

THE OTHER SUFFERINGS OF JESUS AT CALVARY

General reflections on the sufferings of Jesus that were experienced at His crucifixion tend to focus on the horrific physical agonies of Jesus and, of course, also on His spiritual torment when He became the Supreme Sacrifice, Who took all the sins of the world upon Himself. Yet, there was another dimension of suffering that He endured on the Cross that rarely do we hear spoken of—and that would be the emotional pain He suffered because of verbal abuse that was cast against Him.

Psalm 22, a prophetic Psalm, gives a view of Calvary long before its actual event. Not only did it mention Jesus' piercing and the cruel handling that He would receive from His tormentors, but it also mentions that He would be harassed by "beasts," of which Psalm 22 specifically names four species of beasts who will adversely attack Jesus with verbal abuse.

Upon Calvary's Cross, the situation was far worse than that of any similar plight of a human. He hung on the cross in excruciating agony for six long hours. It was undoubtedly extremely disconcerting to face a situation when He was held in place in a way that no defense or shielding was humanly possible! However, the nails and the crown of thorns that pierced Him and the lacerations that lay across His back were not the only agonies that were ongoing; no, there was the added torment of verbal assault!

These verbal assaults listed in Psalms 22 come forth from:

1. Bulls of Bashan: "Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round." Bashan was distinguished for having rich pastureland. The bulls of Bashan are alluded to as remarkable for their size, their strength, and their fierceness. Here, in Psalm 22, they represent those who were both savage and violent in their verbal abuse of Jesus.
2. Lions: "They [the bulls of Bashan] gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion." The lion is mentioned also in verse 21, "Save me from the lion's mouth." The bulls were fierce and threatening, and the lions were ravenous and roaring. They "gaped ... with their mouths," eager to devour! Like roaring lions, these enemies of God howled out their fury, longing to tear their prey in pieces. Matthew records, "Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."

3. Dogs: “For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet,” “Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.” The word dog, as used in scripture, is not talking about cute house pets. When the word is used, it’s usually talking about unholy people or half-wild or wild dangerous animals who usually roam the streets in packs searching for food. They are dirty and are not to be messed with. The inference in Psalm 22 concerning dogs is to show the wild snarling and barking that was directed at Jesus on the cross. Notice that it is “dogs,” as in a pack, who find encouragement from one another as they engage in a frenzy of verbal abuse!
4. Wild oxen: Even those that “were crucified with him reviled him.” Not only were His tormentors located round about the Cross, but He even had to endure hurtful verbal jabs directed at Him from the two criminals who were also alongside Him on their own crosses. Jesus was not in a position where He could close off these malicious invectives directed at Him; He couldn’t stop up His ears with His hands. Instead, He had to fully endure their words as well as the emotion behind them, which, in combination, as the scriptures seem to reveal, added greatly to His torment.

No wonder then that Hebrews 12:1-5 admonishes us; “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

And pay close attention to this remainder of the scripture, “**Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself**, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?”

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