

## A VIEW FROM THE CROSS

### PSALM 22:1-21

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.

But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.

Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed.

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”

But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and

My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.

But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth, and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.

In 1946 Los Alamos was our country's testing ground for its nuclear weapons research. There, a young scientist, "*Louis Slotin*," was conducting an extremely dangerous, but somewhat routine experiment.

To measure the amount of Uranium 235 needed for a chain reaction, he would push together two hemispheres of uranium, and just as the mass grew to the point of self-sustainment, *the critical mass*, he'd pry them apart with a screwdriver, halting the reaction.

That's what usually happened, but on May 21, 1946, Slotin's experiment went haywire. When he went to pry apart the Uranium, his screwdriver slipped, and suddenly the room was ablaze with a bluish haze.

Rather than duck to protect himself, Slotin was more concerned about the seven other people in the room.

He grabbed the Uranium, and pulled it apart with his bare hands, exposing himself to the lethal radiation.

Slotin's bravery saved the lives of his laboratory colleagues, but nine days later, Louis Slotin died a terrible, racking, torturous death from radiation poison.

And what Louis Slotin did for those seven workers, in a sense, Jesus Christ has done for all humanity.

Rather than duck to protect Himself, Jesus exposed Himself to the full blaze of sin's harmful radiation.

Jesus took the *brutal brunt* of sin's critical mass, and suffered an awful, agonizing death. Yet His courageous act halted sin's chain reaction. His intervention broke the power of sin. And we come tonight to pay homage to the selfless sacrifice Jesus made on the cross!

### Psalm 22 is a fascinating chapter.

King David wrote this psalm around 1000 BC. In it he describes the sufferings of a man undergoing the hideous, heinous torture of crucifixion. But what makes the chapter so provocative is that David was writing 500 years before the Persians invented crucifixion, and 600 years before it was perfected by the Romans.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David describes the future sufferings of the Savior. Psalm 22 specifies 33 details fulfilled by Jesus on the cross.

Jesus actually quoted from this psalm while hanging on the cross, acknowledging that it spoke of Him.

Psalm 22 is so descriptive of Christ's Crucifixion you would've thought it was written by an eyewitness of the event - not a man who lived 1000 years beforehand.

In this chapter *David's thoughts* eclipse *David's experience*. The poet writes out of the heart of another David yet to come - the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

This chapter is an emotional diary of the Deliverer's feelings and thoughts while on the cross. Psalm 22 reveals the *grunt and grief behind God's grace*.

It's been noted, the four Gospels give us **"a perspective of the cross"** - the facts of the story - the **who**, and the **when**, and the **what**, and the **where**...

Whereas the NT Letters provide **"a perspective on the cross"** - or why. It gives a theological explanation.

But here we're given **"a perspective from the cross."** The focus is the Savior and His experience.

Psalm 22 is some of the holiest ground in Scripture.

John Phillips suggests: **"Approach this psalm like Moses at the burning bush, remove your shoes - for the place whereon you stand is holy ground."**

The Psalm opens, **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** On the cross Jesus cried, **"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani."** It was a quotation of Psalm 22:1 - except in Aramaic - the language of the common folk.

In quoting this first line Jesus is giving us a reference point. For heavenly commentary on what happened that day at Calvary we can learn from the 22nd Psalm.

The Psalm continues, **"Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?"**

**O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent."**

No one who had been there would ever forget the dramatic scene. For three hours, from noon to 3:00 PM in the afternoon, the sun at its peak, refused to shine.

It was a *midday at midnight!* It was as if heaven had stopped smiling, and all the Earth trembled in fear.

In John 8:29, Jesus talked about His unity with the Father God, "*He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.*" But now suddenly, Jesus is rejected.

He who enjoyed perfect harmony with the Father since before time began now feels the pain of isolation.

This is the most mysterious, yet most monumental moment in all of human history. When Jesus utters the words, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" we hear the *Savior's shriek*. Suddenly the sin of mankind is thrust upon Jesus' *sacrificial shoulders*.

The *Lamb* receives His *load*.

Jesus was the *spotless, unblemished* lamb of God.

Morally, His heart was as tender as a baby's soft, sensitive skin. *But now for the first time Jesus feels the weight of sin.* It would've been a shock to His system to sense a single speck of sin - but imagine the piercing fright, the staggering horror - of suddenly absorbing the sin of the whole world. The sin of the rapist, the serial killer, the child molester, the secret gossip - the sin of all mankind - was thrust upon His innocent shoulders.

2 Corinthians 5:21 declares "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*" Jesus was God, and He

never ceased being God. He had lived from eternity past in warm, unbroken fellowship with the Father.

From before the beginning, nothing had interrupted the Godhead's holy harmony. Yet for a moment, on the cross, *the Son of God* became *the orphaned Child*.

In a way no person can completely comprehend, God became estranged from God. The Son was separated from the Father so we could be restored.

When my son, Zach was two years-old he contracted a serious infection, and had to be hospitalized.

When it came time to insert the IV the nurse told Kathy and I we'd better leave the room. It would be painful for Zach, and he would associate the pain with his parents if we were present during the procedure.

Kathy was smart. Being a nurse she knew what was coming so she walked back to the room - but I stood outside the door to be as close to my little buddy as possible. Suddenly the screaming started.

I'll never forget the shrieks, they lasted only a few seconds, but for me it was an eternity. My little guy kept crying "[I want my Daddy, where is my Daddy?](#)"

I could've clawed through that hospital door - or jerked it off its hinges - but the remedy that was in progress, made me wait until the procedure was over!

And standing in the hall of that hospital with tears rolling down my cheeks God spoke to my heart, "[Now you know what I endured when My Son died for You.](#)"

I've never known His love as strong! God's love for me - His love for you - made Him wait outside the door!

Verse 3 continues the Son's words to the Father, "But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed."

Though Jesus was made sin, He was no sinner! In fact, He qualified to bear our guilt for this very reason - *because He retain His innocence. He trusted God...*

Jesus knew the Father is just and fair in all His dealings, and that's why He trusted the Father God to vindicate His righteousness and insure His deliverance. *Jesus knew that God would hear His cry!*

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people." Jesus was the man all men were meant to be. He was human without sin and its side-effects - the only regular human who ever lived.

You and I, and the rest of mankind - are irregulars. We've flawed, stained, frayed. Thus when sin fell upon Jesus' shoulders for the first time He felt subhuman.

He cried, "*but I am a worm*" - that's how He felt!

The Hebrew word translated "*worm*," was also used in connection with the "*crimson crocus*" - a flower that produced the scarlet dye that colored the King's robe.

The crimson crocus was home for a particular kind of worm. For the dye to be extracted from the flower the worm had to be crushed. And this illustrates Christ's work upon the cross. He too was crushed for us.

God wants to clothe His people in royal robes - to have a right standing with Him. But these robes have to be dyed scarlet - washed with the blood of Jesus.



And in order to extract the dye the worm had to be crushed. Jesus was slaughtered so we could receive God's acceptance, and forgiveness, and goodness.

Verse 7, "All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" Who could forget the cruel mocking and insults and blasphemies hurled at Jesus while He was hanging on the cross.

Even more memorable was His response, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Amazingly, our Lord Jesus extended His hand of mercy even while it was nailed to a piece of wood.

There're people today who still mock Jesus. I wish I could say the blasphemies have ceased, but I can't.

Last year on Good Friday, a Dallas based atheist group sent out an email, "God is Dead. Have a Good Friday." Their intention was to drive the nails in a little deeper. Yet ironically, it's because *God did died*, that we can have a good Friday, Saturday, and every other day. You'll find some folks still hurling insults at Jesus.

And yet the vast majority of today's blasphemers are much more subtle than the crowd that followed Jesus to the cross. Rather than *insult Him*, they *ignore Him*.

They just go their merry way, muddling through life with no regard to His enormous sacrifice! I'm not sure what's worse - outright *defiance* or subtle *indifference*?



Once a woman walked into a downtown Denver jewelry store to purchase a gold cross. The clerk asked, "Do you want a plain one or one with a little man on it?" This was no "*little man*" on the cross!

*Oh, if only you had been there!*

The Roman Centurion was there.

The crusty old sergeant had crucifixion duty that day. He'd done hundreds of executions so his heart was deaf to the screams and cries. After all - *it was his job*.

When he got to work that morning he picked up his paperwork, and noticed three cases on the docket. The day looked like a piece of cake. He might even get home early and have dinner with the wife and kids.

It was business as usual, until the victim in the middle caught his eye. This man was so *poised and peaceful*. He'd seen mountainous men come unraveled under the intense torture - yet Jesus stayed composed, and confident, and cool even in the midst such agony.

The Centurion must've been close enough to look into Jesus' eyes. They weren't hollow and empty - or full of anger and rage - as most men he'd crucified.

Jesus had loving eyes - eyes full of hope!

The old soldier forgot about getting home early. As he fixated on Jesus his world came to a screeching halt. He had spent a lifetime managing men. He knew men. He realized Jesus was more than a mere man.

He saw the Lord extend mercy to a thief... He heard Him pray for His persecutors... He witness Him reject the anesthetic... He saw the sky grow black and felt the

ground shake under his feet... Finally, gripped by emotion, and conviction, and honest appraisal - the Centurion shouted, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Verse 9, "But You are He who took Me out of the womb; you made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb you have been My God. Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help."

Remember Peter's boast earlier that night? "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

But where was Peter now? Peter proved chicken before the rooster crowed! So did all the disciples. God is now the only help the suffering Savior possesses!

God had always been there in Jesus' most vulnerable moments - *as a helpless infant, as a young child, before an angry mob, on a storm-tossed sea.*

The Father sent an angel to warn the family of Herod's plot to slaughter all the babies of Bethlehem.

And now Jesus is asking for the Father's help again. He's asking Him to save Him from another slaughter.

Imagine, Jesus hangs on the cross, gazing at the crowd gathered around Him. In verse 12, He assesses His situation, "Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion."

The enemies of Jesus have Him surrounded like a pack of pit bulls, closing in for the kill. The Jews who's power Jesus had threatened, have wanted Him dead for many months. Now they've got Him in their jaws.

And for the moment creation shutters! Something the world has never seen seems to be occurring... Evil is triumphing over Good - the Devil is beating up on God.

It reminds me of the battle of Waterloo. It was June 18, 1815, the British and their General, Wellington, had gone to Europe fight their French nemesis Napoleon.

On the day of the battle a fog rolled in off the English Channel, and greatly diminished visibility. The British were dependent on a semaphore system for all their communications. And the last message of the day was the news everyone dreaded, "Wellington Defeated."

It wasn't until morning that the nation discovered they'd received but two-thirds of the communiqué. There were three words, not just two. The complete message read, "Wellington Defeated Napoleon."

Instantly, Great Britain's sorrow had turned to joy, their mourning to laughter, their defeat into victory!

And likewise, when Jesus was crucified a communiqué was sent out, "Christ Defeated!" But what was not seen was the final word of the message.

A fog of doubt and confusion had rolled in over the disciples cutting off their visibility. It took three days for the fog to clear. On Sunday AM it became apparent the complete message read, "Christ Defeated Death."

Listen to this poem by Phillips Brooks: "Tomb, thou shalt not hold Him longer; death is strong, but life is stronger; stronger than the dark, the light; stronger than the wrong, the right; faith and hope triumphant say, Christ will rise on Easter Day." And He did!

God is in the business of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat - and of turning sorrow into joy.

He takes us to the end of our rope, so we'll admit our weakness - then lifts us in His strength. It takes faith to peer through the fog and see His ultimate victory.

Psalm 22 is a view from the cross, and in verse 15 the Crucified begins to describe His physical suffering.

*"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within Me.*

The next few verses are not for the squeamish. Now the physical pain of crucifixion is pressing in on Him...

Jesus' ordeal at the whipping post - before He ever climbed onto the cross - was enough to kill a man.

The victim was at the mercy of the lictors. Lash after lash was applied to His back and legs. Muscle and flesh were torn. Often, pieces of bone would fly off the victim's body. Blood dripped from the lacerations.

The beating stripped the victim of His strength, contorted His body, stressed His heart. Jesus says, *"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within Me."*

Then He cries out, *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; you have brought Me to the dust of death."* The body of Jesus has become dehydrated - made brittle by exhaustion.

Jesus compares His body to a broken piece of pottery. His parched lips are bleeding. Jesus thirsts...

The Man who promised, "If any man thirst let him come to me and drink" - now suffers from a lack of fluids. Jesus thirsts physically, so *He can fulfill His promises, and quench our spiritual thirst!* All He tastes is dust - so we can taste the sweet mercies of God.

"For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me." The body of Jesus is now stretched out on a timber - you can count the ribs under His skin.

His temperature is rising. Iron spikes pierce His hands and feet. Lacerated wounds support His weight.

Each breath requires extraordinary effort. He has to hike Himself up on the nails, and push down on His wounds, to expand his lungs enough to catch a breath.

Imagine, waves of pain shooting down His limbs.

In 1968, an ossuary, or burial box, was found by a road construction crew in Northern Jerusalem. Inside the box was the skeleton of a victim of crucifixion. It was the first archaeological discovery of the remains of a crucified person in Judea during the Roman period.

*And it accurately fit the biblical description...*

A seven inch iron spike was still in the heel of one of the feet. The heel was nailed into the side of the cross.

Spikes had also been driven into the man's wrists. The Ancients considered the wrist part of the hand.

A Roman official named Julius Paulus listed crucifixion as worst of all forms of execution... *ahead of burning, beheading, even torn apart by wild beasts...*

The Roman philosopher, Seneca, says this of crucifixion, “Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all?

Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly wounds on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony?

He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross...” Replay those words in your mind, “*long drawn-out agony*” - *this was the crucifixion!* Never in the history has there been a worst way to die!

And we’ve got to ask ourselves why did God subject His Son to such an awful death? Why the cross for the atoning altar? Why not lethal injection? Or the electric chair? Or even a firing squad?... *But the crucifixion?*

Why not a quick, painless - more humane mode of sacrifice? Surely, the Son of God should’ve *died with dignity*? Why so *bloody and brutal*?... **The reason?**

**Jesus got what we deserve!** His punishment shows **the severity of our sin**, and the extremes of God’s love.

There were actually two ways the crucified person died... The first was by **suffocation**. This is why the Romans would break the victim's legs with a club. Now he could no longer push himself up to breathe.

Of course, this didn't happen to Jesus.

The Bible says when the soldiers inspected Him, He was already dead, so they left His bones *intact*. And it was a fulfillment of Scripture - Psalm 34:20 predicted, not one of Messiah's bones would be broken.

Jesus died of cardiac arrest, or **heart failure**.

During a crucifixion, the victim's heart weakened. His blood grew sluggish, and settled into his lower extremities. His pulse rate doubled and his blood pressure was cut by half - the heart working overtime to pump the syrupy blood finally exploded in his chest.

This is why when the spear was thrust into Jesus side out gushed blood and water. Doctors say the only time blood breaks down into water and plasma is when the heart ruptures. **Jesus died of a broken heart!**

And trust me, *His heart still breaks over those who stubbornly resist His love!* If that's you breaking His heart tonight, don't you think its time that you stopped?

Verse 18 continues the view from the cross, "**They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.**" Recall, how the calloused Roman soldiers assigned to Jesus shot *craps* for His coat...

They had no idea who it was they were abusing.



Verse 19, *"But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog.*

*Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me."* And who does the Scripture refer to as a roaring lion? 1 Peter 5:8 tells us, *"your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* And no one was higher on his hit list than God's Son and our Savior.

When Jesus was buried He was laid in the lion's mouth. If Satan had been able to keep Him prisoner there'd be no power to deliver you and me. Christ prayed for the Father to save *Him* so He could save *us*!

One of my favorite Olympic competitions is the diving. Athletes catapult from the springboard or the platform - whirl and twirl, then knife through the water.

How anyone can hit the water at such speed and force - and not be injured... Then there's a long silence, everyone is holding their breath waiting on the diver to surface... Suddenly he or she pops through the water, thrusts their hand heavenward, and waves to the crowd... finally, the fans breathe a sigh of relief.

Well, 2000 years ago Jesus prayed for the Father's deliverance, then plunged beneath the murky waters of death. Together, for three long days, the human race held its collective breath... until Jesus surfaced!

He appeared outside the same tomb where His body had been laid. It signaled to the world that the Father had answered His prayer. Jesus was alive and well!

Tonight, we'll take communion.

For when this rite was first instituted, Jesus told His disciples, *"Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me..."* Jesus wanted us to

take frequent and reverent looks back at the Cross. He knew that this would be a needed reminder.

Whenever a Christian drifts a bit, or exits a season of busyness, or loses their bearings just a degree or two, and needs to realign their life to the compass - *return to their true north* - then they need a look to the Cross.

In the English language when we speak of "*the heart of a matter*" we called it "**the crux.**" And the term "**crux**" is short for "**crucifixion.**" The cross is the heart of the matter when it comes to the Christian life.

When I look to the cross I'm reminded of a litany of truths that recalibrate my life in a godly direction...

First, I'm reminded of **my forgiveness**. If there was anything I could do to earn my salvation the cross would've been unnecessary. But because the price had to be paid. The lamb had to be slain. Jesus cried out from the cross, "**It is finished**" - or literally, "**paid in full.**"

On the cross all that needed to be done was accomplished for mankind to be made right with God!

The cross also reminds me of **God's value system.**

The world around us is into **beauty, brains, and brawn.** Yet the cross was considered to be foolish and weak. It was the antithesis of what the world valued.

Paul said the Jews were into might - the Greeks into wisdom - *the cross was about neither.* God chose what was seen as foolish and weak to save the world. The world's values and what God uses are polar opposites.

The cross also reminds me of **the exchanged life**.

The NT teaches me that the believer has been “**crucified with Christ**.” Spiritually, God superimposes my life on top of Christ. I died and rose with Jesus!

That means my godliness and growth don't come from my own efforts, but from me identifying with what Jesus has done. Seeing myself dead in Christ, and trusting Him to live His life through me. The Christian life is not *a life lived for Christ*, but *Christ alive in me*.

In addition, when I look to the cross of Calvary I behold **the example of a servant**. Jesus' crucifixion was the ultimate display of a selfless sacrifice.

I cannot look to *His cross* without being reminded of *my cross*... For we're commanded to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross daily, and follow Jesus.

Whatever I've been called on to lay down for Jesus' sake is a small sacrifice to make in light of His cross.

And finally, when I look to the cross I'm overwhelmed with **God's love**. If love is measured by the degree to which one is willing to suffer for another, then there can be no doubt that Jesus Christ is madly in love with you!

Every time I come to the cross I'm floored by grace!

Tonight, if you need to be reminded how much Jesus loves you, then look again to the cross - it's there that He stretch out His arms, and said, **“This much!”**

The cross is the crux of Christianity.

Jesus died on the cross - and by faith, in our heart of hearts, we come to the cross... And when you do expect to find God's forgiveness, and His values, and the life of Christ, and an example, and awesome love.

Tonight, we'll come and remember the cross.