

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

The Cross
T H R O U G H
Jesus' Eyes



DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

THE CROSS THROUGH JESUS' EYES

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. –Psalm 22:1-6

Some passages of Scripture are so remarkable I don't feel adequate to deal with them; this is one such passage. When we come to Psalm 22, we should take off our spiritual shoes because we are standing on holy ground. Psalm 22 is called the "Psalm of the Cross," because it describes more accurately and minutely the crucifixion of Christ than does any other portion of the Word of God. It corresponds to two other great chapters of the Bible: Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53.

All of the messianic psalms are pictures of Christ. The first psalm, for instance, is a portrait of Christ in His character—who He is, His life, His practice. But Psalm 22 is like an x-ray penetrating His thoughts and inner life. In it we see the anguish of His passion, His soul laid bare. The Gospels record the historical fact of His death and some of the events which attended His crucifixion, but only in Psalm 22 are His thoughts revealed. Many scholars believe the Lord Jesus actually quoted the entire psalm while on the cross. I concur, because the seven last sayings given in the Gospels either appear in this psalm or the psychological background for them is here.

Instead of standing beneath the cross and passively listening to Him utter these seven last sayings, we are going to get up on the cross with Him and view the crucifixion of Christ from a new position—from the cross itself. We will look with Him on those beneath His cross and see what went on in His heart and in His mind as He hung there. We will examine what occurred in His soul as He became the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Because as He was suspended there between heaven and earth, He became the ladder let down from heaven to this earth so men and women might have a way to God.

We were there, if you please, on that cross as He was made sin for us—He “who knew no sin ... that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). We were as truly on that cross when He died as we today are *in* Christ by faith. Peter put it like this:

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. –1 Peter 2:24

We are healed from sin because the Son of God died for us!

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?
(MATTHEW 27:46)

Psalm 22 opens with the plaintive and desperate cry of a poor, lone man forsaken of God. An attempt has been made to play down the stark reality and bitter truth that Jesus was forsaken of God. But the Hebrew is very clear, the Greek is very clear, and the Aramaic is very clear: In each language, the cry means Jesus was forsaken of God.

Now this is important: We have here a record of His *human suffering*. He is hanging there as a man, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). We get more understanding of this by turning to the epistle to the Hebrews:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels...

Indeed, He was made a man. But why?

... for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

–Hebrews 2:9

We are looking at the one who left heaven’s glory and became a man. He became a man to reveal God, yes, that is true, but most of all to redeem man.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

–Hebrews 2:14

He could save no one by His life. It was His sacrificial death that saves.

And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.... For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. –Hebrews 2:15, 16, 18

Christ Jesus on the cross is the perfect man. He had learned to rest upon God, to trust Him in all He did. He said, *“I always do the things that please Him”* (see John 8:29). But in that desperate and despairing hour, He was abandoned of God. There was no place to turn, either on the human plane or on the divine. He had no place to go. The man Christ Jesus was forsaken. No other person has ever had to experience that. No one. He alone.

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that
the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.*

–Elizabeth Clephane

Why did God forsake Him? Turn back to Psalm 22:

But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. –Psalm 22:3

On the cross in those last three hours, in the impenetrable darkness, the Son of God was made sin. He was forsaken for a brief moment. The paradox is that at that very moment “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The Lord Jesus Himself said,

“Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” –John 16:32

The Father was with Him when He was in prison. The Father was with Him when He was being beaten. The Father was with Him when they nailed Him to the cross. But on the cross He made His soul an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise Him.

Forsaken.

My friend, you and I do not know what it is to be forsaken of God. The vilest man on this earth today is not forsaken of God—anyone can turn to Him. But when Christ took my sin upon Himself, He was forsaken of God.

When Jesus asks “why?” it’s not a *why* of impatience or despair or doubt. No, it is the human cry of intense suffering, aggravated by the anguish of His innocent and holy life. That awful and agonizing cry of the loneliness of His passion! He was alone with the sins of the world upon Him.

...Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? –Psalm 22:1

The word is actually “roaring.” At His trial He was silent, “As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). When they beat Him, He said nothing; when they nailed Him to the cross, He did not whimper. But when God forsook Him, He roared like a lion. It was a roar of pain. Have you ever been in the woods when dogs attacked an animal? Have you heard the shriek of that animal? There is nothing quite like it. I think the shriek of our Lord from the cross rent the rocks, for it had been *His* voice that created them. Now the Creator Himself was suffering! On that cross He cried like a wounded animal, not sounding as a human cry but like a wild, roaring lion. It was the plaintive shriek and the wail of unutterable woe as our sins were pressed down upon Him.

First He roared like a lion, but then He says, “I am a worm” (Psalm 22:6). What does He mean? Well, He has reached the very lowest place.

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. –Isaiah 53:3

The word used here for “worm” is the coccus worm, which was used by the Hebrews in dyeing all the curtains of the tabernacle scarlet red. When He said, “I am a worm,” He meant more than that He had reached the lowest level. It was He who had said, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Lady Macbeth paced as she rubbed her hands, as if washing them, after having committed murder after murder.

A man in a light-colored shirt and dark pants is climbing a tall wooden ladder that extends from the ground to the top of the frame. The scene is set in a grassy field with rolling hills in the background under a dramatic, golden sunset sky with scattered clouds. A thin white vertical line is positioned to the right of the ladder.

JESUS WAS SUSPENDED THERE
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH,

*Christ became the ladder
let down from
heaven to this earth*

SO MEN AND WOMEN MIGHT
HAVE A WAY TO GOD.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

She said, “All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.” She was right, they could not. She cried, “Out damned spot! Out, I say!”

My friend, there is only one thing that will take the spot of sin out of your life, and that is the blood of Christ. Only the blood of the Lord Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses from all sin. Only His blood.

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM (LUKE 23:34)

Jesus’ suffering on the cross was intensified by that brutal mob of hardened spectators beneath Him. Look now through His eyes and see what He saw.

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!” –Psalm 22:7, 8

Some criminals have been so detested that they’ve been taken from jail and lynched by a mob. But while the impromptu execution takes place, most of the mob disperses, as tempers cooled and emotions were assuaged. But not this crowd! I think the lowest thing ever said about religion was said of these Pharisees when the Lord Jesus Christ was dying: “Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there” (Matthew 27:36). You have to be low to do that. In fact, you cannot get lower! The venom and vileness of the human heart was being poured out like an open sewer as they remained there and ridiculed Him in His death. After a snake has put its deadly fangs into its victim and emitted its poison, it will slither away in the grass. But not this crowd, and not the human heart in rebellion against God.

Here is where Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” If He had not said that, this crowd would have committed the unpardonable sin. But they did not—He asked forgiveness for their sin. We know that the centurion in charge of the execution was saved, along with a whole company of Pharisees—including Saul of Tarsus, who probably was in that very crowd.

WOMAN, BEHOLD YOUR SON! (JOHN 19:26)

As Jesus looks over the crowd, He sees eyes of hate and antagonism, but He also sees eyes of love. He sees His mother with John down there. “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother,” according to John’s record. As Jesus looks at her, do you want to know what went on in His heart? He went back to Bethlehem at the time He was born. He says to the Father,

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. –Psalm 22:9, 10

To His mother He says, “Woman, behold your son!” Yonder at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, she had asked Him to do something to show He was the Messiah, that she was right when she said He was virgin born. She wanted Him to reveal Himself at this wedding. His answer to her at that time was, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). But there hanging on the cross, He says, “Woman, behold your son!” His hour has come. The reason for His coming into the world is now being accomplished. This is the most important hour in the history of the world.

Then His attention moves back to those who are doing the crucifying.

Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. –Psalm 22:12

Describing these soldiers that were crucifying Him, He says they are like the bulls of Bashan, but He does not stop with that, for He is being devoured by wild animals—that is what His tormentors had become:

They gape at Me with your mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. –Psalm 22:13

He is talking about Rome now, comparing them to a roaring lion, for the lion was the picture of Rome. Rome crucified Him.

Now notice His condition:

I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. –Psalm 22:14

This accurate description is remarkable when you consider that crucifixion was unknown when this psalm was written. The Roman Empire was not even in existence, and it was Rome that instituted execution by crucifixion. Yet here is a vivid picture of a man dying by crucifixion.

“I am poured out like water”—the excessive perspiration of a dying man out in that sun.

“All My bones are out of joint”—the horrible thing about crucifixion was that when a man began to lose blood, his strength ebbed from him, and all his bones slipped out of joint. It was terrible, terrible suffering.

Then He says something that is indeed strange, “My heart is like wax.” Many doctors have said a ruptured heart would have produced what John meticulously recorded: “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (John 19:34). May I say to you, Jesus died of a broken heart.

I THIRST! (JOHN 19:28)

As He is hanging there ready to expire, with excessive perspiration pouring from Him, He suffers the agony of thirst.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to My jaws; you have brought Me to the dust of death. –Psalm 22:15

Down beneath the cross they hear Him say, “I thirst.”

For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet.

–Psalm 22:16

“Dog” was the name for Gentiles. The piercing of His hands and feet is another accurate description 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.

–Psalm 22:17, 18

He was crucified naked. It is difficult for us, in this age of nudity and pornography, to comprehend the great humiliation He suffered by hanging nude on the cross. They had taken His garments and gambled for ownership. My friend, He went through it all, crucified naked, that you might be clothed with the righteousness of Christ and stand before God throughout the endless ages of eternity.

FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT
(LUKE 23:46)

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. –Psalm 22:19, 20

The word “precious” is better translated “my only one”— “This is my beloved Son ...” (Matthew 3:17). Jesus is saying, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen. –Psalm 22:21

The King James Version translates “wild oxen” as “unicorns.” Now for many years it was thought that the unicorn was a mythical animal, but it was an actual animal a size smaller than the elephant, very much like the rhinoceros, sometimes called the wild bull. Vicious and brutal, they were killers. What identified

them was the fact that they had one horn—*uni* means one. To express intensity in the Hebrew, the plural is used—horns of the unicorns—but the thought is one horn.

To me, my beloved, that is remarkable indeed, because the cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified was not the shaped cross we see today. We think of a cross made of an upright post with a crosspiece. Nowhere does Scripture so describe it.

Two Greek words are translated by the English word “cross.” One of them is the word *stauros*, meaning one piece. You find it used in several places. For instance:

“You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

–Matthew 27:40

And Paul used the word *stauros* when he wrote:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

–1 Corinthians 1:18

The second Greek word is *xulon*, which is translated by the English word “cross” or “tree.” It simply means a piece of wood. Paul also used this word:

“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.

–Acts 13:29

Does he mean an upright post with a crosspiece? Now I am perfectly willing to go along with the popularly accepted shape of a cross, but for the sake of accuracy and to appreciate the exactness of this psalm, we need to brush aside tradition for a moment. Jesus said, *“You have heard me from the horns of the unicorns [the cross]. Into Your hands I commend My spirit.”*



The Savior offers to us a
finished redemption.

We never shall be worthy of it,
we cannot earn it,
we cannot buy it -
*we must receive
it as a gift.*

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

Another thing that amazes me is that this word *xulon* is mentioned in Revelation 22 as the tree of life. I believe the tree on which Jesus died will be there, alive, throughout the endless ages of eternity, to let you and me know what it cost to redeem us.

We've witnessed the sufferings of Christ, and now a radical shift turns our focus to the glory that should follow:

I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. –Psalm 22:22

I believe Jesus spoke this entire psalm while He was on the cross. He did not die defeated, for when He reached the very end, He said this is the gospel that will be witnessed to. "I will declare Your name to My brethren." And I see Peter in the midst of the Sanhedrin, composed of both Pharisees and Sadducees, saying to them, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE
(LUKE 23:43)

My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever! –Psalm 22:25, 26

The thief on the cross said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Christ responds, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." The redeemed shall be there to praise, and that includes the thief He took with Him that very day. Although he was a man unfit to even live down here, according to Rome's standard, the Lord Jesus makes him fit for heaven by His death on the cross.

IT IS FINISHED! (JOHN 19:30)

There is a seventh word; it is His last.

They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this. –Psalm 22:31

“To a people who will be born ...” includes you and me, my friend.

They shall declare *His* righteousness—not your righteousness, for God says it’s as filthy rags in His sight. How will they declare His righteousness? “That He has done this.” Some would translate it, “It is finished,” the last word Jesus spoke on the cross. When He said it, it was but one word—*Tetelestai!* Finished!

Your redemption is a completed package, and He presents it to you wrapped up with everything in it. He doesn’t want you to bring your do-it-yourself kit along. He does not need that. When He died on the cross, He provided a righteousness that would satisfy a holy God. All He asks of you is to receive this package, this gift of God, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

If you reject it, God must treat you as He treated His Son when He cried, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” It will be hell for any man to be forsaken of God. Jesus Christ went through it Himself so you might *never* have to utter that cry.


Psalm 22 reveals the heart of our Savior as He was made a sin offering on our behalf. He completed the transaction in triumph. He offers to us a finished redemption. We never shall be worthy of it, we cannot earn it, we cannot buy it—we must receive it as a gift.

The Lord Jesus Christ did all that was needed to save us. It is *finished!*

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

**LEARN HOW TO SHARE
THE MOST
IMPORTANT
MESSAGE OF
YOUR LIFE.**

TTB.org/HowCanIKnowGod

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from the TTB.org website. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

**GET ANSWERS TO YOUR
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
BIBLE AND LIVING THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.**

TTB.org/booklets

**KEEP YOUR BIBLE BUS JOURNEY
GOING ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME.**



[TTB.org/listen](https://www.ttb.org/listen)

**GET THE GOSPEL TO THE
ENDS OF THE WORLD
WITHOUT LEAVING
YOUR HOME.**



[TTB.org/give](https://www.ttb.org/give)



THRUthe**BIBLE**
with *J. Vernon McGee*

Connect with Thru THE Bible



Box 7100, Pasadena, California 91109-7100
P.O. Box 25325, London, Ontario, Canada N6C 6B1



1-800 65-BIBLE (24253)



TTB.org



BibleBus@ttb.org



/ThruTheBibleNet

YouTube

/TTBRadio