

When You Come To The Cross

Psalm 22

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In Galatians 6:14, Paul says, “But God forbid that I should boast...”—in one thing only—“... except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As believers, Paul said that we are to glory in the Cross of Jesus Christ. We don’t worship the Cross; we worship Christ, Who died on that Cross. But the Cross is a reminder of what Jesus did—to die for our sins.

There are three reasons why we should glory in the Cross. Number one, it is our salvation. The Cross is the place where we are pardoned from our sins. There is no other place to go to be pardoned from our sins. If you want to get to heaven, you can’t go around the Cross; you must come to the Cross for salvation.

Number two, we glory in the Cross because it is our place of sanctification. We are empowered by the Cross. It is the power of the Spirit in our lives to make us holy. We are declared righteous in justification, but we are made righteous in our sanctifying life of the Holy Spirit in obedience to God’s Word.

Number three, we glory in the Cross because it is the place of service. We look at the Cross and see that Jesus gave His life to die for the world. So what do we do? We give our lives to serve others. We give our lives on behalf of others. We live humbly and brokenly and sacrificially in this world. So this becomes our pattern.

So the Cross is a place of salvation—we are pardoned; it is a place of sanctification—we are empowered; and it is a place of service—we have a pattern of how we should live humbly and sacrificially. That is why we, as believers, glory in the Cross.

I know of nowhere in Scripture that we see more glorying in the Cross than in Psalm 22. Psalm 22 is a psalm all about the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is a place where we see the Messiah prophesied, that He will be crucified on the Cross.

It is a psalm of David and it is part of the trilogy of Messianic psalms picturing Jesus as the shepherd. It is interesting that Psalms 22, 23 and 24 take the three titles for Jesus as our shepherd and depict them in this psalm. In Psalm 22, Jesus is the good shepherd, Who dies for the sheep. In Psalm 23, He is the great shepherd, Who lives and cares for the sheep. In Psalm 24, He is the chief shepherd, Who comes again for the sheep. So in these three psalms we have the shepherd Who dies for the sheep, the shepherd Who lives for the sheep and the shepherd Who comes for the sheep.

We will read all of Psalm 22, but I want to bring out the seven words or statements that Jesus uttered when He was hanging on the Cross. All of the words or statements that Jesus uttered on the Cross are out of this psalm or there is the background for them here. These utterances I’m going to give you aren’t in chronological order; they aren’t given in the actual order in which

He spoke them.

The first utterances are the statements of agony uttered by Jesus in verses 1-5. The psalmist David says, “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.”

Verse 1 is actually a direct statement that Jesus made when He was hanging on the Cross. Jesus was crucified for six hours, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. After Jesus had been hanging on the Cross for three hours, at high noon, there was a universal darkness. I can't be sure that it was universal, but that is what I believe. I don't think it was just local, because the Creator of the universe was dying for the sins of the whole world. That the whole world was shrouded in darkness is one of the greatest mysteries of the Cross. It is almost as though God the Father put up a veil to keep eyes off the Cross while this holy transaction was taking place, where Jesus, “Who knew no sin [became] sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God.”

So the Bible says that as Jesus hung on the Cross, He cried, “‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani,’ that is...”—verse 1—“...‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” This is the cry of agony. The greatest suffering that Jesus endured on the Cross was not physical. Although He was whipped and beaten and crucified, nailed through His hands and feet, and hanged on the Cross—it was a horrible way to die—the greatest suffering that He endured was bearing the sins of the world.

Now the question is, why did God the Father forsake the Son? Then answer is in verse 3: “But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.” The reason is that at that moment, the sin of the whole world was placed upon the Son of God. At that moment, God the Father—and this is a great mystery—had to actually forsake or turn His back on God the Son. It wasn't an ultimate forsaking. Theologians have wrestled with this concept. How could God forsake God? How can the Trinity be split? But I am convinced, along with a lot of other good theologians, that this actually took place; there was a forsaking by God the Father of God the Son.

The idea is that Jesus fully tasted death and bore our sins. He carried our sins and sorrows. He was forsaken, I believe, so that we would not have to be forsaken. He was abandoned so that we would not have to be abandoned. He tasted hell so that we could have His heaven. Jesus was forsaken by God the Father, so He cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Some say that Jesus just felt forsaken, that He wasn't really forsaken. But that's not what the Scriptures indicate. The moment the sins of the world were placed upon the Son of God, God the Father, being holy, turned His back on God the Son. Jesus then tasted death for all mankind. This is a very mysterious thing. What a transaction that took place on the Cross!

So this is the cry of agony. Jesus was separated from God the Father, so we would never have to be separated from God.

The second statement Jesus uttered is in verses 6-8. I call it the word of forgiveness. "But I am a worm, and no man; reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me." We know from Matthew 27 that the crowds gathered around the Cross and mocked, jeered and yelled names at Jesus. They said, "If He is the Son of God, let Him save Himself!"

Continuing in verse 7, "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!'" This verse in Psalm 22 was actually fulfilled 1,000 years later, the exact thing the psalmist described. This also was actually hundreds of years before crucifixion was ever invented as a means of capital punishment. It was never used in Israel, except by the Romans, and this was a long time before the Roman government, back in the days of David.

So the only way that David could know this was prophetically. It is one of the evidences for divine inspiration of the Scriptures. David, by the Spirit, was speaking here about Messiah and His Crucifixion.

In the New Testament, in Luke 23:34, when Jesus was hanging on the Cross and looked at the crowds, He said, "Father, forgive them..."—who is the "them"? Those who were crucifying Jesus, calling Him names and mocking Him—"...for they do not know what they do." This is the word of forgiveness. This was a prayer while Jesus was on the Cross.

By the way, He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and He also said it at the beginning of verse 2: "O My God." Even though He was dying on the Cross unjustly, being crucified, the Father was still His God. It was the only time in the Bible where Jesus prayed to the Father and did not address Him as "Abba, Father" but as "My God," as He was taking the sins of the world upon Himself.

So we see here that the crowd was mocking and jeering at Jesus.

Jesus prayed to the Father. What did He pray? "Father, forgive them..."—and why?—"...for they do not know what they do." There are three thoughts about this. Number one, it fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah 53:12 says that Jesus "made intercession for the transgressors."

It's very hard to pray for people who are mean to you, hurting you or attacking you. You might pray, "Lord, break their teeth in their mouth!" That's in the psalms. You don't pray, "God, bless them." You pray, "God, this isn't fair! This isn't right!" But Jesus, the Son of God, prays, "Father, forgive them."

Secondly, this statement was practicing what He preached. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus says, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." So Jesus was practicing what He preached.

Thirdly, it was the purpose for which He was dying. Jesus died to forgive our sins. He was actually dying for them. He was dying for the mockers, the jeerers and the hating people. He was dying for our sins, so He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."

The third utterance or statement from this psalm is the word of affection, verses 9-14. "But You are He who took Me out of the womb." So now Jesus is looking back. "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." Notice that in verse 9, He mentions the womb, and He mentions His mother's breasts. Again, in verse 10, He mentions His mother's womb. "Be not far from Me..."—why?—"...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." Now notice verse 14: "I am poured out like water." Remember when they thrust the spear into His side, and out came blood and water? "And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me." This is a description of crucifixion, and it refers to what Jesus went through on the Cross.

I call this the word of affection, because this is the background for the time Jesus was hanging on the Cross, in John 19:25-27. Jesus looked down from the Cross and saw His mother, Mary, and He saw the apostle, John. He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" He said to John, "Behold your mother!" From that day, John, the apostle, took Mary into his home and took care of her.

Can you imagine the feeling that John had? Jesus had just entrusted His mother to him, and he was to take care of her. What a beautiful picture this is of His affection. Jesus has the sin of the world on Him, He's dying on the Cross and what does He think about? The care of His mother. It's so fascinating to me.

In Exodus 20:12 is the fifth Commandment, which says, "Honor your father and your mother..."—That is the first Commandment with a promise—"...that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

Remember in Luke 2 when Simeon prophesied over Mary, who was at the Cross? He said, "A sword will pierce through your own soul." Can you imagine, mothers, watching your son being crucified on a cross? To know that He was innocent? How this must have broken Mary's heart! She knew He was the Son of God. But she still loved Him as her son, and He was dying before her very eyes. So Jesus utters the word of affection.

The fourth utterance by Jesus was the word of humanity, verses 15-18. This is also a description of crucifixion. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd..."—or a piece of dried pottery—"...and My tongue clings to My jaws." Notice the descriptive terms for His physical body. He talks about "My strength...My tongue...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." How graphic a description is that of crucifixion! "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.”

John 19:28 says, “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled...”—This is a reference to Psalm 69:21—“...said, ‘I thirst.’” Think about that. The God Who created all the oceans, all the rivers, all the streams, the snow on all the mountains—all the fresh water supply—is hanging on the Cross and said, “I thirst.” This indicates that He was truly human. The Bible teaches that the nature of Christ was both fully God and yet fully man at the same time in one person. He wasn’t two people. He wasn’t the God and the man blended together; He was one person, Christ, as both God and man.

Let me make another distinction: His humanity did not lessen His deity. He wasn’t less man because He was God. And His deity did not lessen or diminish because of His humanity. He was fully God and fully man. That’s so amazing! He was the God-man. Jesus had to become a man in order to die, and He had to be God in order to save. So He is the only one uniquely suited, through the virgin birth, to be able to redeem mankind. He is the God-man.

His thirsting indicates He was fully man, Who could die. Jesus also said that He was hungry. The Bible talks about Him eating, groaning, being weary and in tears. These also are indications of His humanity.

So Jesus had two natures, He suffered physically, but He became the water of life, Who would bring forth life to those who are thirsty. If we drink of Him, we’ll never thirst again.

The fifth utterance that Jesus made as He was hanging on the Cross was the word of committal, verses 19-23. “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...”—In the Hebrew, this could be translated “My Holy One”—“...from the power of the dog.” “The dog...the lion...the oxen” are just descriptive terms for the people who are crucifying Him. “Save Me from the lion’s mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!”

Chronologically, in the statements that Christ made on the Cross, this perhaps would be the last statement He made. After saying, “It is finished,” Jesus said, from Luke 23:46, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” This is the word of committal. Jesus is hanging on the Cross, and because He’s the God-man, He could have chosen not to die; He could have come down from the Cross. But He actually submitted Himself to the Father. What He does here is He actually dismissed His spirit. Death is the separation of the body from the spirit. Jesus had control of that, but He committed His soul, His spirit, unto God the Father.

This points out a very important truth: Jesus died on the Cross voluntarily. That may not seem like a big deal to you, but it is important. I’ve heard people who have attacked the concept of the Cross; that a God of love wouldn’t let His Son die on the Cross. They accuse God of being a cosmic child abuser. How could a God let His Son die on a cross? But I want you to

understand that Jesus gave Himself willingly and voluntarily to die on the Cross. Jesus actually gave Himself to the mission of redeeming mankind.

So Jesus came to die. John 10:11 says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." Jesus said, "No man takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." So Jesus gave His life willingly and voluntarily.

Now there is a change in the psalm that I want to note before we move on. From verse 22 to the end of the psalm, David goes from prayer to praise, from suffering to triumph. Verse 22 says, "I will declare Your name...I will praise You." Verse 23 says, "Praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him and fear Him." How apropos is that for us today. We want to praise the Lord, we want to glorify the Lord and we want to fear the Lord.

Utterance number six is the word of salvation. The background for this is in verses 24-30. "For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard. My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him." Following is the key text. "The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation."

In verse 26, it says, "The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever!" Remember in Luke 23:43, when Jesus was hanging on the Cross? There were two other crosses next to Him—one on the left and one on the right. There were two thieves hanging on those crosses. They were receiving their just penalty for their crimes. They were reviling, cursing and mocking Jesus, until one thief, by the grace of God, had a change of heart. What he said to Jesus was, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Then Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." It was one of the most beautiful things that Jesus uttered while on the Cross.

This is the word of salvation. "Today..."—not "tomorrow," not "next month," not "if you're lucky," not "maybe"—"...you will be with Me in Paradise." You talk about a death-bed conversion! This is a death-cross conversion. It's like getting saved in the electric chair on death row. He has lived a wicked life, and he's dying for his crimes.

There are so many important truths that you can draw from this statement. But I want to mention the fact that we are saved by God's grace. This thief wasn't a good person; he hadn't lived a righteous life. He was a criminal. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Bible also says, "There is none righteous; no, not one." That's you and me. We've all sinned and fallen short. As a matter of fact, we should have been on the Cross and

not Christ.

Jesus didn't tell the thief, "Get off the cross. Get baptized. Go to church. Get a Christian haircut. Put a bumper sticker on your car. Read the Bible. Pray. Fast. Hope that you'll go to heaven." No. He said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Isn't that good news? Guess what; the word "whoever" in the Greek means "whoever." This is one of the most beautiful stories of Jesus saving this former thief as he dies on the cross. Why? Because Jesus came to save sinners.

Last, but not least, in verse 31, is the utterance of the word of victory. "They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this." In the Hebrew, the phrase "He has done this" could easily be translated "It is finished." Does that have a familiar ring?

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross, He cried, "Tetelestai!" or "It is finished!" or "Paid in full!" or "Done!" The work of salvation was complete. His rescue mission was completed. He came to save sinners. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost."

This was a common word used whenever you paid a debt. It would be stamped in red on the paper "Tetelestai" or "Paid in full." Don't you love those bills that you have that say "Paid in full"?

If you committed a crime and went to jail, they would actually state your crime on a piece of paper, nail it to the wall and when you were released from doing your time, they would stamp on that paper "Tetelestai" or "Paid in full" and then give it to you.

When a farmer was plowing in his field and then finished his long day of labor, he would unyoke the oxen, unhitch the plow, wipe his brow of his sweat and say, "Tetelestai" or "It is finished."

When an artist would paint a picture and he put the last bit of paint on the brush and stroke it on his painting, he would put his brush down, stand back, look at his painting and say, "Tetelestai" or "It is done."

There are many theological implications of this, but let me draw out a point which is so important. When Jesus died on the Cross for your sins, the penalty or payment was paid in full. Other religions say, "Due," but Christianity says, "Done." When other religions say, "Do this and live,"

"The law commands

But gives us neither feet nor hands.

Far better news the Gospel brings:

It bids us fly and gives us wings."

You don't have to confess your sins to a priest or to some other person. You can confess your sins directly to God, and He will forgive you and pardon you of all your sins. Praise God for the Cross of Christ!

And Jesus isn't going to be crucified again. When we do take communion, the bread doesn't actually become His body. And it's not His blood. He died once for sin, and He lives today to save us. There is no need for me to do penance, to try to work hard to deserve or merit the goodness of God or that my good works will outweigh my bad works. He did the work already on the Cross. And, as Christians, what we do is enter into that finished work of Christ.

One of the glorious doctrines of the Gospel is that Christ died to finish or pay my debt; it's finished and done and paid in full. Now what's left for you and I to do is to believe, to trust, to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Someone said,

"It is finished. It is finished.

My salvation, full and free.

Jesus paid the debt for sinners

When He died at Calvary."

Amen! "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And it's only because of the Cross that we have that hope.

You don't need to be afraid or fret. You have eternal life.