

How Jesus Endured the Cross, Part 1

Psalm 22:1-21

Go ahead and turn in your Bibles back to Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, and follow along as we just make some initial observations in the text. The writer to the Hebrews called us to "look to Jesus, the founder the perfecter of our faith who for," it says, "the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

To see what he endured in enduring the cross, we read, as we did this morning, from the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and they tell us what Jesus suffered, what he endured for the sake of our salvation. The cross of Jesus Christ was the greatest trial, the greatest suffering that anyone has ever endured throughout all of history. It wasn't just the cruel death at the hands of brutal men. Others have suffered throughout history similar deaths. Crucifixion was very common in the Roman world, even suffered worse deaths at the hands of cruel, violent men. It wasn't just the ignominious, humiliating aspects of Jesus' suffering, being publicly portrayed and displayed in front of everybody gawking, mocking. Again, others

have been shamefully scornfully treated as well. That's not what makes the death of Jesus Christ the greatest trial and suffering that ever happened in human history.

What men did to our Lord was one thing. It's what *God* did. That is another category of suffering altogether because on the cross the holy God poured out the fulness of his anger. He breathed on him the fire of his unmitigated wrath, on his own beloved Son, no less, there on the cross. That is something that's truly unprecedented, something that will never be repeated. It could *never* be repeated. No one has ever endured the suffering that Jesus suffered on the cross because no one but Jesus bore the weight of sin like he did. No one but Jesus absorbed the full penalty of divine punishment in his own body, no one but him.

It's amazing when you consider that Jesus knew what was coming well before he ever reached the cross. In and of itself, that is another unimaginable form of suffering, the anticipation of enduring the cross. No one else has ever faced that, either. Take a look at Mark 14:32-41 because that is recorded of Jesus' suffering even before the suffering of the cross. This is what he endured even while he was praying in Gethsemane. "They went to the place called Gethsemane," verse 32. "He said to his

disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled, and he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.'" That is not hyperbole. He is so sorrowful. He says, "'Remain here and watch.'" He longed for his friends to be involved, join him in his suffering through prayer, help him. "Going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him, and he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.' He came and found them sleeping."

So not just the suffering of that hour, but also the disappointment of his own friends not joining him. He found them sleeping. "He said to Peter, 'Simon, why are you asleep? Could you not watch for one hour? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" Even in suffering, even in disappointment, he's teaching, isn't he? He's shepherding. "Again, he went away and prayed, saying the same words, and again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy." Right? "The flesh is weak." They didn't know how to answer him. "He came to them a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking

your rest? It is enough. The hour has come, the Son of Man betrayed into the hands of sinners.'”

Listen, as human beings, knowing what Jesus was about to endure because we’ve read the story, praying to the God who can do the impossible, asking God to find another way on the eve of his suffering, we, as human beings, understand that. We get that. This makes sense to us. Jesus’ prayer, here, is not a request to escape. It’s not an expression of cowardice. His prayer expresses a very human aversion to the ordeal itself, to the soul-wrenching pain of abandonment to divine wrath.

In fact, if Jesus did not pray this way in Gethsemane, we might well doubt whether he was truly human. Can he really understand? It’s precisely because of this; how he endured the trial of the cross, that makes Jesus the most remarkable human being who ever lived, a man worthy of our worship and praise. Jesus remained, here, fixed in his purpose, resolute, standing firm, fully resolved to do his Father’s will even in the face of unimaginable suffering. It was in the courage of this faith that Jesus embraced the path of suffering. He said, “The hour is come.” “It’s time.”

How did Jesus do that? How did he endure this radically profound suffering? You say, well, he was fully God. Yes, I

know. He was also fully man. How did he as man endure that? Turn ahead a page or two to chapter 15. We need to take a look at the extent of Jesus' resolve. He endured the betrayal. He endured the arrest, the abandonment of his disciples. He endured the mock trials, the perversion of justice. He endured the mocking of the soldiers, their mock worship, their faux worship followed by their piercing him with nails, suspending his limbs from the beams of the cross, his body is stretched out like on some kind of a medieval rack, excruciating pain. But notice in Mark 15:29, it records the taunts of those who witnessed his crucifixion, mockers and scoffers who threw his own words back in his face.

Look at Mark 15:29, "Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross! And so also the chief priests," men who ought to be dignified, "scribes," studied men, learned men, "they mocked him to one another, saying, 'He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.'" Such derision! Such unimaginable scorn for a suffering, dying man. Jesus did have the power to remove himself from the cross, didn't he? According to Matthew 26:53, all he had to do was make one simple appeal, one word to his father, and his father would have deployed

twelve legions of angels to his rescue. Just remember what one angel did to a 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Dead in a night. Twelve legions would have wiped out the face of the earth. Yet he remained on the cross.

Continuing the narrative, verse 33, the next section provides us with a clue we need to understand how Jesus endured this suffering of the cross. "When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, 'Behold, he's calling Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink." Saying, "'Wait, let's see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last."

Note, there, the strength of Jesus in this final hour even while hanging on the cross; twice Mark tells us that Jesus cried out "with a loud voice." That's called emphasis, there in the text, twice repeated. Crucifixion victims typically didn't have the breath to cry out loudly, if at all. In fact, they died not from blood loss but from an excruciatingly painful level of

suffocation. So what little breath that they had in their lungs they saved. It preserved. Not Jesus, he used his final breath to save. He used his final breath teach.

Mark wants us to see that Jesus was in control of all of this to the very end. Jesus was no victim, here. What he did, he did willingly, he did of his own volition. He chose this from start to finish. John 10:17-18, Jesus said this, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." And just to make it clear, he said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." Such authority, such strong words, such powerful resolve!

And in light of that resolve, how do we understand that final question on the cross? Why did Jesus cry out, verse 34, "in a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" That does not sound like the authoritative triumph of a victor. Sounds like the lament of someone who has suddenly realized he has made a big mistake. He has miscalculated something severe. He's been abandoned by God. Some, they've said those words indicate that Jesus denied his Father on the cross, as if his question is an expression of doubt.

As we're going to see in a moment, that interpretation is exactly the opposite of the truth. In reality, Jesus Christ, his cry, it was an expression of an unshakeable faith in the midst of the most profound suffering ever known. We only need to point out that Jesus addressed him as my God, my God. He affirmed in his words. He still trusted. Others, faithful Christians, they've recognized how those words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", they understand that those expressed the depth of our Savior's suffering, and that is true. As we've already said, Jesus suffered way beyond the physical pain, crucifixion torture, it's way beyond the humiliating taunts of the mocking crowd.

But some go too far. They say wrongly that the abandonment of the Son by the Father, that that indicates a separation within the Trinity itself. That is not true. To introduce a break in the relationship among the persons of the Trinity, however temporary, is to introduce a change in the unchangeable God, to introduce a change, one change, even a small iota of change, that's to deny immutability; that's to deny the God who says, "I, the Lord, do not change." And that denies the essence of the God that's revealed in Scripture. No, we can't go there.



We need to be very careful, here. It's easy to fall into a ditch of heterodoxy or error, whether by saying too little or by saying way too much. We're delving into a profound mystery, here. We're looking into things that are beyond our full comprehension. Still, since the Holy Spirit has seen fit to record these things for us, we are encouraged, we're even exhorted to grapple with profound realities, to struggle to understand. Jesus' cry, listen, it does not affect the nature of the Trinitarian relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit one iota. Something else is going on, here. If we'll trace this out carefully, we have the opportunity, here, to learn to an even greater degree, the significance and the wonder of what Christ actually accomplished on the cross.

Today, we're going to learn how Jesus, as a man, how he endured the cross because for him, this was his fiercest trial. This was his greatest battle, and it was a battle he won, get this, it was a battle he won by faith. In addition to increasing your appreciation for your Savior in addition to elevating your sense of wonder and awe in your worship of him, we can also learn something from this about how to endure our own trials, if we'll pay attention carefully.

Obviously, our trials are trivial by comparison, but they are very real, nonetheless, and often very painful. Our trials to us being so weak, so small, can be overwhelming at times. By seeing how Jesus endured the cross, by exercising faith in God, we are going to learn how we can do the same in our lives as well. Just two points in our outline. The text is actually from Psalm 22. We're going to do an exposition of Psalm 22, and that's because Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" that comes from the very first words of Psalm 22. So turn back there, Psalm 22 verse 1, and we'll get to the very first point on our outline, which is this: Jesus expected divine protection. Jesus expected divine protection.

As Jesus hung on the cross, did he personally deserve to be there? Yes or no? Okay, you pass. You're right. No. He did not deserve to be there. He was sinless, utterly sinless. And being sinless, guiltless, having fulfilled the will of God in every way possible, Jesus had every right to expect God's protection and blessing. He had every right to expect protection from his enemies, and there is a sense in which God should have protected him, should have delivered Jesus from the power of ungodly men.

The fact that God handed Jesus over to them, that he did not deliver him on this occasion, it means one of three things.

First, it could mean that God had ceased to be true to his good character. That he ceased to be God. Well, we know that's not true. Second option, God was unable to deliver Jesus from the power of men. Also untrue. Well, that forces us to consider a third option, one that we know is true from reading the Scripture and seeing the character of God, that he's good and he's powerful. So what's going on, here? God had a good and wise purpose in this trial. In this evil of handing Jesus over to ungodly men, God had a good purpose to fulfill. That's why he didn't deliver Jesus from that dreadful hour. And that's why Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He's calling attention from everybody surrounding him, and now to us because it's recorded in here in Scripture, he's calling attention to the fact that God had a divine purpose in his suffering. Jesus could have prayed that prayer silently, but even in his final minutes of life, with his final breath, he pointed his nation to the true purpose of his death on the cross. He was not dying for his own sins, but for theirs. The quote from Psalm 22 would help them discover the truth about his death on the cross. He died to save his people from their sins.

But Jesus also, he wasn't just teaching. This is a genuine prayer of sorrow. This is a prayer that's coming from the heart,

and notice his prayer is Scripture. You want to pray well? Pray the Word of God. Jesus prayed the Word of God from the heart. He was longing, here, for a close fellowship with his father, and this psalm, Psalm 22, it captures his thoughts on the cross. It records what he was thinking and what he was feeling with divine precision. As we read, we find the purest and most profound expression of faith in God. This was an example to the entire nation of Israel, and to us as well, now, of how a genuine believer clings to God even in the greatest of trials. He clings by faith.

Let me take a couple minutes to read the entire psalm just so you can see it for yourself. As we read David's psalm, you're going to see three sections, here. One from verses 1-10, we hear his complaint. And then from verses 11-21, we hear his request. And then finally we hear his confident praise. So as David works out his worries, his anxieties before God in prayer, he comes from complaint to request to praise. That's how all prayer in the moment of anxiety and trial and worry and pressure that's how it all should flow, right? So follow along as I read.

This is "to the choirmaster, according to the doe of the dawn, a psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my

groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

"On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

"But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

"From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it."