



Psalm 22:1-32

The Song of the Cross

Use your imagination and go with me back to a thousand years ago. The date is A. D. 963. Most of Europe was only sparsely inhabited by barbarian tribes. The discovery of America would not be for another 500 years. Let's suppose there existed a document prepared a thousand years before the event predicted of a time when a man of great distinction worldwide, would be the head of a great nation. He would be riding a street in a large metropolitan city in a metal chariot not drawn by horses. Then this man suddenly and violently would die from the penetration of his brain by a little piece of metal hurled by a weapon made of wood and iron. Within hours, his death would have world wide effect and world wide mourning. Can you imagine with what awe and respect that document would have on people today even though written in A. D. 963 predicting the death of President John Kennedy on November 22, 1963? That hypothetical prediction would have been made even before the invention of the automobile or guns or tall buildings or radio and televisions or satellites or missiles or atomic and hydrogen bombs.

I don't know where I heard that illustration but it helps us understand exactly what we have in reality in Psalm 22. The Psalmist described a capital punishment by crucifixion before it had even been invented. It was unheard of in Jewish minds. It was written many centuries before depraved minds invented this horrible cruel form of punishment. No one had ever been put to death by crucifixion in King David's time. The Jewish method of execution was by stoning someone to death. Romans borrowed the crucifixion from the Carthaginians who invented it in order to make death as painful and cruel as possible.

Apart from the Gospel records themselves Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 describes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ more accurately and in greater detail than any other portion of Scripture. Only in Christ can we find One whose experience perfectly fulfills that revealed in this Hebrew song. Whatever may have been the experience of David, the suffering and the triumph described here transcends mere human suffering. There are meanings here far beyond the experiences of any human being.

In Psalm 22, we have a picture of the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, painted by King David one thousand years before Jesus was born. He describes at least nine specific events or aspects of the crucifixion in minute detail a thousand years before it actually happened in history. All of them fulfilled during the six hours Jesus hung on the cross.

The first section of this Hebrew poem (22:1-21) describes the problem of being forsaken of God. The second part (22:22-31) is filled with praise for God's deliverance. The positive note of assurance comes at the end of the poem after wave after wave of wretchedness and trust in God. The mood of abandonment and trust is constantly alternating.

THE PROBLEM OF BEING FORSAKEN OF GOD (22:1 – 21)

21)

The problem of the suffering Messiah (22:1-5)

The Psalmist gives a "cry of dereliction" (vv. 1-2). "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; And by night, but I have no rest."

It is a cry of abandonment, as the sufferer becomes aware of his being forsaken by his God. "Forsaken" literally means loosen, or relinquish or let me go. The Gospels uses a word made up of three words "to leave, down, in" —meaning to abandon or forsaking of someone in a state of defeat or helplessness in the midst of hostile circumstances.

You can feel the pain in his soul. Why is God so far from helping me? Why are my groanings so far from obtaining help for me?

Matthew 27:45 describes a strange, weird darkness that settled down over the world, obscuring the sun until it could be seen no more. The darkness fell like a heavy curtain over Jerusalem and the cross of Jesus. The three-hour darkness was not due to an eclipse because it was time for the full moon at Passover week. A supernatural darkness came over the land of Israel from 12 noon until 3 p.m. It was a supernatural manifestation in nature. It was doubtless a period when Jesus suffered extreme anguish of spirit. The increasing nameless agonies of the crucifixion were deepening more and more with every moment into death. Jesus Christ cried out these words at the end of the strange period of darkness. No one has ever explained it. It lasted three hours. Almost at the close of the three hours of darkness, feeling Himself God-forsaken, He cried out words of torment in the awful silence of the darkness. The words echoed through eternity and reverberated down the centuries of time: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*

Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" In that strange sense of abandonment God the Father was rejecting God the Son! This God forsakenness was real. No human being has ever experienced so great a suffering.

A deathly silence reigned and a feeling of terror crept over everyone.

Martin Luther sat contemplating these words. After a long time he rose from his chair and exclaimed, "God forsaken of God! Who can understand that?"

That darkness meant judgment. It was the coming judgment of God against sin. It was the wrath of God burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus as our substitute. In those dark hours, hell came to Calvary that day. Our Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead. The Apostle Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5:21, "God made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The Psalmist tells us the sufferer who screams at God still believes in God. There is also an awareness of the faithfulness of God (verses 3-5). "Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In Thee our fathers trusted; They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. To Thee they cried out, and were

Thee our fathers trusted; They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. To Thee they cried out, and were delivered; In Thee they trusted, and were not disappointed."

He thinks back on the history of Israel and remembers God's faithfulness. Although they were sinners God was faithful. "My God, My God" is the name of the mighty God of the covenant. He uses the word *Eli*, My Strong One. In verse 2 he uses the most common designation of God, *'elohay* the One to be feared by me. He used word "trust" three times in verses 3-5—meaning to give God one's full weight, literally to collapse on God. He recalls Yahweh's holy character. There is no one like God. He is sinless, complete in Himself, He is perfect, He is awesome. He is worthy of our praise.

The passionate cry of the suffering Messiah (22:6-8)

For some strange reason, God is treating him differently. "But I am a worm, and no man." The pain of his suffering is dehumanizing. He experiences utter helplessness and frailty. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah wrote of him who is suffering, "His appearance was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14). They beat Him to a pulp. In His dying Jesus is treated like a common criminal, despised, hated by society.

" But I am a worm, and not a man, A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him'" (Psalm 22:6-8).

Matthew records the crowd in Jerusalem during the crucifixion of Jesus. The unthinking multitude passed by wagging their heads in mockery and shouting, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now." This crowd could not have been controlled. They had no idea they were fulfilling prophecy a thousand years old. Here is the way Matthew described the actual events at the foot of the cross in Matthew 27:39-43. Listen as they attack His faith in God.

And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET HIM DELIVER Him now, IF HE TAKES PLEASURE IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

The pain of utter abandonment of the Messiah (22:9-11)

"Yet Thou art He who didst bring me forth from the womb; Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother's breasts. Upon Thee I was cast from birth; Thou hast been my God from my mother's womb. Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help" (22:9-11).

The disciples, friends and family all abandoned Jesus (Matthew 26:56). Only God is left and now He senses that God Himself is forsaking Him. Jesus had been in an intimate holy relationship with the Father all through eternity and for 30 years in the flesh while on the earth until this very hour. He was the perfect, sinless Son of God. He was always the delight of His Father. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17b). There was nothing in Jesus' life and character to merit abandonment. However, on the cross He is utterly forsaken of God the Father. That eternal fellowship is broken.

Why? He was dying as our substitute. He was being made an offering for the sins of the world. Isaiah 53:5-6 says, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray,

for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

The panic of the cross is described (22:12 -13).

The onlookers are described as strong powerful bulls. They seem like lions, fierce, ravening, threatening, their fangs dripping with rage to tear him apart. "Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion."

The enemies of Jesus surrounded Him like a pack of wild animals shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (Matthew 27:22-26). It became so bad a riot was ensuing and Pilate caved in to their demands for His blood.

The reaction of the victim is felt (22:14 -15).

King David writes, "I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And Thou dost lay me in the dust of death."

A feeling of utter helplessness and weakness overwhelms him. His physical pain is so severe it is like all his bones are being pulled apart. The distorted position into which the body of a crucified person was thrust may have brought about something comparable to David's description. His courage has left him. He is all but dead.

The Apostle John described this terrible ravaging thirst of Jesus. With His body dehydrated in the hot Judean sun, and with the suffering from a raging fever He cried, "I thirst" (19:28b).

God is the one who lays Him down in death (v. 15). It is a judicial death. Isaiah 53:4, 6, 10.

Picturesque vivid details of the crucifixion are described (22:16 -18; Matthew 27:33-50).

Note the exacting details of the execution. David never suffered like this one. "Dogs" is a derogatory term for Gentiles. The fulfillment in the nailing of the hands and of the feet of the Crucified One to the cross is clear. The prophet Isaiah also saw this clearly and wrote, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed" (53:5).

"For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; 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."

He can count His bones because He is forcibly stretched out making all His bones stand out as He tries to breathe. People mingle about the cross mocking Him.

Our poet is prophetically standing at the foot of the cross. This Psalm is written as if the author were standing beneath the cross! Who but God could have written these words? The historian writes, "And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots" (Matthew 27:35; compare Luke 23:34; John 19:24). It is impossible that this could have been fulfilled by the collusion of the pagan Roman soldiers. Yet, here it is described 1000 years before Jesus' death by crucifixion.

A final prayer of commitment to the Father (22:19 -21).

The Psalmist is committing himself to God. "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. Save me from the

my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, My only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; And from the horns of the wild oxen Thou dost answer me."

Matthew 26:39-45 describes Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not My will, Thy will be done."

Just before He died Jesus cried, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46b).

It is impossible for us to understand this cry of our Savior from the cross. We would have to go to hell as the holy sinless Son of God to comprehend His atoning death. No sinner will ever be in hell in those circumstances. We are guilty sinners. We deserve the death penalty. We deserve eternal separation from a holy God. He does not owe us anything.

When Jesus died for our sins, He gathered up all the guilt and iniquities of all mankind and died for it. All our guilt was laid on Him. He represented all that seething mass of evil and with the one stroke of the wrath of God it was all blotted out. It was condemned forever. He was identified with all of your sins and suffered and died for them.

No wonder there was such a cry of God-forsakenness from the suffering Lamb of God! My God! My God! Why? He was the holy, sinless and perfect sacrifice for sin. The wages of sin is death. Jesus paid those wages! He did not die because He had ever experienced sin personally. He was pure and holy. God make Him sin for us!

The remarkable thing is this song of dereliction merges into a note of jubilation. The moment of death is revealed in this broken verse, twenty one, and then the singer is heard again, no longer expressing abandonment, but a paean of victory in the following verses. The tone now becomes jubilant praise.

THE PRAISE FOR DELIVERANCE BY GOD (22:22-31)

The praise to the suffering Messiah (22:22-26)

Something transpired between verses 21 and 22. In the first part of this Psalm, we heard the voice of one person in statements, which are shorter, like gasps of air, breathed in distress. He is a lone sufferer. In the second section of our Psalm, we hear many voices including the Psalmist. The verses are longer because the speaker is delivered from pain. The lone warrior won the victory. The Messianic work has been accomplished through suffering. The people can now enter the possession gained through suffering and the triumph of the Redeemer. The suffering Messiah ben Joseph is also the triumphant Messiah ben David! The sovereign LORD God reigns!

Just as the first section coincides exactly with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second part gives the results that came because of His resurrection. The Psalmist' vision is so clear of the salvation of the world arising out of His resurrection seems more like history than prophecy.

Now He will declare to His brethren what God has done for Him. Jesus called His disciples His brethren. Our poet writes:

I'll tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee. You who fear the LORD, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Neither has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard. From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever! (22:22-26).

Hebrews 2:11-12 applies these words of the Psalmist to Jesus Christ.

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I 'WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE. "'

The same one who has just suffered and died is now in the midst of the company whom he calls his brethren. He is calling out the people of God to praise God in v. 23. The first words of the risen Lord Jesus were to women. He said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me" (Matthew 28:10). He said to Mary Magdalen who stood there hugging the daylights out of Him, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" (John 20:17). For the next forty days Jesus declared to His brethren what God had done. He calls His disciples brethren.

The resurrection is the evidence and proof that Jesus was the suffering servant of God dying as the Lamb of God who takes away all our sins. Verse 24 sees the one who was forsaken just in the eyes of God. Read Hebrews 13:20-21a. We worship a living Lord who has been raised from the dead and who now shares His life with us. Our life belongs to Him. He is risen! He is alive! Not only does He give praise to His Father, but we too have ample reason to give Him praise! Our Savior has risen from the dead after dying in our place.

We can praise Him because He has provided all that we need to please God (vv. 25-26). Out of His resurrection power, He gives us everything we need. Everything we need has been made available to us to live the Christian life (Hebrews 7:25). He made the provision through His death and resurrection.

The proclamation of the suffering Messiah (22:27-31)

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; it will be told of the LORD to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it.

The poet speaks of generations yet to be born who will hear of the sufferer's triumph and rejoice in His victory. One group shall declare it to the next because the truth is worth proclaiming to every generation. The Great Commission is to preach the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth (vv. 27-28). Every tribe and nation will hear the message of God's grace. Just before ascending into heaven Jesus said to His disciples, "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

All the peoples of the earth will be in subjection to Him (22:29-31). Remember, these words were written a thousand years before Philippians 2:9-11 and Revelation 4 and 5. The remotest corners of the earth will hear the message of salvation. We the recipients of His grace are fulfilling these very words of the ancient poet!

Every time we take the gospel out of the realm of self-edification and share it with others we are fulfilling these words. Members of our church were part of a team who saw 143 people saved on a recent medical-dental mission trip to a remote coffee growing area of Honduras. God is at work bringing praise to His name.

The last words of this Hebrew poem are utterly amazing. They read literally, "It is finished." We can paraphrase it "there shall be proclaimed deliverance to a people yet unborn, that it is finished!"

Our Psalm opens and closes with a word of Jesus from the cross. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus cried with a loud voice and said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). There was nothing left to do. It was done, complete, finished for you.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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