

## Good Friday 2020

We have a tendency to sanitize everything. Jesus' birth in an immaculate stable, Mary serene dressed in purple - the cleanest animals outside Emmerdale. We do the same with the crucifixion. Three crosses in silhouette high on a hill with a few respectful, grieving onlookers. It is quiet. The universe holds its breath.

But it is not on a green hill far, far away. It is on a flat bit of ground just outside the main gate of Jerusalem - a city packed with pilgrims and he is not looking down at them. He is at eye level and as the visitors walk by they look on with curiosity - they stare him in the face, up close and personal. The king of the Jews - naked, covered in blood, dirt and filth. People walking by - the ones he has come to save - taunt him - his humiliation is complete. It is very noisy with the bustle of the crowds, the sounds of the animals waiting to be sacrificed, the screams of the men to his left and right. Everywhere the smell of blood, the smell of sacrifice.

The uprights for crucifixion were permanent fixtures. The condemned were required to carry their own cross beams. They were nailed on to that first - through the wrists not the palms. When the cross beam was dropped onto the upright and came to a sudden halt Jesus' shoulders were dislocated so now he has a choice - to sag down and suffocate or stand up on the two nails holding his feet to the sides of the upright. No choice really - the will to live being what it is so Jesus pushes himself up until he can't any longer and then he slumps down to suffocate, to feel his lungs filling with fluid and then agonizingly up again. He has been beaten to a pulp, has lost too much blood and is floating in and out of consciousness.

What was going on in Jesus' mind - at eye level with the onlookers, in agony, in shock, delirious, mind drifting facing the unimaginable? And as if the physical suffering wasn't enough he experiences total abandonment by God. Terrible mental suffering for someone so intimate with God.

What were Jesus' thoughts? Dr Creasy, whose bible study lectures are on Audible or on Logosbible study.com, offers this insight.

See Mathew 27 v 11 onwards.

Jesus is standing before Pilate. He has already been tried by the Sanhedrin. The Jewish leaders want a death sentence. He has been found guilty of blasphemy - a capital offence under Mosaic law. The Jews are living under Roman law and so cannot carry out the sentence. Therefore he has been taken to Pilate. Before Pilate he is not accused of blasphemy but of claiming to be a king which under Roman law is treason. There is one king, his name is Caesar and he lives in Rome.

Pilate looks at Jesus who has been beaten up in the Sanhedrin, he has been spat upon, he is exhausted. You're king of the Jews! - tone of incredulity. Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replies. All the religious leaders chip in - yes that is what he claims - but he had actually refused to answer them earlier. Jesus does not make any reply to the charges brought against him. He just looks at Pilate. Jesus just says nothing and in doing so speaks volumes. At that time it was customary for the governor to release a prisoner. One due for execution was Barabbas, which means son of the father, who was a known insurrectionist, resistance fighter. He, with his two companions, had been arrested for murdering a Roman official. Pilate gives the crowd a choice between a popular hero or Jesus - who claimed to be the Messiah but hadn't acted in the way they had expected - a bit of a disappointment. As we know the crowd chose Barabbas. So Pilate had Jesus flogged and handed over for execution. Jesus was beaten nearly to death. He was stripped, mocked, spat on, ridiculed. He is a dead man walking.

So we come to Psalm 22. We do not know the immediate context for this psalm - but we can read it as a foreshadowing of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. Jesus knew the psalms intimately - they were part of who he was. The Gospels portray Jesus having this Psalm in mind as he suffers and dies on the cross, to give us an insight into what was going on at the very doorstep of death.

Read the Psalm in conjunction with Matthew 27 - look for the common phrases

## **Psalm 22**

**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.

*Jesus feels forsaken by both God and mankind*

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.

*A profound contradiction lies at the heart of these verses for, although Jesus feels forsaken by God, the very foundation of his faith is God's active presence in his life. Yet now, when Jesus really needs Him, He doesn't seem to be there. The fathers had trusted in God and God had delivered them so why isn't God there for him? Jesus feels totally abandoned by God - the very definition of hell. Think of the mental suffering Jesus' experiences - he, who was so intimate with God, who was at one with God the Father, now feels totally alone.*

**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**

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!”

*They divided up his clothing by casting lots. Jesus was crucified totally naked. Part of the humiliation of crucifixion is hanging there totally naked - especially for a Jew. There is a built in modesty in Jewish culture. Jesus can see people staring at him and gloating.*

**But I am a worm, and no man; a laughing stock, a nothing.**

**He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him;**

*-exactly what one of the religious leaders says. Jesus makes the connection.*

But You are He who took Me out of the womb;

You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts.

*Jesus sees Mary - he sees her distress. Even in the depths of his suffering He is concerned for her*

### John 19: 26, 27

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'

*She is there at the cross with John. Imagine the look on her face. There is no way that she would have thought that one day she would be standing at the foot of a cross watching her son, the Immanuel, die. And yet there had been warning ...*

Luke 2: 34, 35

Then Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary: “Behold, this Child is appointed to cause the rise and fall of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your soul as well.”

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.

*Feeling forsaken by God Jesus pleads for God’s help. Come close please - there is no one else 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.

*Jesus feels trapped and helpless - pressed in on all sides by soldiers and crowds. He feels intense fear. This is important. God is immortal, He cannot die or risk His life. He cannot understand our fears or insecurities but Christ Jesus can - and He is seated at the right hand of God being our advocate.*

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.

*Jesus looks at himself on the cross, all his body fluids are leaving, sweat, blood loss. **I am poured out like water,** Jesus shoulders have been dislocated, he can see this. **And all My bones are out of joint;** his heart is racing. His heart is having to work overtime to pump an ever decreasing amount of blood runs his body. **My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me.** He has had nothing to drink since the Passover meal earlier the night before - nothing to compensate for all the fluid loss.*

**And My tongue clings to My jaws;**

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.**

*Dogs literal and metaphorical. Jesus is surrounded by his enemies. There is no escape. He watches Psalm 22 played out around him.*

*Crucifixion was not invented until the time of the Persians. In David's time there was no such thing as crucifixion. **They pierced My hands and My feet; - so where did this line originate?** He sees and hears the crowds gloat, participate in his humiliation. **They look and stare at Me.** He sees the soldiers playing lots for his clothing. **They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.***

*Jesus is drifting in and out of consciousness*

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!  
*Where are you God? Save me!*

*In those first three hours on the cross Jesus faces all the world can throw at him physically and mentally.*

*And then the world goes dark. Whatever transaction is taking place is taking place in private - just between Jesus and God. Somehow in a way we will never understand Jesus bears the penalty which is ours to pay as he reconciles us to a God of righteousness and justice. In this darkness he experiences all our transgressions.*

*As Jesus draws his last breath he thanks God for he knows that his prayers have been answered.*  
**You have answered Me.**

*He has held fast, his courage, his faith, his trust are intact. In his mind he addresses the crowd:*

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!  
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.  
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
Those who seek Him will praise the Lord.  
Let your heart live forever!

*There is a shift in voice for the last part of the Psalm. It is our response.*

All the ends of the world  
shall remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
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,  
they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born,  
that He has done this.

## **THESE THINGS THE LORD HAS DONE**

### *It is accomplished*

What was happening to Jesus during the dark hours?  
This is how Adrian Plass imagines it in his short story *The Visit*:

*[Jesus] spoke very softly*

*“And I know all about each one of you too. I know what you have done, what you want, what hurts you, what you are afraid of. I know what you need. I know you because, in a way that’s impossible to explain, I saw - I almost became each one of you, during the three hours that I spent dying all those years ago on that hill. You happened in me. You were punished in my body. The time I spent on the cross was a nightmare of congealed darkness and despair, a nightmare filled with selfishness, hate, murder, rape and filth of the most unbelievable kind, as well as apathy, ignorance, and all your trivial unkindnesses that never seem to matter at the time. In those three hours I knew what it was to be an addict and pusher, a torturer and a victim, how it felt to destroy and hurt and damage, and gloat over the agony of others. I knew it, I saw it, I felt it - and in the middle of it all I lost the one I was doing it for. He couldn’t bear to look at me and I was so, so alone.*

*There is a lot more I’d like to say to you, but I won’t now. Just two things. Can I ask you to do something for me? Please read the book. Get a version that suits you, one you can understand, and I promise you with all my heart that as you read it I’ll meet you there, and we’ll talk again. The other thing is the most important message I have for you. Look after each other. Forgive each other. Love each other. Don’t hurt me. God bless you all and look after you until I’m able to come back again.”*

Adrian Plass *The Visit* Zondervan ISBN0-310-54071-2 p199-200

As He suffered on the cross Jesus experienced all of us - past, present and future. He knows us. In this time of enforced isolation there is a golden opportunity for us to get to know Him - by reading the book. Start at Genesis and work your way through all of it until the end of Revelation. You will follow God’s plan of salvation as it is worked out through people and history and you will build your relationship with Him as you allow Him to reach you through His word. Talk about it. Think about it. Pray about it. But don’t skip any of it. It is all there for a reason. Take time to know Him.