

How Jesus Endured the Pain of the Cross

Nobody performed an autopsy on Jesus' mangled body after He was taken down from the cross. But doctors who have studied the Bible's description of His death say the pain would have been beyond excruciating. In fact, the word *excruciating* means "out of the cross." Jesus literally defined the worst pain anyone could feel.

His suffering began in Gethsemane, when God laid the sins of the world on His beloved Son. The intense stress caused what physicians call *hematridrosis*, a condition in which blood seeps out of sweat glands. After His arrest, Jesus was flogged so mercilessly that his skin was stripped off His back, exposing muscle and bone.

After being slapped, punched, crowned with thorns and beaten with reeds, He was covered with a red robe and led to Golgotha. There, Roman soldiers drove seven-inch nails into his wrists (most likely hitting the median nerve, causing more blinding pain) and then they rammed another nail into his feet.

At that point, doctors suggest, Jesus would have suffered dislocation of His shoulders, cramps and spasms, dehydration from severe blood loss, fluid in His lungs and eventual lung collapse and heart failure. Yet He refused to take a pain-killing solution (see Matt. 27:34). He chose to endure the pain for us.

So how did Jesus handle this agony? Many scholars believe He meditated on Psalm 22 throughout His ordeal. He would have already memorized the prophetic prayer—which is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage. It describes in detail the death of the Messiah.

Imagine Jesus muttering the words of this psalm as He gasped for breath:

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1, NASB). The gospels record Jesus praying this from the cross. Any Jew who heard it would have known He was quoting David’s prayer.

“But I am a worm and not a man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people” (v. 6). Jesus said these words as a crowd of angry mockers insulted Him. Matthew Henry points out that worms were used in Bible times to dye red fabric. Jesus was stained red for us so that He could make our sins as white as snow.

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me” (v. 14). Some victims of Roman crucifixion took as long as nine days to die, but Jesus’ death came in a matter of hours—probably because He had been flogged so cruelly before He was nailed to the rough wood.

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws” (v. 15). Victims of crucifixion typically developed serious dehydration because of a lack of blood and oxygen.

“They pierced my hands and my feet. 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” (v. 16b-18). Nowhere in the Old Testament is the cross described so clearly. Jesus’ tormentors stripped Him of His clothes, and He bore our shame. We know from the Gospels that soldiers gambled for his tunic (see John 19:23-24).

But David’s psalm does more than just predict the pain Jesus would experience. It ends in victory. Imagine Jesus muttering these words to Himself as He bled to death:

“I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You” (v. 22). The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the Cross “because of the joy set before Him” (Heb. 12:2). Even as He hung in pitiful agony, He was thinking of union with His bride, the Church.

“All the ends of the world will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s and He rules over the nations” (v. 28). Jesus died so that all nations might know His forgiveness and salvation! As He poured out His blood on that cross, He was thinking of China, India, Uganda, Bolivia, Cuba, Russia, Iceland, Iran, the United States and every racial and ethnic group would one day know His love.

“They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it” (v. 31). This closing verse in Psalm 22 speaks of the great and final victory of the Messiah. Interestingly, the original Hebrew in the last phrase (“He has performed it”) can be translated, “It is finished.” This is exactly what Jesus declared in John 19:30 as He breathed His last! Most likely He recited the entirety of Psalm 22 during the tedious process of death.

In our sophisticated culture, people don’t like to talk about the barbaric treatment Jesus received, or about the fact that Jesus had to die to cleanse us from our sins. Let God give you a fresh revelation of the cross this week. And remember the words of the old hymn that says:

*In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
A wondrous beauty I see;
For ‘twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
To pardon and sanctify me.*

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