

The Cross – The Greatest Hope of All.

'Before we can get to the resurrection, we must stand at the cross...

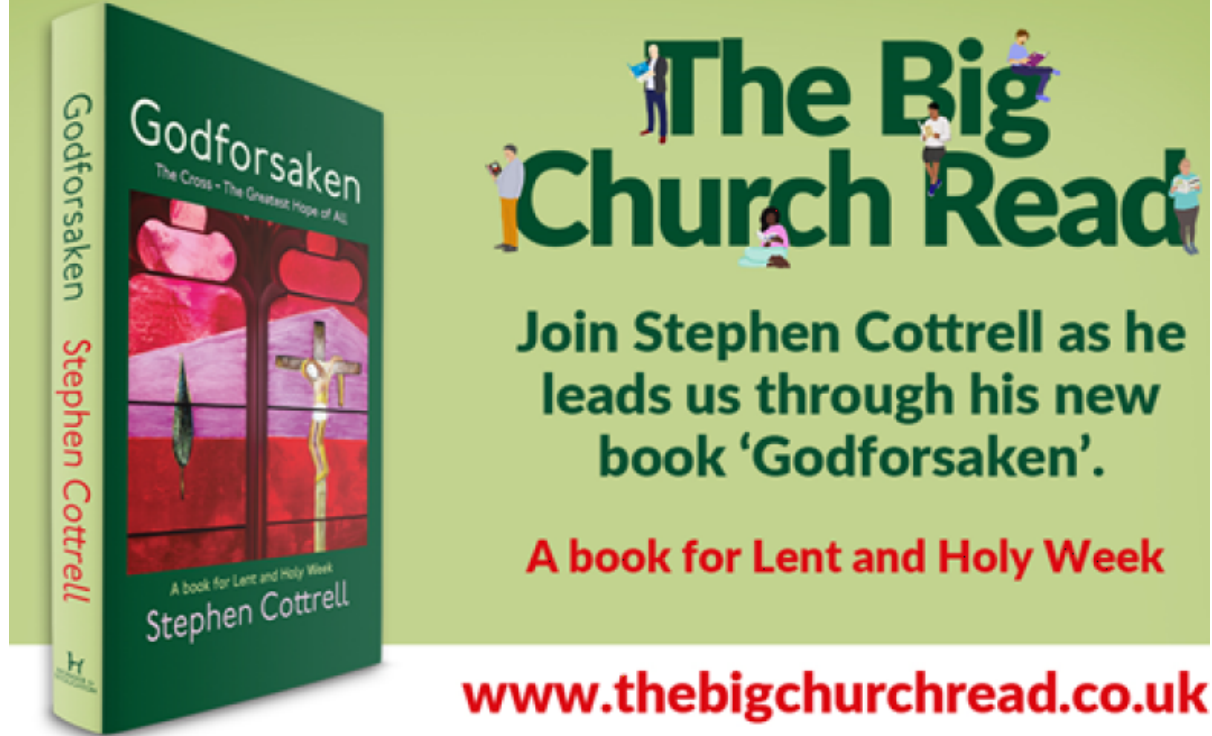
As we stand under the cross, we begin to understand it. We will hear Jesus crying out. We will stay with those awful words. We will examine them. We will acknowledge their difficulty... [we will] explore the horror and anguish of Jesus' dying, to see how it will help us face ours, and all the forsakenness we see in our world today.' The Most Revd Stephen Cottrell

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' are Jesus' last words on the cross, as reported by Mark in his gospel account. They are shocking and painful words, full of despair and anguish. Yet, the Archbishop of York writes in *Godforsaken* that we can also discover in them 'a strange and beautiful hope: the hope that Jesus, in his passion and death, has indeed shared the horrors of our own isolation, desperation and alienation from God and from one another. Moreover, his resurrection only brings hope and meaning to our lives precisely because he has participated in such passion and separation.'

In this book for Lent and Holy Week, Cottrell 'plumbs the depths' of these last words of Jesus as reported by Mark. This is one of only a handful of times that Jesus' words are preserved in the original Aramaic in the gospel accounts, and Cottrell looks at the significance of that in terms of the impact of these words. He also highlights the importance of understanding and interpreting these words in their context as the opening verse of Psalm 22, showing Jesus drawing on his own religious tradition and formation – by drawing on the Psalms as the 'prayer book of the Bible' - as well as indicating that his death was a fulfilment of scripture, and therefore helping to make sense of his suffering and dying. These are words which are uncomfortable for us to hear, even centuries afterwards – we want a Jesus who is in control, not in physical and mental torment, writes Cottrell. He examines the stark reality of the cross and the concept of separation between the Father and the Son at this pivotal moment. And he explores how Jesus' suffering on the cross is crucial to him coming alongside us in our suffering – when we feel abandoned by God, we can find hope and comfort in knowing that Jesus experienced this too.

Much of this book was written in 2019-22 during the pandemic – a time of isolation and fear for many, which also forced us to confront our own frailty and mortality. Throughout the book, Cottrell draws on his own experiences and those of others to explore wider themes of isolation, hopelessness, abandonment and loneliness. Questions at the end of each of the seven chapters help the reader to reflect on what they have just read.

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The Big Church Read

This Lent and Easter, journey with Archbishop Stephen Cottrell through his new book 'Godforsaken' with The Big Church Read. Visit The Big Church Read to access FREE videos from Archbishop Stephen to accompany the book. You'll also find a reading plan and questions for discussion or reflection.

In 'Godforsaken' Archbishop Stephen ponders on Jesus' last words from the Cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (the first line of Psalm 22). It's an anguished expression – traditionally ascribed to King David – of defeat, failure, abandonment and despair. What does it mean for Jesus to have quoted them, at the very end of his life? What do those words mean for us? This is a beautiful and compelling exploration of the dark, suffering side of the Passion – and how Jesus' words lead us to the greatest hope of all.

Gather people together to read through 'Godforsaken' this Lent with the Big Church Read. It's FREE to join in and is ideal to be used by individuals, small groups and whole Churches. To find out more visit [the Big Church Read](http://www.thebigchurchread.co.uk).

4 min read

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