

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
The Tree of Life for week ending 04/04/04.
The Great Mysteries Surrounding the Cross
Matthew 22.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke some wonderful and powerful words while on the Cross, and we are now looking at the fourth statement He made from the Cross, perhaps the least understood of them all. It is found in **Mat 27:46** and **Mar 15:34**, where Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*” that is, “*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*”

We have seen the first three statements from our Lord on the Cross and they really do not surprise us. “*Father, forgive them; for they know what they do,*” **Luk 23:34**. He came to bring forgiveness; so we are not surprised at these words.

“*Today you will be with me in paradise,*” **Luk 23:43**. We could well expect these words because He came that we might be forgiven and one day go to heaven, **Mat 5:10**.

He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son! Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” **Joh 19:26-27**. This does not surprise us because our Lord fully obeyed the Law in His life and in His death **Mat 5:17**.

The first three statements from the Cross should not surprise us. But our Lord’s fourth cry introduces a mystery that is very difficult for us to identify with. In **Mat 27:45-47**, “*Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, “This man is calling for Elijah.”*”

These words, found in Matthew and Mark, as well as in Psalm 22, were screamed over and over again. The Greek verb *ebosen* means a cry in the sense of crying out for help. The Old Testament prophecy in **Psa 22** gives us even more insight into what was going through our Lord’s mind when He cried, “*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*” The twenty-second psalm has been rightfully called the Crucifixion Psalm, and it begins with the phrase, “*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*” and ends with the phrase, “*It is finished,*” or “*He has performed it.*”

This Psalm is an insight into our Lord’s darkest hours and a record of His dying words and through it David takes us deep into the horrors of the Cross. This Psalm also shows us the fruits of the Lord Jesus Christ and His passion in the establishment of His kingdom among men. This Psalm was the expression of personal anguish on the part of David, crying out in **Psa 22:1**, “*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*” and prophesying of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. In fact, there is no more accurate expression of our Lord’s thoughts and feelings during the awful six hours on the Cross in all of the Scriptures than in Psalm 22.

In **Psa 22:1** we read, “*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.*” This was quoted by our Lord in **Mat 27:46** and it was a cry that caused the Jews to mock but the elect angels to rejoice. **Psa**

22:2 states the unanswered prayer of our Lord on the Cross: “*O my God, I cry out by day [the first three hours on the Cross, 9 A.M. to 12 noon] and then by night there is no silence for Me [the continued cry of our Lord during the darkness that surrounded the Cross, from 12 noon to 3 P.M., as He was being judged for our sins].*”

Psa 22:3 reveals the reason why God the Father forsook the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, in one phrase: “*You are Holy. You who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel.*” God the Father was imputing our sins to His Son and judging them from His Holiness, therefore, He could not answer His Son’s plea. The Lord Jesus Christ knew, no matter the circumstances, there is no injustice with God. Many people speak evil of God when they are under His afflicting hand but not so with the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew His Father too well to let outward circumstances defame His character.

In **Psa 22:4-5**, our Lord says, “*Our fathers trusted in You [faith-rest]; they trusted, and You delivered them [You answered their prayers]. They cried out to You in prayer and were delivered; they trusted You and were not disappointed.*” Of all the ones who ever trusted in God, He would be the only one to be forsaken by God. We have the promise that we will never be forsaken, **Heb 13:5**.

Why did God the Father forsake the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross? The reason is given in **Psa 22:6**, “*But I am a worm and not a man. A reproach of men, and despised by the people.*” He was being crushed for our sins, so that you and I could wear the crimson robe of the Royal Family forever. The Hebrew word *tola* refers to the worm that was crushed to make red dye for the robes of kings and aristocrats. The very people who would have once have crowned Him have now condemned Him, the very ones who benefited from His cures now despised Him, **Psa 22:7**, “*All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head.*” These gestures of contempt and hatred came to pass in **Mat 27:39-40**. Priests and people, Jews and Gentiles, soldiers and civilians, all united together to hurl abuse at Him, mock Him while He was dying for those very sins. Which makes you wonder the most, the cruelty of man or the love of the Savior?

Psa 22:8 reads, “*Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.*” Our Lord’s prayer was heard by all who were there, but they did not understand that He was bearing our sins in His own body on the Cross, **2Co 5:21**. He was our substitute; He was taking our place. During His time on the Cross, He could only be judged; and during His judgment His prayer could not be answered. This was fulfilled in **Mat 27:41-43**.

We then read in **Psa 22:9,11-13,15-21**, “*Yet Thou art He who didst bring me forth from the womb; Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother’s breasts... Be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me [Mat 27:1]. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion [Mat 26:59-60]. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me [Luk 22:44]... My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws [Joh 19:28]; and Thou dost lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet [Zec 12:10]. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots [Mat 27:35]. But Thou, O Lord, be not far off; O Thou my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, My only life from the power of*

the dog [the Gentile Romans]. Save me from the lion's mouth; and from the horns of the wild oxen Thou dost answer me."

The "lion's mouth" is a reference to Satan, **1Pe 5:8**. The devil as the "roaring lion" attacked the Lord Jesus Christ unlike any other man, and attacked with a rage like never before. Never was the devil so determined to destroy a soul, and he threw everything the kingdom of darkness had at Him. The Lord Jesus Christ had said that this was the hour of the power of darkness, **Luk 22:53**.

Where Satan did his worst, Jesus Christ did His best. The Cross is where the adversary was stripped of his power. The Lord Jesus Christ annulled the rights of the evil one to accuse and enslave us, **Rev 12:10-11**. This Psalm proclaims in **Psa 22:31**, "*They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it.*" It is declared that all the ends of the world shall remember and bow to the Lord.

So this fourth statement cried out from the Cross by our Lord introduces a mystery and something very difficult for us to identify with. At least three mysteries are wrapped up in this statement from the Cross, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" If we understand something of these mysteries, we can better understand what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us.

We begin with a great mystery, the darkness around the Cross. From noon until 3:00 in the afternoon, darkness was over all the land. This was not a sandstorm or an eclipse or something that people imagined; it was a supernatural darkness sent by God the Father.

First of all, this was the darkness of *sympathy*. The Creator, in His humanity, was dying on the Cross, and all of creation was suffering with Him. When the first man and woman sinned, they affected the entire creation. They had dominion over all the earth, **Gen 1:26**, and even creation itself suffered because their sin. God did forgive their sin, but there were still consequences, **Rom 8:19-22**, "*For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility or condemned to frustration, not of its own will, not because of some intentional fault on its part, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption and enter into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*" All of creation is in pain, awaiting the coming of the Creator, who will set creation free.

When the Lord Jesus Christ died, He did redeem creation. His crown of thorns was symbolic of His taking our sins to the Cross. Thorns are used to symbolize the curse of mankind and nature at the time of the Fall, **Gen 3:18, Rom 8**. The thorn is a symbol of man's negative volition toward God, as well as the power of Satan, as in **2Co 12:7**. Jesus Christ wore a crown of thorns on the Cross and that signified that He was made a curse for us, **Mat 27:29; Mar 15:17; Joh 19:2** cf. **Gal 3:13; 1Pe 2:24**. Creation, as it were, wrapped darkness of sympathy around the Creator as He died for our sins.

This darkness at the Cross was also the darkness of *gloom*. The just was dying for the unjust, **1Pe 3:18**; the innocent Lamb of God was dying for guilty sinners. The book of *Exodus* records the plagues that God sent upon Egypt. The ninth plague was *three days of darkness*, a darkness so thick it could be felt, **Exo 10:21-23**. The tenth was the *death of*

all the first-born males in Egypt, **Exo 12:34**. There was darkness over Egypt before that final judgment, the death of the firstborn, and the Passover. God's only Son went through three hours of darkness before His death. Our Lord's death on the Cross was a very solemn, serious, holy event. On the Cross, He entered into outer darkness for us, to save us from that darkness. We, as believers, have the power to save others as well, "snatching them out of the fire," **Jud 1:23**, a place of torment, **Luk 16:28**, a place where desire is never met, **Luk 16:24**, and a place of unspeakable misery, **Mat 25:41**, and a place where the conscience never dies and the fire is never quenched, **Mar 9:44**. This is why **2Co 6:2** says, "*Now is the time of acceptance; now is the day of salvation.*" Now is the moment to be prepared for eternity by personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, this darkness surrounding the Cross was a darkness of *secrecy*. In those three hours Jesus Christ was accomplishing a great work that He alone could accomplish. On the Day of Atonement the high priest would enter the Temple *alone* to perform His task before God. When Jesus Christ was on the Cross during those three hours of darkness, He was carrying on an eternal transaction with His Father alone. He was finishing the work that He came to do, **Joh 17:4**.

Perhaps an even greater mystery is the *loneliness* on the Cross. The Lord Jesus Christ was gradually enveloped by a deeper and deeper loneliness during His final hours on earth. After Judas left to betray Him, He took the 11 to the Garden of Gethsemane. Three entered into the garden with Him, but they fell asleep. Eventually, they all forsook Him and fled. Only after He had suffered alone did the Apostle John come back. Men forsook Him, but the Father was with Him at this time (**Joh 8:29, 16:32**). But at the Cross the Father left Him, resulting in the utter loneliness of the Savior on the Cross.

He was lonely because He was forsaken by the Father. Sin isolates man and separates man from God, and even separates a man from himself through guilt. Adam and Ishshah ran and hid themselves because of the loneliness of sin, **Gen 3:10**. But God has never forsaken you. The Son of God was forsaken by the Father that we might never be forsaken. He went through the darkness that we might live in the light. He endured unspeakable loneliness and isolation for us. And that is what hell is—eternal loneliness and eternal isolation.

Another great mystery identified surrounding our Lord's fourth cry is the *blindness* before the Cross. There were many people onlookers standing before the Cross. They heard Him cry out, "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*" but they were spiritually blind, **Mat 13:13-16**. And they kept saying in **Mat 27:47**, "*This man is calling for Elijah.*" But He was not calling for Elijah; He was quoting **Psa 22:1**. They did not recognize the fulfillment of prophecy before their very eyes. They were blind to the Scriptures, blind to the Savior, and blind to their own sin.

The *love* upon the Cross is also a mystery we will never fully comprehend. The Lord's cry points to His infinite love for us. On the Cross, He wept, bled, and died; He died spiritually being forsaken of God and then He died physically. Was there ever any greater love than this, that the Prince of life and glory should condescend to this shame and death? Yet this is how He lived and this is how He taught us to live. This is why we are called to suffer for Him. We are to take up our Cross with thankfulness that we were permitted to bear it.

Our Lord's fifth cry on the Cross can be identified by one word—suffering. In **Joh 19:28**, "*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in*

order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty.'" It is amazing to realize how the Lord Jesus Christ loved the Scriptures and how His life centered around them. The first great lesson from this fifth utterance from the Lord's lips is the *importance of the Word of God.*

The thirst of Jesus indicates His humanity, for deity does not thirst. Deity could not suffer the penalty of sin. Jesus Christ is undiminished deity and true humanity in one Person forever, but it was only His human nature that could pay the price for our sins and experience death. This statement "*I thirst,*" immediately followed three hours of darkness, during which God the Father had withdrawn from the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, this cry reveals the intensity of what He had suffered, and the awful severity of the conflict through which He had just passed.

Even though His sufferings were like no other, His expression of thirst was not a mere desire for the relief of His body. There was a far higher purpose that caused Him to open His parched lips. There was a distinct and significant motive that drove Him to declare, "*I am thirsty.*" This is made abundantly clear in **Joh 19:28**, "*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty.'*"

The very fact that He did now "thirst" reveals His perfect submission to the plan of God. The One who made water flow from the smitten rock for the refreshment of Israel in the wilderness (**Exo 17:6**) still had the same power now that He was on the Cross. He could have satisfied His own thirst at any time, but that was not the Father's plan. The One who turned the water into wine by a word from His lips, could have spoken the same word of power here, and instantly met His own need. But we read in **Heb 5:8**, "*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.*" Why, then, did He hang there with parched lips? Because it was written that He should thirst, **Psa 22:15, 69:21**. He knew **Heb 10:7**, "*Behold, I have come (In the roll of the book it is written of Me) To do Thy will, O God.*" He knew that the Scripture had said in **Psa 22:15**, "*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws*"; and in **Psa 69:21**, "*They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*" He came here to do God's will, and He performed it perfectly and completely. In dying, as in living, the Lord Jesus was in total submission authoritative Word of the living God.

In **Joh 19:29-30** we read, "*A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth.*" The Lord had simply said, "I thirst." And the vinegar is extended and the prophecy is fulfilled. Notice our Lord's extreme self-control under the most horrifying circumstances.

Thirst represents the result of sin, **Luk 16:24**. He had hung on that Cross for six hours, and had passed through unparalleled undeserved suffering, nevertheless His mind was perfectly clear and His memory entirely unimpaired. He had before Him, with perfect accuracy, the complete truth of the Word of God, and He overlooked nothing, proving that He was superior to all circumstances!

The Lord had refused the first drink He was offered in **Mat 27:34**, "*And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.*" Vinegar and gall were commonly given to criminals to deaden their pain, but our Lord refused. Gall was a bitter poison that would accelerate the victim's death, and He knew it would

have deadened His senses and hindered His ability to fulfill the plan of God with a clear mind. Later, He accepts a drink of sour wine in **Joh 19:29-39** and **Mat 27:48**, “*And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.*” Here He accepted the wine in obedience to His Father’s will.

The power to suffer for another, the capacity to be self-denying and to accomplish some great work for God should be sought after. The One who said in **Joh 7:37**, “*If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink,*” was Himself thirsty. When we hear the Lord say, “I thirst,” we see three portraits of Christ. We see (1) the suffering Son of Man, (2) the obedience of the Servant of God, and (3) the love of the Savior for sinners. Jesus Christ, God Almighty, was also truly man, **1Jo 1:1-3**. Jesus was born as a baby, and grew up as a child and a youth. He ate and drank and became weary. He felt pain, He wept, and He died. All these experiences belong to humanity. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled, **Heb 7:26**.

When the suffering Son of Man was on the Cross, He felt the depths of both physical and spiritual suffering, yet He was in perfect control of His faculties; He did not seek to escape pain in any way. When our Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin, He refused to be influenced in any way by strong drink; He remained in full control of His senses at all times. Therefore, He was able to empathize completely with us, to identify with our pain and our need, **Heb 4:14-16**. Therefore, we are able to “come boldly to the throne of grace.” We can come to One who understands exactly how we hurt and how we feel. He knows the burdens we are carrying and the pain we are enduring. As the obedient servant of God, our Lord said, “I thirst,” that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

The third portrait is the loving Savior of sinners. Jesus was thirsty, to be sure, because of the physical agony He was experiencing. But He had just come through those three hours of darkness when the sun had veiled its face, and He was separated from His Father. The Lord Jesus Christ, in that time of darkness, had cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” When the Lord Jesus was made sin, when He completed that great transaction for our salvation, He endured our “hell” for us.

He was smitten on the Cross that we might have the water of life, and there will be no thirst in heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ thirsted on the Cross that we might never thirst again. When you place your faith and trust in Him, He will satisfy your need, and you will never thirst again.

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