

## THE PSALM OF THE CROSS

I'd like to look today at a passage of Scripture that describes the feelings and thoughts Jesus had while He was on the cross. This section describes the crucifixion in more detail than anywhere else in the Bible.

It is Psalm 22, which has been called "The Psalm of the Cross." It is like an x-ray looking into the mind of Jesus, revealing His thoughts while He hung on the cross.

Here is what Charles Spurgeon said about it: "This Psalm may have actually been repeated word by word by our Lord when hanging on the tree: it would be too bold to say that it was so, but even a casual reader may see that it might have been. It begins with "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and ends, according to some in the original with "It is finished"....Before us we have a description both of the darkness and of the glory of the cross, the sufferings of Christ and the glory which shall follow. Oh for the grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm."

An unusual thing about Psalm 22 is that David writes it in the first person, as if it's all about him. Yet the New Testament says it is about Christ:

John 19:23-24 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

This is a direct quote from Ps 22:18, showing that scripture was indeed fulfilled by Jesus. Acts 2:30 says that David was a prophet speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in this Psalm he spoke of the crucifixion.

To some extent Ps 22 must have referred to events that happened in David's life—he had many very serious trials, but in duality it also refers to Jesus Christ in a prophetic way, and in some verses it applies more to Him than it could possibly apply to David.

David's life pictured Christ's in many interesting ways. Both were born in Bethlehem. Both were shepherds (Jesus in the spiritual sense). Both were doubted and mocked by their people, their brothers, and the King. People in high places were jealous of them and tried to kill them, but they were loved by the poor and rejected. Both faced amazing odds and brought salvation to their nation (David via killing Goliath). David is Israel's most famous and loved King; Jesus is the King of Kings. Both were betrayed by those close to them. Jesus' favourite name for himself was "Son of David".

So it makes sense that David writes the Psalm in the first person, as a lot of it was about him, but it found its deepest meaning in Jesus. In fact, even though it was written 1000 years before the crucifixion, Psalm 22 contains 20 specific details that were fulfilled by Jesus Christ on the cross! This starts right from the first words of the Psalm – they were quoted by Jesus as He hung there.

**Psalm 22:1 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?”**

Those were the very words Jesus cried out, demonstrating the profound depth of anguish He had as the One upon whom all of the sins of the world were placed.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

He was made to be sin for us. The One who hates sin more than we can possibly imagine, who is unable to live with any sin of any kind, who never sinned and never will – He was identified with sin – made to BE sin.

It blows our mind to think of the enormity and depth of that realisation, of that experience and what it meant to Jesus. No wonder He cried out in dismay and disorientation, but not in doubt or lack of faith in any way.

**Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”**

Jesus became a curse! Can you imagine what that means? We can’t really comprehend it, but that’s what He was willing to do for us – He was willing to stoop as low as He could possibly go. He took the guilt of all humanity on Him. He became guilty, He became sin, and God hates sin. God had to forsake Him.

You and I don’t know what it is to be forsaken by God. Even the vilest person on earth today isn’t forsaken by God. Anyone can turn to Him. But when Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself, He was forsaken by God. It was just momentary, but He experienced that horrible feeling of absolute emptiness, something He had never gone through and couldn’t imagine being cut off from the Father He had been one with for all eternity.

Other people have suffered physically as He did, but no one else has ever experienced the degree of His inner, spiritual pain, because everyone else has sinned and deserved problems. We find it hard to accept blame for something just one other person has done. He had never sinned, but He took the blame for everybody.

When He cried out these words, it showed Jesus was so willing to identify with us that He was willing to subject Himself to the same kind of confusion we go through. “Why is this terrible thing happening to me? Why did I have a car accident? Why am I sick? Why did someone die so soon?”

When we’re going through trials it’s okay to ask “Why?” Because Jesus did, and He never sinned. And it helps to know Jesus went there too, having the same sorrows that affect all of us—actually even deeper sorrows we can’t really comprehend.

*Quote here: Emptying the Sewer, by Max Lucado. (See box at end).*

**Psalm 22:2 “My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”**

It wasn't only for a split second as He died that God refrained from helping Him, but all the time in Gethsemane in the dreadful hours and even days leading up to the crucifixion, and then in the beating and thrashing He received, as He stumbled and fell under the burden of the cross, God didn't intervene to help Him – for the hours He hung naked on the cross, God didn't step down to relieve Him of the struggle.

Psalm 22:3 **“Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.”**

But He knew behind it all that there was a reason, that God was in control, and God was holy. He never lost sight of that fact, and so He carried through with it.

That's what we have to remember through all our troubles too!

Psalm 22:4-5 <sup>4</sup>**“In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. <sup>5</sup>To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.”**

He recalled that God had helped out people who had asked for His intervention in the past. But God wasn't helping Him. As well as facing the Father's silence, He was being mocked, scoffed at and taunted by people jeering sarcastically that God had abandoned Him and was powerless to help Him.

Psalm 22:6 **“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.”**

So distressful was this aloneness and the agony of separation from God's presence that He felt that He was even less than human – that's how badly He felt – reduced to such depths that He was no better than a worm, despised by everyone.

Interestingly, the word used for *worm* refers to the *coccus worm*, also called the crimson worm or the scarlet worm, which was used by the Israelites in dyeing the curtains of the tabernacle scarlet red. God says “though your sins be scarlet they shall be white as snow” – His red blood would remove our scarlet sins and wash them clean.

The way Jesus was despised is also described in Isaiah 53:3 “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held Him in low esteem.”

Isaiah 53 continues in verse 5: “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”

Another verse that was written hundreds of years before the crucifixion, but described it so well—using the word “pierced”!

Psalm 22:7-8 <sup>7</sup>**“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. <sup>8</sup>“He trusts in the Lord,” they say, “let the Lord rescue Him. Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him.”**

These verses were fulfilled in Matthew 27:39-44:

<sup>39</sup> “Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup> 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!” <sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <sup>42</sup> “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. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” <sup>44</sup> In the same way the rebels who were crucified with Him also heaped insults on Him.”

How He must have been tempted to clear God’s name that was being blasphemed, to prove He was God once and for all! But He couldn’t afford to yield to temptation even then.

Psalm 22:9-10 <sup>9</sup> **“Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast. <sup>10</sup> From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”**

In the depth of this agony, He recalled the miracle of His birth and the reason He had come to earth. He was breastfed and had to learn to walk and talk just as we do, but He was specially conceived by the Holy Spirit and knew God at a very early age.

Psalm 22:11 **“Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.”**

He needed the Father with Him – no one else could help!

Psalm 22:12 **“Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.”**

Jesus was surrounded by enemies, pictured here by angry bulls ready to gore Him with their horns. The bulls of Bashan were proverbial for their size because they were well fed on the lush vegetation and pastureland of the Bashan area of the Upper Jordan.

Psalm 22:13 **“Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.”**

The lion was the symbol of Rome – the Roman soldiers who crucified Him were cruel and vindictive and the lashings ripped His flesh apart.

Psalm 22:14 **“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.”**

Here is a description of crucifixion even though it was unknown when this Psalm was written. **“Poured out like water”** refers to excessive dehydration by perspiration in the hot sun, and loss of blood.

“All my bones are out of joint.” One of the most horrible things about crucifixion was that when a man began to lose blood and his strength ebbed from him, all his bones slipped out of joint. The cross is like a rack that tortured the victims by stretching them, making it a most painful kind of death. The word we use today to describe extreme pain, *excruciating*, is linked with the word *crucifixion*.

**“My heart has turned to wax...melted away.”**

John 19:34 “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.”

**Psalm 22:15 “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.”**

“Potsherds” are pieces of broken pottery, baked and dried in the sun. He was extremely thirsty, so much so that He cried out “I am thirsty” (John 19:28).

“You lay me in the dust of death”. It was God’s plan to save us through His Son’s sacrifice.

**Psalm 22:16 “Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.”**

“Dog” was the name for gentiles. “Pierced”, as we saw in Isaiah 53:5, a pretty accurate account of crucifixion!

**Psalm 22:17 “All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.”**

Crucifixions were naked, humiliating and shameful. Charles Spurgeon wrote: “We know that the greatest pain the body can endure is that arising from a bone out of its place...When the Lord was raised up on the cross and His sacred body hung in the air from the nails, all the joints began to give so that the bones were parted one from the other so visibly that (as David had prophesied) they might tell all his bones, and thus throughout the whole body he endured acute torture.”

**Psalm 22:18 “They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”**

Exactly fulfilled in Matthew 27:35 “When they had crucified Him, they divided up His clothes by casting lots.”

**Psalm 22:19-21 <sup>19</sup> “But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. <sup>20</sup> Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. <sup>21</sup> Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.”**

He called for God’s help, and knew God would deliver Him. “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.” Dogs represent Gentiles, lions refer to Rome.

The mood changes in verses 22 – 31, as the crucifixion led to the resurrection.

**Psalm 22:22 “I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.”**

We are using the NIV today as usual, but in this verse almost every other version translates “people” as “brethren” or “brothers”, and “assembly” as “congregation”.

These words are a reference to the New Testament Church, prophesied here although it wasn’t known in the time of David, and in fact didn’t begin until after Christ’s resurrection!

**Hebrews 2:11-12 <sup>11</sup> “Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup> He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”**

Verse 12 is quoting Psalm 22:22!

**Psalm 22:23 “You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, honour Him! Revere Him, all you descendants of Israel!”**

Here we are told how to react to this amazing event! We, the spiritual Israelites who fear the Lord will react by praising God because...

**Psalm 22:24 “For He has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from Him but has listened to His cry for help.”**

Jesus Christ the afflicted One was resurrected to a position of power as Lord of Lords and King of Kings! And all of our sins are forgiven!

The final verses begin to describe the time when Jesus Christ will rule and God's Kingdom will cover the earth.

**Psalm 22:25 “From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.”**

Vows were often made in a period of distress, and fulfilled when God answered the prayers. On the fulfilment of the vow the person whose prayer was answered would do the things mentioned in verses 22-24, and then put on a feast (v. 26). This is what Jesus is going to do.

**Psalm 22:26 “The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever!”** (Talking about eternal life.)

**Psalm 22:27-28 <sup>27</sup> “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, <sup>28</sup>for dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations.”**

Clearly referring to a time yet future!

**Revelation 11:15 “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever.”**

**Psalm 22:30 “Posterity will serve Him; future generations will be told about the Lord.”**

This reminds us of **Isaiah 11:9** “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

**Psalm 22:31 “They will proclaim His righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!”**

“He has done it!” – not far different from “It is finished.”

This reminds us of **Isaiah 9:6-7**: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

Jesus suffered terribly in the crucifixion, but He did it all for us, and it's all going to turn out right in the end. We will be there with Him in His Kingdom, because of what He did on the cross!

Emptying the Sewer (by Max Lucado)

*"Imagine that somewhere in the universe there is a cesspool containing all the sins that have ever been committed. The cesspool is deep, dark, and indescribably foul. All the evil deeds that men and women have ever done are floating there. Imagine that a river of filth constantly flows into that cesspool, replenishing the vile mixture with all the evil done every day. Now imagine that while Jesus is on the cross, that cesspool is emptied onto him. See the flow of filth as it settles upon him. The flow never seems to stop. It is vile, toxic, deadly, filled with disease, pain and suffering.*

*When God looked down at his Son, he saw the cesspool of sin emptied on his head. No wonder he turned away from the sight. Who could bear to watch it? All the lust in the world was there. All the broken promises were there. All the murder, all the killing, all the hatred between people. All the theft was there, all the adultery, all the pornography, all the drunkenness, all the bitterness, all the greed, all the gluttony, all the drug abuse, all the crime, all the cursing. Every vile deed, every wicked thought, every vain imagination – all of it was laid upon Jesus when he hung on the cross."*