

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: Physical Death Wasn't His Greatest Torment

<http://blog.forerunners4him.org/crucifixion>

In full display before a watching world, Jesus suffered as no human being has ever suffered or will ever suffer again. Yet, no one looking on could see it. The scoffers certainly couldn't see that it was their Messiah who was being crucified right before their eyes. However, even those who believed in Jesus couldn't see the true extent of their Messiah's suffering: Physical death wasn't the greatest torment of His cross. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ plunged our Lord into an invisible inward agony.

Everyone there, of course, could see the brutality of the cross and the violence it was doing to the three men doomed to die at Golgotha that day. Even to this day the gruesome physical ordeal of crucifixion seems to capture all the attention. And why not? It's visual and visceral. The Romans wanted it that way to strike terror into the hearts of any potential rebels against their regime. It easily plays upon the abhorrence we all feel at the thought of intense physical pain. And it should. There is nothing trivial about the way our Lord was executed. Even so, we need to remember that there is nothing unique about it either.



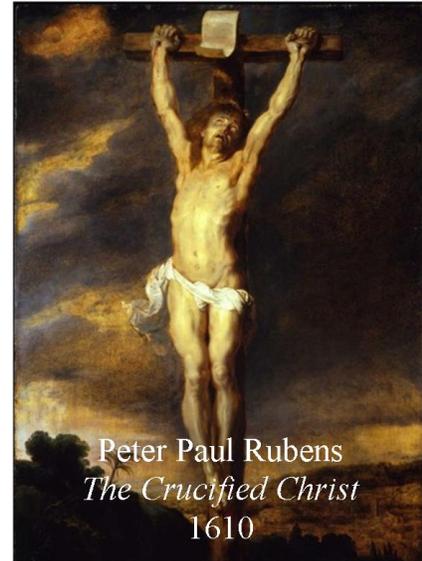
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I almost feel like a heretic writing this (so much is made of His physical suffering), but Jesus is not the only person who died by crucifixion. He is not the only person who died unjustly. He is certainly not the only person who died under conditions of horrific physical suffering, whether due to a tragic accident, a wasting disease, or torture. He is also not the only person to die for the sake of liberating someone else. *What made His suffering unique?*

The answer to this will lead us straight into the heart of what was taking place “behind the scenes” at Golgotha. I hope it will also lead your heart to esteem Jesus even more for the courage that led Him to the cross and the love that held Him there. There is so much more to His death than meets the eye.

For our sake Jesus chose to descend into an abyss of suffering—unparalleled in all of history—without a guide to lead Him through it, or a friend to cheer Him on. What looked like a ghastly travesty of justice was in reality the valiant conquest of a hideous foe. Though it came only at the cost of unimaginable suffering, the innocent Victim became the invincible Victor—*even before He died!*



“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” John 10:17
ESV

How Far Have We Fallen?

What Jesus suffered for us is in direct proportion to [our need for His salvation](#). If we could figure out how far we have fallen, that might give us a better idea of how great our need for His salvation truly is. We can get at this corporately by looking at the long, dismal record of human history with all of its wars, oppression and disasters, but let’s keep this personal: *How far have I fallen into sin?*

There are three main ways to estimate how far we have fallen.

1) First, there is the view from the top. This of course is denied to us by way of direct access, but we can catch a glimpse by using our “sanctified imaginations”—with our vision aided by divine revelation. Despite the distance in time and depth of depravity, we can “see” that Adam and Eve lived at a summit of perfection on the high ground of holiness. From the very first moment of their creation they lived in absolute purity and innocence of heart, filled with such love and peace that they enjoyed perfect harmony with each other, with all of creation and within themselves. Above all they enjoyed unbroken, face to Face intimacy

with God. From this exalted height they fell and we fell with them. Now, the experience of life at the summit is so entirely lost to us that it is even beyond the capacity of unredeemed humanity to believe it ever existed. *How impossibly high does that summit look to you?*

2) Second, there is the long uphill climb. As we take a look around our present position, we see that we are moving upwards better than some, but worse than others. Have you ever tried to raise yourself above certain unwanted faults? It's so hard to do! Unaided by the Lord it is all but impossible to make any headway. Let me ask you, how far have all of your best efforts at moral improvement carried you? If we are honest, we can see that for every fault we may rise above, others descend upon us. Maybe we've gotten beyond the major sins, but even the minor ones show us that we still have such a long way to go. How far have we fallen? *How long is it taking you to climb back out?*



These two views are from our perspective. They are both painfully revealing of our fall from grace, but there is another view. It is from God's perspective. It is the most revealing and the most painful of all.

3) There is the broken wreck at the bottom. As we look to the cross with our vision aided by scripture, we see how much it cost Jesus to save us. In order to reverse the direction of our fall, Jesus plunged past our present fallen condition into the very depth of our depravity and beyond. He descended to the ultimate horror of where the curse was taking us all. Our sins—placed upon Him—carried Jesus... Well, that part is coming, but first we will work through the stages Jesus took to get there: His suffering first in body, then in soul and finally in spirit.

What Jesus Suffered for Us

You may wish to read through this quickly at first in order to get the big picture. That's fine, but please consider coming back later to take the journey slowly. Allow time to let it sink in. That tireless lover of God, St. Francis, once spent the whole of Lent (40 days of fasting and prayer) meditating on the cross and asking God for grace to know within himself something of what Jesus suffered for sinners, if he could also know something of the love for sinners that made Him willing to suffer. Jesus answered His prayer by appearing to him in Person!



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No matter how you read through this, I recommend that you breathe out these two prayers at the end of each one of the three sections:

Dear Lord, forgive me that this is what you had to suffer because of me.

Thank you Jesus, that You were willing to suffer all of this for my sake!

1

There was physical suffering.

In the first stage of making atonement Jesus suffered... all the assaults that human cruelty could devise. He was spit at and slapped in the face. Brutal men beat and bruised His body. His flesh was ripped open by a whipping that would have laid bare his bones. A crown of thorns was wedged upon his head, tearing at his scalp. Weakened by these punishments, He was forced to carry the crushing weight of the cross beam on shoulders shredded by the lash.



At Golgotha large spikes were pounded through his wrists and feet, then came wrenching pain as He was lifted high upon the cross. All this was a mere prelude to the fuller agony of crucifixion itself: the pulling of the nails against flesh and bones, the gasping for breath, the heart strain and cramping of muscles—pains impossible to relieve. Crucifixion tortured its victims to death.

This was visible to all, but this was only the beginning of His physical sufferings.

In this latter stage of making atonement through His body Jesus suffered... the full onslaught of all that the curse had brought upon our physical bodies. Isaiah revealed that the Messiah would carry within Himself our sicknesses and our diseases.

Surely He has borne our griefs (sicknesses, **weaknesses**, and distresses) and carried our sorrows and pains [of punishment], yet we [ignorantly] considered Him stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God [as if with leprosy]. Isaiah 53:4 AMP

This meant that Jesus now suffered physical pains and ailments that the Author of life had never known. He who had only known perfect health now experienced (somehow) within Himself the terrible gamut our wasting illnesses in all of their dreadful forms. Our aches, pains and piercing agonies were all in the cup from which He drank.

2

There was the suffering of His soul.

In the early stage of making atonement Jesus suffered... all the assaults that human treachery could heap upon Him. From the common people in the mob to the religious leaders in their assemblies reproach, insults and vile accusations were hurled against Him. Those He served rejected Him; those He loved hated Him; those He tried to reach scorned Him. Perhaps, most grievous of all, those He called and trained deserted Him. From the Garden of Gethsemane to the cross Jesus experienced the pains of betrayal, abandonment and intense aloneness.

This we can see and imagine, but this was the least of what He suffered in His soul.

In the latter stage of making atonement Jesus suffered... the full onslaught of our sins. Until now He had known sin only as a temptation to be resisted. At the cross thoughts and feelings the sinless One had never known as His own came crashing down upon Him. Paul revealed that on the cross Jesus actually became our sins—he was (somehow) infused with and united to our sins.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

This meant that Jesus was forced to experience our feelings of anger saturated with hatred, of bitterness as hard as stone, and of lust as insatiable as fire. Our untrusting fears, anxieties and faithless terrors crawled through His heart and mind, along with our ugly prejudices and heartless apathies. He was forced to feel within Himself our loneliness that reeks with self-pity; our jealousies and envies that love nothing but their own self-seeking; and our pride and ambition in all of its scheming forms. These foul thoughts and feelings of our sin nature—so common for us—now swirled through Jesus like a sewer.

Surely this was His final and most terrible suffering? No, there was worse to come.



3

There was the suffering in His Spirit.

(It has to be acknowledged that this is a mystery so deep we can barely lift the veil.)

In the first stage of making atonement Jesus suffered... not the appalling experiences of what our sin is like, but its dreadful consequences. Sin darkens, deadens, defiles and destroys all that it touches. Inevitably, indwelling sin began mutilating Jesus. The supremely enlightened One experienced our mental and spiritual darkness. The Spirit-filled One experienced our deadness to life and love. The Holy One of Israel experienced our defilement from sin. The Prince of Peace experienced the destruction of peace and inward wholeness. Just as unrelieved sin squeezes and crushes the life out of us, so Jesus experienced it in far fuller measure. He who knew no sin was being made to be the sins, not of one individual, but of all humanity.

Incredibly, we are not there yet.

These evils previously described are unworthy of being compared to the worst suffering of all. This may well have been what Jesus saw in the cup the Father showed Him at Gethsemane. Here was the ultimate suffering, the one that He would gladly have set aside, if only the Father could have devised another way to save us.

And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Luke 22:41-42 ESV

In this final stage of making atonement Jesus suffered... the unimaginable. It was perhaps as unimaginable for Him as it surely is for us. None of us who are the redeemed will ever come close to this. We will certainly have known sin and its consequences, but not this—thank God! Jesus received within Himself the horror of sin's ultimate penalty. For the first time in all the eons of uncreated time, Jesus experienced—not hell—but a desolating separation from His Father's loving presence. There! There is the thing He dreaded most: *Rejected and separated from God!*

[God the Father](#) has to reject sin and Jesus (on our behalf) *became* sin. Sin separates us from God. It darkens our vision of God. It deadens our love for God. It defiles our communion with God. It destroys our intimacy with God. It separates us from the glorious presence of God. This terrible doom must surely be at the center of Jesus' deepest agony in Gethsemane. It is clearly



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at the heart of His cry of dereliction at the cross. *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*

Jesus had never known the slightest separation from His Father: Even on earth He always did what He saw the Father doing and spoke as He heard the Father speaking. The uncreated, loving embrace between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is at the core of [Who They Are](#). Now that oneness was shattered. Now that timeless intimacy was ripped away from Jesus as He bore our sins to the extremity of separation that holiness requires.



Even in our worst moments of shame or loneliness, we only experience such separation in slight measure—so great is the unfelt love and grace that surrounds us. Jesus suffered our well-deserved separation in all of its sheer, horrifying totality.

By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living [stricken to His death] for the transgression of my [Isaiah's] people, to whom the stroke was due? Isaiah 53:8 AMP

Gone now was the all-consuming, ever-infusing embrace of divine love. The Father’s love and joy were still flowing all throughout His beloved creation, but Jesus was cut off—stricken for our sins—seemingly exiled forever from the Presence even He could not live without. This is an anguish our minds can never fathom.

These terrible sufferings were in the cup that Jesus drank from at the cross. What of suffering, or sin, or sorrow has been in your cup? Know that He has already drained it all for you. Gaze with adoration and wonder upon His mercy-filled love, and give Him thanks!

The Final Word

The sufferings Jesus endured—as horrendous as they were—were not allowed to have the last word. He did! When it was over, when He had fully drained the cup His Father offered, Jesus declared His great Work finished. Only then did He freely release His Spirit to God.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30 ESV



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A Prayer to Receive Jesus as Your Savior

After seeing what Jesus was willing to suffer for you, would you like to invite Him to be your Savior and Friend? If you have already prayed a prayer to receive Jesus, it still won't hurt to refresh your heart and recommit your life with this prayer.

Dear Jesus, I see now how much You must love me! And how great is my need for You to save me. Forgive me for all my sins and wash me clean with the Blood You shed. Please come into my heart, into my life, and live your life in me. I surrender myself to You: body, soul and spirit. Help me by Your Word and Holy Spirit to trust and follow You step by step into the new life that You have promised. Just as You were willing to lay down Your life for me; help me to lay down my sinful life and live for You!

If you prayed that prayer (or want to pray it but aren't quite there yet), please accept this offer of our free eBook, [Salvation Basics: How to Get Saved and Live Saved](#). It's simple, easy reading and filled with lots of insights and answers about salvation and new life in Christ. Want it? Why not [go there now!](#)

A Hymn of Adoration and Praise

Now that we have meditated deeply on all that Jesus suffered for us, it is only right to pause and give Him thanks and praise, adoring the One who loves us with a love stronger than the grave.

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Medieval hymn, selected verses

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.



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About the Author: [Steve Evans](#)



For over a decade Steve Evans and Healing Streams have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom. Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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