

**+ Psalm 22 + Fix Your Eyes on Jesus—The Forsaken Savior! +
+ Good Friday + Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 14 April 2017 +**

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

What was Jesus thinking as he hung from the cross? What was Jesus seeing? What was Jesus hearing? What was Jesus experiencing as he hung from a cross for three hours on that Friday afternoon outside of Jerusalem?

He hadn't slept since early Thursday morning. He had experienced the growing sorrow and grief of his disciples. He had agonizingly prayed to his heavenly Father in Gethsemane to the point that his sweat was like drops of blood. He had faced betrayal's sharp stab in the back, then the brutality began. Armed guards had tied Jesus up and hauled him off to the palace of the high priest Caiaphas. There he was treated to all-night session of injustice from those who should've recognized him, ridicule, and people spitting and punching him in the face. At daybreak, the Sanhedrin—the highest religious court in the land—condemned him to death for blasphemy.

Jesus was hauled to the courts of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, where things didn't get any better. There he faced a morning full of injustice, cowardice, the living death of flogging that tore up his back, the brutal ridicule of the Roman soldiers who pounded a crown of long, viney thorn branches into his head, and then rejection from his own people in exchange for a notorious criminal.

Without pity, the Romans made Jesus carry a heavy, rough wooden cross through the Jerusalem streets to a place outside of the city known as Golgotha. They stretched out his arms and legs on the cross and hammered long, sharp nails into his hands and feet. Then they lifted him up to slowly die. Two criminals were crucified on either side of Jesus, and everyone came out to watch. The soldiers gambled for his clothing. The religious leaders ridiculed Jesus. Only a small handful of his followers, mostly women, came to grieve, but if that wasn't enough darkness came over the land and Jesus faced the wrath of God.

What was Jesus thinking as he hung from that cross? A thousand years earlier, the Lord in his wisdom inspired King David to write a psalm, a hymn of prayer to the Lord. Throughout his life, the Lord led David to pen 73 of the 150 psalms in the Bible, but Psalm 22 was unique. While in this psalm David sings of suffering and hardship, the Lord was revealing much more.

For a brief moment, the Lord allowed the Psalmist to crawl up into the mind of Jesus on the cross to unveil the thoughts of the Son of God as he faced the wrath and judgment of God. Three hundred years after David, the Lord would do something similar through his prophet Isaiah, who, for a brief moment, would view the suffering Savior from the perspective of those standing there on Golgotha. Isaiah saw the cause and the blessings from Christ's death on the cross, but he doesn't say much from Christ's perspective. During these weeks of Lent leading up to tonight, we've seen Jesus from that outside perspective through others in the desert, in an evening meeting, at Jacob's well, through the healed eyes of a blind man, at Lazarus' tomb, from the perspective of the Jerusalem crowds and finally in the Upper Room. Yet tonight King David helps us see Jesus not from the perspective of the Golgotha crowd, but through the eyes and ears of Jesus himself.

What was Jesus thinking as he hung from the cross, as darkness came over the land and he faced the eternal judgment of the merciful, yet holy God? In the middle of that Friday afternoon, as darkness covered the land for three hours, Jesus cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46)

What was Jesus thinking? David reveals the Lord's thoughts, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?”*** What was it that caused such a cry to well up from the deepest depths of Jesus' soul? Was it the blood loss? The lack of sleep? The brutal torture and the unending pain from the deep gashes in his back and the wounds caused by the nails in his hands and feet? Was it the salt in his wounds from betrayal and denial and rejection? Was it despair or doubt? No. Through all this, Jesus remained the sinless Son of God, but at that moment, Jesus was experiencing hell. What you hear is not a complaint from physical pain or a cry of hopeless despair. No, what you hear is the grief of the Savior's soul as the eternal judgement of the holy God crushed down upon him. At that moment, Jesus was fully aware of God's awful wrath and condemnation. As every citizen of hell experiences, Jesus was separated from God's love, enduring God's full punishment for sin.

...But wasn't Jesus the sinless Son of God? Why would Jesus have to endure the full wrath and punishment for sin? Why would Jesus have to endure hell on that cross? David provides the Lord's thoughts, ***“In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.”***

So why did Jesus endure hell on the cross? He was filthy. Earlier in Jesus' ministry, in a debate with the religious leaders over what makes someone clean or unclean in God's sight, Jesus told them, ***"For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"*** (Mark 7:21-23) Jesus wanted them to realize that when your heart is full of the sewage of sin, it will show itself in your words and actions.

Now consider this. As the sinless Son of God hung on the cross, he was covered with all the filthy sewage of every single sin of every single man, woman, and child from Adam and Eve to the last sin before Christ's return. He was coated and covered with the filth of your deceit and my selfishness, your greed and my slander, your lust and my arrogance, along with the filth of every human being who has ever lived and ever will. He was disgusting. All that sin stunk to high heaven, and what did the holy God do? He turned his back on Jesus in disgust and piled on the condemnation that every single sin deserves. Can you see the depths of his grief as the Lamb of God bears the sins of the world, yours and mine and everyone else's, on his back on the cross?

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yes, we hear Jesus' grief, but we also hear God's answer. "I have forsaken you because I did not want to forsake them. I abandoned you because I did not want to abandon them to an eternity in hell. I turned my back on you because I did not want to turn my back on them. I have poured out my holy condemnation on you and sacrificed you that they might live." Yes, Jesus was suffering horribly on that cross, but behind it all, there was love just as Jesus had told Nicodemus years before, ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16) Yes, Jesus was forsaken, but he willingly hung on that cross and endured his Father's rejection to be your Savior and mine.

Look through the eyes of Jesus and see his indescribable love. You don't see despair. You see grace. The Lord never forsook his people no matter how faithless they were. Yes, he allowed them to suffer and they cried out to him for help, but the Lord always delivered them. That's what makes Christ's death on the cross so remarkable! God did not save the only One who did not deserve the just punishment for sin in order to save those who did.

You hear that tremendous love in the Savior's precious statements from the cross. As nails pierced his hands and feet, Jesus prays for his enemies, ***"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."*** (Luke 23:34) To the criminal hanging next to him, who had been mocking him just minutes before, Jesus answers his faith-filled plea, ***"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."*** (Luke 23:43) To his widowed mother, whose heart was pierced with grief at seeing her son hanging on that cross, Jesus entrusted her to the care of his disciple John. Though he was enduring hell, Jesus never forgot why he was there and who he was—the Savior sent to rescue us from sin and hell.

Look through the eyes of Jesus and listen through his ears. What do you see and hear? While undying love throbbed in his heart, we see fulfillment all around him. David describes it for us. ***"All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him.' ...I am poured out like water...My heart has turned to wax...My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death... They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."***

A thousand years before the birth of Christ, it's like standing on Golgotha and hearing the Savior's running commentary. The crowds attacked him like angry bulls and violent dogs and roaring lions. The religious leaders used David's very words to mock Jesus! Jesus was in unbelievable anguish. Yet David not only describes how Jesus felt, but 500 years before the first historical reference to crucifixion, he describes in detail how Jesus would die. He even describes how the Roman soldiers gambled for Christ's clothing, but it was all part of the plan. God foretold it and Christ accomplished it.

What was Jesus thinking as he hung from the cross? In the deepest depths of his suffering, he had cried out, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** Yet after three hours of hellish suffering, Jesus shouted, ***"It is finished!"*** (John 19:30) This was no cry of resignation and giving up. No, it was a declaration of fulfillment to the entire world. The wages of sin had been paid. God's wrath was satisfied, and Jesus knew he had saved the world. Hopeless despair never entered his heart. Instead you find divine confidence. ***"For [the Lord] has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. ...Future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it."***

Whose cry for help did God hear? He heard ours in our grief, in our sorrow, in our guilt, in our lives affected by the curse of sin. He heard the cry of every generation back to Adam and Eve hiding in their guilt, and Jesus listened. Jesus heard our cry and he saved us. In love and fulfillment, as Jesus bowed his head in death, he delivered you and he delivered me.

So tonight we gather beneath the cross. We do not mourn as at a funeral, though we see every filthy sin piled on the Forsaken One. No, we rejoice because we see the undying love of our Savior in all its glorious beauty. On the cross, we see Jesus, who scorned shame and suffering and death to bring us joy. Tonight fix your eyes on Jesus—our Forsaken Savior. Amen.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.