset and culture.

However, it was not foreign to a first-century Jewish person who had an ancient near eastern mindset and Hebrew cultural context. What may be strange to some people and cultures in the twenty-first century not only is normal to a first century Jew living in Israel but also was packed full of “OH WOW” moments for those at the cross that day.

What a first-century Jewish person might have been thinking about when they heard Jesus saying those fourth magnificent words from the cross that were overflowing from His heart because they had been sown into His heart were more than what we first realize. We don’t realize that often when first century Jewish Rabbi’s would

quote a line from a Psalm, such as Jesus does here on the cross when he quotes Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Although he may only be quoting the first line of the song, a first century Rabbi would have the whole Psalm in mind. Thus, what may only look like Jesus crying out to His Father that He is abandoning Him in his time of need, Jesus likely had a bigger picture in mind. He knew another lyric to the song in His heart that did not get sung out loud, but that was in His heart, nonetheless. Rabbis in Jesus’ day didn’t always say the whole Psalm.

They often only would sing the first verse even when they had the whole song in mind.

To be clear, Jesus does not explicitly tell us what He is thinking in this moment on the cross. However, it is reasonable to believe Jesus absolutely felt abandoned in that moment. He was being honest in that moment. He didn’t say everything was fine. The words of the song not only overflowed out of His heart and mouth but also,

they resonated with his emotions. Regardless, He didn't only have verse one from Psalm 22 sown into His heart.

He had the whole song in His heart and mind. And there are things in this Psalm that echo what we read in the Matthew 27 passage that we see unfolding at the cross when Jesus is being crucified. It's listening to verse one of the Psalm in light of the whole Psalm that makes the fourth words from the cross so utterly magnificent.

Jesus echoes this Psalm, written by David when he was going through a time of suffering in his life, because this was the song people sang when they were suffering in that day. Look at some of these things in Psalm 22 that connect back with the cross scene beyond verse 1.

Psalm 22:7–8 (NIV): 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.”

When it says in verse 16...

Psalm 22:16–18 (NIV): 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.

Look how these last verses end with such hope, victory and perspective about what is coming at the end of the suffering. It has the rest of the story that Jesus, His contemporaries and all in that day who would have gone through tough, painful and suffering times would have been singing and holding on to what was sown into their hearts at young ages.

Psalm 22:27–31 (NIV): 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!

Don't miss that "OH WOW" moment at the end of verse 31: "that HE HAS DONE IT." Another way to say those final words: IT IS FINISHED! That is the sixth word from the cross we will look at in a few weeks.

When Jesus cried out from the cross the first line from Psalm 22, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me," He had the whole Psalm planted in His soul. We hear the first lyric, but He knows that there is more to that song. In the end, Jesus is the suffering servant who is fulfilling everything the Scriptures said would happen. As a twenty-first century reader, we likely do not see all that is going on like a first-century Jewish person would have understood.

Matthew wrote this gospel primarily with a Jewish audience in mind. And the things Matthew includes in his gospel account of the crucifixion would have connected on a cultural level with his first-century Jewish audience. Why?

Because they had the Old Testament seeds sown into their souls as well. Thus, when the religious leaders of the day are standing around the cross watching this unfold and listening to what Jesus says, they see prophecy unfold right before their eyes.

For example, when Jesus says the fourth words: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

As Jewish people who knew that Psalm and had it sown into their hearts, too, they would have been connecting with those other lyrics in the song. They would have linked the words that talk about the mocking and letting God deliver Him and the language about the pierced hands and feet and the dividing His garments by casting lots that we just read above. The Jewish religious leaders of the day around the cross would have been connecting the dots and viewing it all through the lens of prophecy.

And in Matthew 27:45 when it says: “Now from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.”

In the first century, they counted time from the hour the sun came up until it went down. Thus, the sixth hour until the ninth hour would translate from noon to 3 pm. Therefore, just after lunch when the sky goes dark and about 3 pm when Jesus starts overflowing on the cross with the words from Psalm 22, they would have looked around and not just seen the dark skies, they also would have seen the words of the prophets coming true.

In the Old Testament, when God brings darkness over the land, it is a sign of judgment. Because the Old Testament would have been sown into these Jewish people's hearts watching this cross event unfold when the sky turns black, what begins to rise in their hearts and minds are passages like Exodus 10.

Exodus 10:21–22 (NIV): Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days.



The first-century Jewish person sees things happening in this account that twenty-first-century people may not notice.

We often don't get past: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

However, Jesus has the whole song in mind because that is what has been sown into His heart throughout the years.

The fourth word from the cross is a magnificent word with a magnificent meaning for each of us even though we are not first century Jews. It is magnificent because we, too, are sowing things into the hearts of people all around us each day.

What are you sowing into the hearts of your family?

Dad, what words are you sowing into the hearts of your kids that will come out overflowing when they go through

seasons of suffering?

Wife, what words are you sowing into your husband when he loses his job and comes home to face you and his family? What words will overflow that you have been sowing into his heart?

Students, what words are you sowing into your parent's lives? Do they know how you feel? Do they know how you appreciate them putting a roof over your head and clothes on your back and food in your belly or have you been sowing other words that tear them down?

Grandparents, are you sowing words of encouragement and wisdom into your kids and grandkids or are you sowing words that remind them that they are not doing life how you did it when you were there age?

Adults with aging parents, are you sowing words of appreciation, confidence, and love into your parents that allow them to sing the whole song of Psalm 22, or are you giving them just cause only to sing verse 1 because in reality, they do feel forsaken by their families?

Parents, do your kids have seeds sown into their hearts that remind them that whether or not they start on the team, make the team, get a hit, score a goal, make an error, get first chair, have a girlfriend, lots of friends or no friends, whether they are short or tall, skinny or fluffy, great skin or not so great skin, smart in school or not a straight-A student, no matter what: you love them for free? Do they know in their hearts that they don't have to do the dance for you to get the hug from you? Do they know that and are you sowing those seeds into their lives on a day in and day out basis so that when the painful times of childhood and puberty hits and their little souls get flooded, what rises from the depths are the truths about how you see them and how much you love them?

That may not make it all better, but it gives them hope that leads to a future.

There is never a greater time than today to begin sowing seeds of truth, love and God's word into the souls of your kids, your marriages, and your own lives. Jesus did that.

And when His soul was flooded on the cross with the wrath of God, the song of Psalm 22 overflowed from Him. That overflow led to your life and my life being rescued from sin, death, Satan and hell. Those are words worth sharing and sowing into the heart and life of other people.

With what you are going through right now, you may only see the first line of the story, but church you need to remember that you can have hope for a different ending. Gospel sees your struggle, and dips on his way to resurrect the hope, joy, peace, that you need in the situation.

Who will you share these words of hope with this week?