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THRUthe**BIBLE**

THE RADICAL COST OF THE CROSS

WHAT JESUS REALLY PAID FOR YOUR SALVATION

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE



THE RADICAL COST OF THE CROSS

WHAT JESUS REALLY PAID FOR YOUR SALVATION

The cross of Christ is the most recognizable symbol in the world, yet no one fully knows its meaning. No theologian can adequately interpret the suffering of Christ or plumb the depths of the meaning of His death. It is a profound mystery.

The apostle Paul wrote most of the epistles dealing with the death and resurrection of Christ, but even he at the conclusion of his life said, *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (Philippians 3:10).

WHY THE MYSTERY?

The cross has always been foolishness to the world. That is exactly what the Word of God says:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing –1 Corinthians 1:18

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him –1 Corinthians 2:14

The cross is not quite what the world wants. The first time Jesus came to the earth, they were looking for Him to come on a white charger, bringing victory and deliverance from the iron heel of Rome. But, instead, He came riding upon a little donkey—on His way to a cross, no less. That did not appeal to people then, and it does not appeal to people today.

There is a second reason for the mystery of the cross: God drew a veil of silence and curtain of darkness over it. None of the four Gospel writers actually record the details of the crucifixion itself. They state that Christ was crucified and give some isolated events related to His death, but they do not describe the actual crucifixion.

We are not permitted to sit down with those who were there and “kept watch over Him” (Matthew 27:36). Even they were shut out, denied the right to see the sad spectacle of the death of the Son of God, because God drew the curtain of night over the cross. At high noon, He blotted out the sun, and our Lord died in the darkness of those three hours.

Artists through the centuries have attempted to place on canvas the horrendous death of the Savior of the world, man has attempted to describe it in vivid language, but none have done it justice. We will probably never know, even in eternity, the extent of His suffering.

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark the night the Lord passed through,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.*

–Elizabeth C. Clephane

THE SUFFERING CHRIST

Seven hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem, Isaiah revealed something of the suffering of Christ that we don't find anywhere else.

How do we know Isaiah 53 is speaking of Christ? Up to the early Christian centuries, Jewish scholars agreed that it spoke of the Messiah who was to come. But when they found Christians were interpreting it in reference to the Lord Jesus, they immediately changed their view. However, the New Testament has too many references to Isaiah 53 to discount it. John quoted Isaiah verse 1 to tell about the rejection of the Lord Jesus:

But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

–John 12:37, 38

Paul does the same thing when he describes the death and resurrection of Christ, "*For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'*" (Romans 10:16).

Then there's the Ethiopian eunuch who rode in his chariot across the desert, reading Isaiah 53. Philip, guided by the Holy Spirit, approached him and asked if he understood what he was reading. Despite having just left Jerusalem—the religious center of the world at that time—the Ethiopian was in spiritual darkness, and he didn't understand when he read:

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.”—Acts 8:32, 33

So he asked Philip, “Was the prophet speaking of himself or of another man?” The interesting thing is Philip's response: “*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him*” (Acts 8:35). There's no doubt Jesus is the subject of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

The theme is the suffering Savior, and it reveals the humanity of Christ in a wonderful way. It tells why He took upon Himself humanity. One of the great theologians of the Middle Ages, Anselm, offered an explanation: “He came to redeem lost mankind.” That is the picture painted in Isaiah 53; I say reverently, it reveals His life all the way from the cradle to the grave and beyond.

Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.
—Isaiah 52:14

No one has ever been marred more than Jesus was on the cross. This is a shocking statement. When light broke onto the cross after the three hours of darkness, the crowd looked up at the One hanging there and gasped in horror. He was probably little more than a quivering mass of human flesh. He had borne hell for you and me. He had paid the penalty for the sins of the world. And it showed.

We will probably never know,
even in eternity, the extent of

His suffering.



—DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHEN GOD FLEXED HIS MUSCLES

... *To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?* –Isaiah 53:1

In the Hebrew language, the word used here for “arm” is vivid and picturesque. It evokes God baring His arm by rolling up His sleeve and symbolizes a tremendous undertaking.

This is the same God who created the heavens and the earth. Psalm 19:1 tells us of His marvelous creation, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork.” That word “handiwork” is literally “fingerwork,” like a woman crocheting or knitting. Creation didn’t require any effort at all for God. He merely spoke the universe into existence.

But when God was ready to redeem sinners, that work required His bared arm. *This* is when God flexed His muscles.

When you consider that God’s power is already infinite, it’s difficult to make the distinction—but God wants us to see that it took a greater expenditure of power, wisdom, and sacrifice to redeem man than it did to create entire universes. He attaches more importance to the redemption of sinners than He does to all the rest of His creation.

A TENDER PLANT SPRINGS FROM DRY GROUND

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.... –Isaiah 53:2

Isaiah takes us back to the birth and boyhood of our Lord. He had said previously a living branch would come out of Jesse, who was the father of King David (11:1). But why Jesse, since the Lord Jesus is presented in the New Testament as the King coming from David? Well, by the time our Lord came into the world, it was in “*the fullness of time*” (Galatians 4:4) as far as God was concerned. The family of David had returned to peasantry; they were no longer princes but peasants. The One in God’s royal line happened to be a carpenter in Nazareth.

When Jesus came, He was a root out of dry ground. The nation of Israel was dead spiritually. The religious rulers had reduced the Old Testament to a dead ritual, and they were far from God. They followed the letter of the Mosaic Law, but they had more ways of getting around it than modern man has in getting around the civil law.

Israel was not only a dead nation spiritually, but it was also under the iron heel of Rome. The people of Israel were not free. The Roman Empire produced no great civilization—they were merely good imitators of great civilizations. There was mediocre achievement and pseudo-culture, the moral foundation was nonexistent, and the citizens were debauched and pleasure-loving.

The reason the apostles' message of the grace of God fell on so many receptive ears was because people were tired of law. They had been taught to follow little, meticulously-detailed programs in order to be saved rather than having a personal relationship with God. There was deadness everywhere.

Into such a situation, Christ came. He came from a noble family that had been cut off, from a nation that had become a slave to Rome, and in an age of corruption. The loveliest flower of humanity came from the driest spot and period of the world's history. It was humanly impossible for His day and generation to produce Him, but He came nevertheless—because He came forth from God.

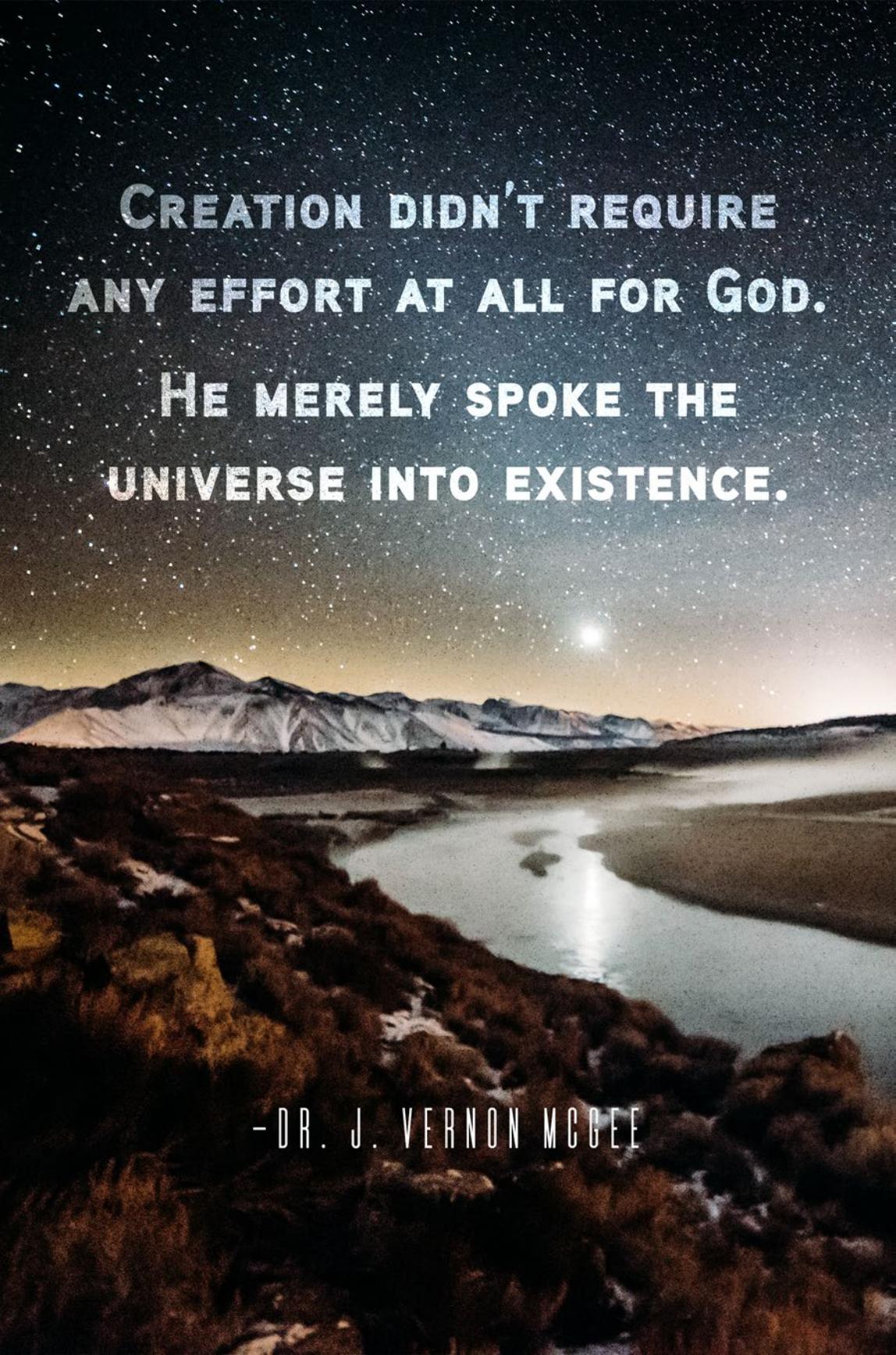
If you walked across a desert without a green sprig anywhere and suddenly came upon a big, lovely head of iceberg lettuce growing out of that dry, dusty soil, you would stop dead in your tracks and say, "Where in the world did this come from?" That is how amazing Christ's coming into the world was. There was nothing in the world that could have produced Him, my friend. He is a root out of a dry ground.

THE UNLOVELY CROSS

...He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. –Isaiah 53:2

This has led some to draw the wrong conclusion that Jesus was misshapen in some way or had a disease. May I say to you, Jesus was the perfect man. He could never have been the sacrifice for the sins of the world if He had not been perfect in every way—we know this from the Levitical requirements set down for a sacrificial lamb.

What this is saying, though, is there was absolutely nothing beautiful on the cross. Beautiful crosses are put up on churches all over the world. But, my friend, the cross on which our Savior died was not pretty. *“There is no beauty that we should desire Him”* is speaking of Him when He hung on that cross.

A night landscape featuring a starry sky with a bright moon, a body of water reflecting the light, and a range of mountains in the background. The foreground is a dark, rocky slope.

**CREATION DIDN'T REQUIRE
ANY EFFORT AT ALL FOR GOD.**

**HE MERELY SPOKE THE
UNIVERSE INTO EXISTENCE.**

- DR. J. VERNON MCCOEE

THE REJECTED SAVIOR

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. –Isaiah 53:3

Jesus wasn't rejected only when He was crucified—this speaks of His total life. From the day He was born in a dirty, smelly stable, He was rejected. If you want an idea of what He went through in His earthy life, read Psalm 69, which fills in some of what he experienced during those silent years between His childhood and the beginning of His public ministry at the age of thirty. As an adult, He could say, “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Matthew 8:20). He went through this world rejected.

THE BEARER OF THE WORLD'S SORROWS

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. –Isaiah 53:4, 5

Healed of what? This passage has caused some to assume there is physical healing in the atonement. But it is not referring to physical healing. Matthew sheds light on what it does mean:

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses." –Matthew 8:16, 17

He didn't bear our sicknesses on the cross. He bore them when He walked through this earth, my friend—during those three years of His healing ministry. He was *moved* by the suffering of the human family; His heart went out to them. Disease is not

sin itself—it is the result of the entrance of sin way back in the Garden of Eden. When Jesus walked by and saw the blind and the lame, He was moved with compassion.

We have only a hazy account of the miracles He performed. The Gospel of John says He healed many. Luke says He healed the multitudes. I believe one of the reasons the Pharisees could not contradict the fact He was performing miracles (and they never did) was because there were literally thousands—yes, thousands—of people He had healed who were walking about everywhere. Why? Because as the Son of God, He is moved by the suffering of humanity. The Bible doesn't say in His *death* He heals disease—ending suffering was part of His ministry during His life on earth.

Now let me make this very clear. The other passage of Scripture that ought always to be quoted with Isaiah 53 is 1 Peter 2:24:

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. –1 Peter 2:24

Healed of what? “*Who Himself bore our sins in His own body*” When He died on the cross, He died for sin, my beloved.

THE *loveliest* FLOWER
OF HUMANITY CAME
FROM THE DRIEST SPOT
AND PERIOD OF THE
world's history.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE



WHY DID HE HAVE TO DIE?

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. –Isaiah 53:6

This verse opens with “*all we like sheep have gone astray,*” and it closes with “*the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*” When Christ died on the cross, He took upon Himself the sins of the world. Why? Because “*we have turned, every one, to his own way*”—expressed in those three words is the basic problem with the human family today.

Scripture says, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 14:12). The Lord Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). When the human family turned away from God, it was then Christ became the sacrifice for the sins of the world: “*The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*”

At the crucifixion of our Lord, it wasn't His suffering at the hands of man during those first three hours but His suffering during those last three hours in the darkness, that the cross

became the altar on which the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was offered.

Three times we are told in Isaiah 53 it was God who smote Him:

- “*smitten by God, and afflicted*” (verse 4)
- “*the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (verse 6)
- “*yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him*” (verse 10)

Consternation fills our souls when we recognize it was God the Father who did it!

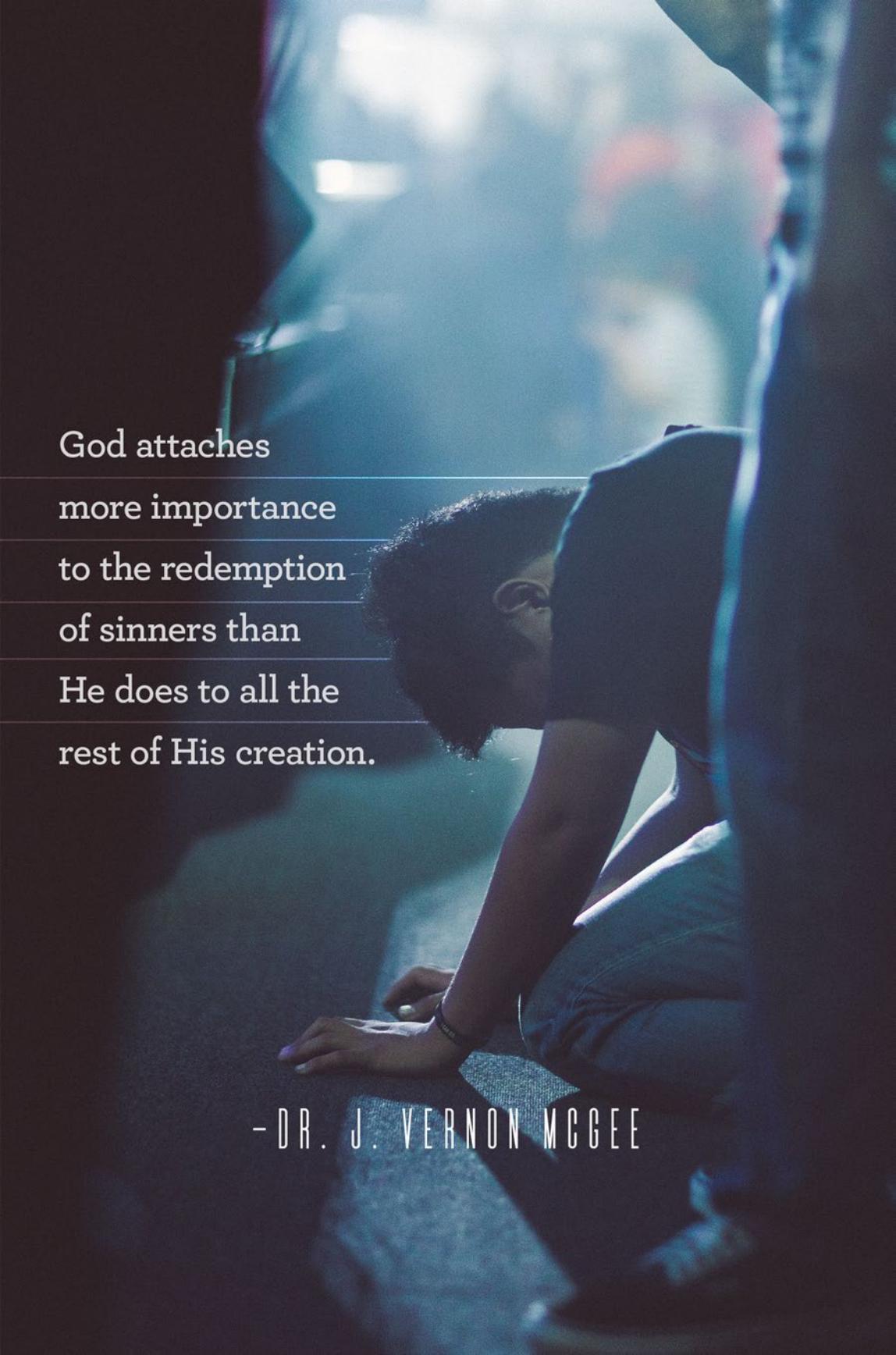
Christ was on the cross for six hours, hanging between heaven and earth from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon.

In the first three hours, man did his worst. He heaped ridicule and insult upon Him, spit upon Him, nailed Him without mercy to the cruel cross, and then sat down to watch Him die. At twelve o'clock noon, after Jesus had hung there for three hours in agony, God drew a veil over the sun and darkness covered that scene, shutting out from human eye the transaction between the Father and the Son. Christ became the sacrifice for the sin of the world. God made His Son's soul an offering for sin. Christ Jesus was treated as sin, for we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:21 He was made sin for us—Him who knew no sin.

Why did He do it? He did it because He loves you. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. God made the soul of Jesus Christ an offering for your sin!

If you want to know if God hates sin, look at the cross. If you want to know if God will punish sin, look at the Beloved of His heart enduring the tortures of its penalty. That cross became an altar where we behold the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. He was dying for somebody else—He was dying for you and me.

My friend, if God didn't spare His own Son, what do you expect at the hands of God when you stand before Him someday? The writer to the Hebrews asks the question, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation ...?*" (Hebrews 2:3). Do you think you can escape? There is no way, because Christ has taken the only route and has paid the tremendous price that you and I might be saved.

A person is kneeling in prayer in a church. The scene is dimly lit with a strong blue and purple color cast. The person is in the foreground, their head bowed and hands resting on the floor. In the background, other people are visible, some standing and some kneeling, all in a similar posture of prayer. The overall atmosphere is solemn and reverent.

God attaches
more importance
to the redemption
of sinners than
He does to all the
rest of His creation.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

OUR SACRIFICIAL LAMB

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

–Isaiah 53:7

All the way from Abel to John the Baptist, Scripture uses the figure of the lamb. This was the verse the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip climbed up into his chariot. The Ethiopian asked Philip, “Who is the prophet talking about, himself or another?” Philip said it was Another who was yet to come, and he told him about Jesus who had come as the Lamb led to the slaughter. (See Acts 8:32, 33.)

When Abel brought his sacrifice to the Lord, it was a lamb. If you’d asked Abel why he was sacrificing a little lamb if he knew it wasn’t going to take away his sin, I imagine he would have responded, “God has asked us to do it. He promised my mother One is coming who will be our Savior. This little lamb is depicting Him, and I offer it as a substitute. But there is coming One who will give Himself in voluntary, vicarious death. I don’t know much about it yet, but I trust God that He is coming.”

Centuries passed, and at last one day John the Baptist marked out Jesus and said, “*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). This is God’s Lamb—the One to pay the penalty for the sins of the world, including yours and mine.

Then the apostle Paul could look back at that cross and say, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me” (see Galatians 2:20).

Jesus didn’t die to win your sympathy. When He was on His way to the cross and the women of Jerusalem were weeping for Him, He said, “...*Do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.... For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?*” (Luke 23:28, 31). He did not want their sympathy, and He does not want ours.

Oh, we would be cold-blooded indeed to read the story of the crucifixion of Christ and not be moved. When Clovis, leader of the Franks, first heard about the crucifixion of Christ, he was so moved that he leaped to his feet, drew his sword, and exclaimed, “If I had only been there with my Franks!” But our Lord didn’t want Clovis and his army. He told His own disciple to put up his sword. He could have the protection of legions of angels, but He was not here to be delivered—except to death for you and me. He did not die as the martyrs did, singing praises and conscious of God’s presence with them. Rather, Jesus cried out in that awful moment, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” He was forsaken of God!

He died because “*all we like sheep have gone astray...and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*” He had to do it to save you, my friend.

Isaiah 53 opens with suffering, but it closes with satisfaction:

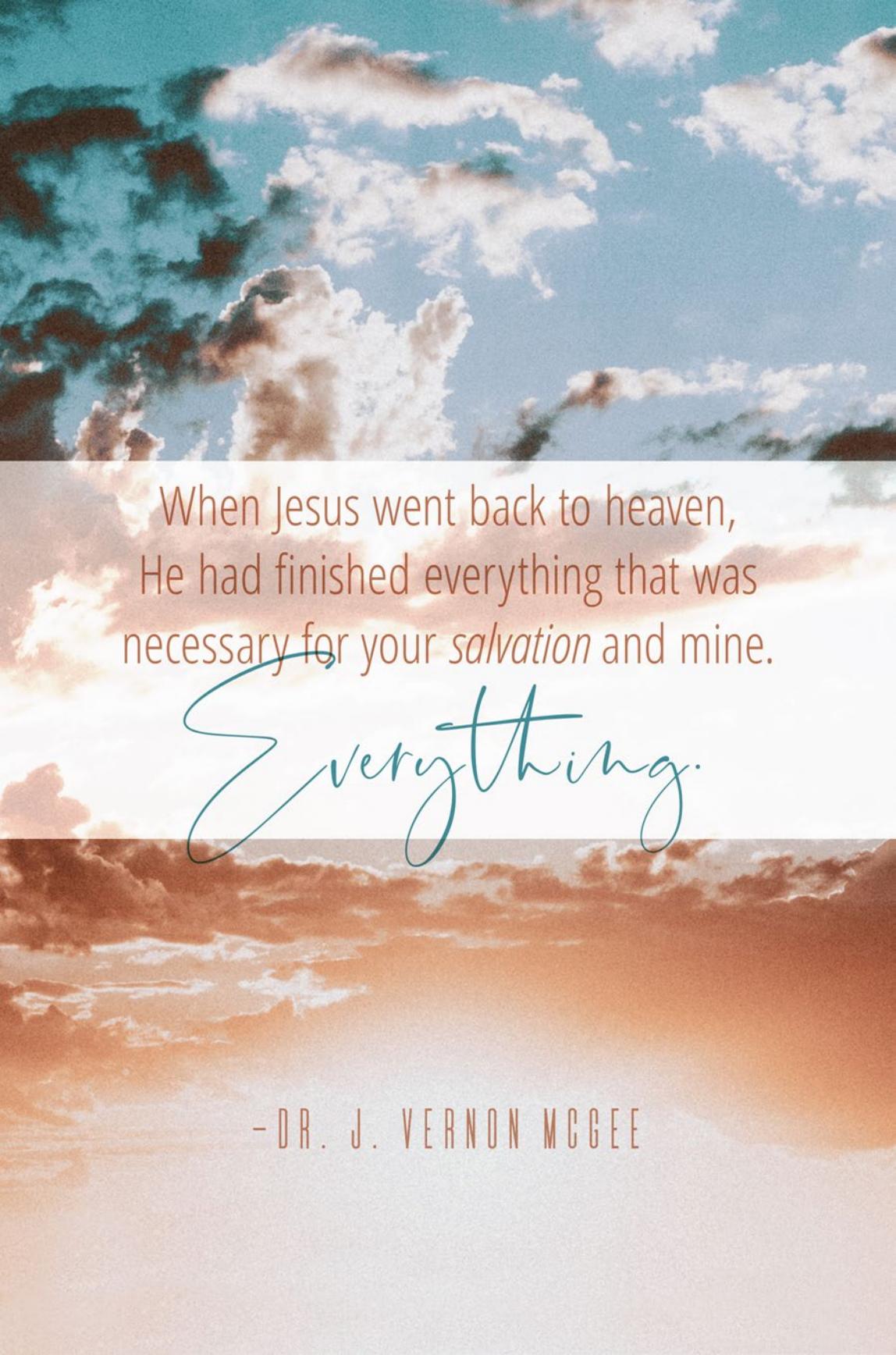
He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. –Isaiah 53:11

Don't feel sorry for Him. If you think He was caught between the upper millstone of Roman power and the nether millstone of religious greed, forget it. He was not. He says, "*No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father*" (John 10:18). The Book of Hebrews says, "*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Hebrews 12:2). He made adequate provision for the sin of the world. He is satisfied.

The cross is not an ambulance sent to a wreck. It is not first aid. It is not a temporary arrangement. The Lord Jesus is "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8). And when you look into eternity you see what John describes: "*... behold, in the midst of the throne ... stood a Lamb as though it had been slain ...*" (Revelation 5:6). Scripture tells us He sat down at God's right hand, and do you know why? For the same reason God rested on the seventh day after He had created the heavens and the earth. He wasn't tired—He sat down because He had finished the job. When Jesus went back to heaven, He had finished everything that was necessary for your salvation and mine. Everything.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Do you have the answer to that? God has a remedy for every sin, except the sin of rejecting the Remedy: His Son.

God is satisfied with what Jesus did for you on the cross. Are you satisfied? "*He shall see the labor of his soul, and be satisfied.*" Oh, the restlessness of men and women today! My friend, rest in Him. He paid a tremendous price for you.



When Jesus went back to heaven,
He had finished everything that was
necessary for your *salvation* and mine.

Everything.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets for download. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden bench.

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