

The Psalm Of The Cross

Psalm 22

Introduction: 1) In 1 Peter 1:10-11 the apostle wrote, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” (NIV) These words of the apostle Peter, could easily describe both the flow and content of Psalm 22, a Psalm James Montgomery Boice called, “the best description in all the Bible of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion” (Boice, vol. 1, 191).

2) In words that sound as if they had been written by an eyewitness beneath the cross at Calvary, David penned what Luther called a “gem among the Psalms” (Spurgeon, 335). Spurgeon said, “This is beyond all others the psalm of the cross... We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this Psalm” (Spurgeon, 324).

Heinemann writes, “Extraordinary is the word for Psalm 22” (*Bib Sac* 147; 286).

3) Some wish to identify the righteous sufferer in the psalm with David or another ancient writer prior to the time of Christ. I, however, would concur with Calvin who said, “although David here bewails his own distresses, this psalm was composed under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy concerning David’s King and Lord... in this psalm the heavenly Father intended that in the person of His Son those things should be visibly accomplished which were shadowed forth in David” (Calvin, 362, 376).

4) Referenced some 24 times in the New Testament (Wilson, 424), the psalm describes not a sick man or a weary warrior. No, the words of Psalm 22 are the words of a man enduring execution, depicted in language so graphic and brutal, we are haunted by the pictures conjured up in our minds.

5) Many have observed how Psalms 22-24 constitute a magnificent trio, each emphasizing a particular aspect of the Lord’s Anointed, the Messiah-King. In Psalm 22 we have a portrait of our suffering king. In Psalm 23 we have a portrait of our shepherd king. In Psalm 24 we have a portrait of our sovereign king.

6) It is also instructive to read Psalm 22 in light of what precedes it in Psalm 20 and 21. The canonical ordering is instructive, as well as perplexing. In Psalm 20:6 we read, “Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from his holy heaven, with the saving strength of His right hand.” And in Psalm 21:1-7 we read “The king shall have joy in Your strength, O Lord; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart’s desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life from You, and You gave it to him-length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Your salvation; honor and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence. For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.” Now, in stark contrast Ps 22:1 surprises us, stuns us, startles our expectations as God’s anointed is forsaken, God is removed, God does not answer him.

7) Though the psalm can be studied under the 2 categories gleaned from 1 Peter 1:10-11, that of suffering (vs. 1-18) and that of glory (vs. 19-31), our careful and respectful meditation will give attention to 3 dominate themes in this psalm of agony and ecstasy: 1)

The Passion of the Messiah-King (vs. 1-18), 2) The Salvation of the Messiah-King (vs. 19-21) and 3) The Mission of the Messiah-King (vs. 22-31).

I. Meditate On The Passion Of Our Lord. 22:1-18

A psalm of lament containing both prayers of petition and praise, we are confronted immediately with the cry of the Righteous Sufferer. How do we know He is righteous? In the psalm there is no confession of personal sin for He has none. Further, not a vindictive or vicious word is hurled even once at the enemies who taunt Him and seek His death. No, the one suffering the abandonment of heaven and earth endures His passion an innocent victim and a trusting servant of the Lord. In what ways does this Righteous One suffer? 3 aspects of His passion are highlighted.

1) Our Lord suffered spiritually. 22:1-5

- The psalm begins with a three-fold cry to *El*, a cry that is recorded as the 4th saying of Jesus on the cross in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, a cry that is intimate and personal with the possessive pronoun immediately catching our attention: *Eli, Eli* (vr 1), “My God, my God?”

- Why have you forsaken me?
- Why are you so far from helping (*ESV, NIV*, “saving”) me? (cf v. 11, 19).
- Why are you so far from the words of my groaning (roaring?)

He is the lion of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9-10) who roars to His God why...why...why am I cut off from you?

- To emphasize the isolation and separation He is experiencing he brings to God’s attention the fervency of His prayer life (v. 2). “Day and night I cry out to you.” I am not silent, but you do not answer, you do not hear. He is helpless. He is alone.
- Then in vs 3-5, the Righteous Sufferer turns in confidence as he recalls the character of God and the faithfulness of God. Note the phrases “But You, in You, to You and in You.”
 - You are holy, distinct, unique, set apart, a God who is like no other, enthroned, dwelling in the praises, the worship of Israel. As a holy God you are a just and righteous God. As a holy God you are a faithful God. The fathers knew this and trusted (3X) in you. They trusted and were delivered (2X), they were not put to shame or disappointed (v.5).
 - But this was not the experience of our Lord Jesus. He was shamed more than any man. He was not delivered, He was forsaken. “He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).
 - He was shamed that I might not be shamed in my sin.
 - He was forsaken that I might not be forsaken by God forever in my depravity.
 - He was not delivered that I might be delivered from judgment.

Trans. He suffered spiritually that I might live spiritually.

2) Our Lord suffered personally. 22:6-13

- There is now a connection made with the great Suffering Servant song of Isaiah 53. There in vs. 3 we read, “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.”
- What does our Suffering King say of Himself as he hangs on the Cross?
 - (v.6) “I am a worm (emphatic), and no man.” The great I AM who was made a little lower than the angels now is made lower than man. But He goes further. “A reproach (scorned)...despised (held in contempt, deemed worthless) by the people (v.6).
 - (v.7) All who see ridicule (mock, laugh me to scorn) Me. They shoot out the lip, make faces at me, and shake their heads in derision (Matt 27:39-43). But their words, listen to their words (in v.8)!
 - (v.8) He trusted (cf vs. 4-5!) in the Lord (*Yahweh*), so let Him rescue, deliver (cf vs 4-5!) Him, since He delights in Him. Interestingly the word trust is *gol* from the verb *galal*. A related word to it is *gulgoleth* or *Golgotha*.
- This suffering King did trust in Jehovah. In vs 9-11 He notes 4 times the sovereign and providential activity of His God in His life from its beginning.
 - You are the one who took me out of the womb (v.9)
 - You made me trust even from My mother’s breast (v.9)
 - I was cast upon You from birth (v.10)
 - From my mother’s womb You have been my God (v.10)
- Thus He cries again to the one who is His God (4X)! David’s words here anticipate the glorious description of the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isa. 42, 49, 50 and 53. Indeed the Servant of the Lord can proclaim in Isa. 49:1, “The Lord has called me from the womb.”
 - Be not far (v.1) from me.
 - Trouble is near, distress is upon me.
 - There is none to help (v.11).
- Indeed there is no one to help this innocent victim now at the mercy of evil, wicked humanity. With 2 striking metaphors the greater David describes the enemies who have surrounded Him.
 - Many bulls...strong bulls of Bashan (powerful and senseless) surround and encircle me (v.12).
 - Raging and roaring lions, they gape (*NIV*, “open wide their mouths”) at me (fierce and powerful, they are ready to tear me apart and finish me off. I roared to you for help. They roar at me with death (v.13).

Trans. And, there is none to help (v.11). Our Lord suffered personally.

3) Our Lord suffered physically. 22:14-18

- These verses transcend the imagination, boggle the mind, bring us into a world of prophetic wonder and a world of evil beyond our comprehension. Through crucifixion would not even come into existence as a form of execution for several hundred years, these words are an accurate description of this type of death, and they detail for us the physical dimension of the Messiah-King's suffering.
- vr 14 - "I am poured out like water," drained, emptied of strength, energy and vitality.
 - "All my bones are out of joint," His body is racked with pain, stretched to the breaking point, dislocated from their proper place.
 - "My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me." The fight in Me is gone. Life is ebbing away.
- vr 15 - "My strength is dried up like a potsherd," I am dehydrated, no vitality, no moisture, my life-juices are gone.
 - "My tongue clings to my mouth," I thirst, dryness engulfs my mouth. A state of shock has overtaken me.
 - "You have brought me to the dust of death." (cf. Gen. 3:19).
What? Death. Who? You! The Lord! As Isaiah 53:10 affirms, "Yet it pleased the Lord to crush Him, He has put Him to grief."
All of this is Jehovah's doing.
- vr 16 - "Dogs" (ancient scavengers who ran in packs living off the garbage and refuse dumps of the land) surrounded me... a band or company of evil men has enclosed Me (there is no escape).
 - "They pierce my hands and my feet (cf Isa. 53:5; Zech 12;10; John 20:24-27).
- vr 17 - "I can count all my bones," I am so emaciated, thin, like a tragic victim of a holocaust concentration camp, you can count my ribs, my bones, one by one. Indeed they do as "they stare and gloat over me" (NIV).
- vr 18 - "They divide my garments and cast lots for my clothing (cf Matt 27:35; John 19:24). They count me as good as dead. When they are finished with me, I will not need them. Here suspected naked between heaven and earth for all the world to see is the last and greatest humiliation and indignity visited upon our Suffering-King.
Trans. He suffered physically.

II. Meditate On The Salvation Of Our Lord. 22:19-21

The psalmist now makes his petition proper. It is clear and simple, and it is voiced in confidence and faith. This faith and confidence in Jehovah is not in vain.

1) God helped His Righteous Sufferer. 22:19

This prayer of faith begins with a strong and emphatic adversative. "But You... He addresses God as "Lord" (*Jehovah*) and "My strength." He requests, He pleads that the Lord: 1) would not be far from Him (cf. vs. 1, 11) and 2) that He would hasten, come quickly (imp.) to help. *Yahweh* is the one who can give Him

strength during this trial, and He will. The Lord is the one, the only one who can help, and He is confident He will not be disappointed.

2) God delivered His Righteous Sufferer. 22:20-21

- Having addressed the Lord in faith, the psalmist now gives one final glance to His enemies. In essence David repeats in reverse order the enemies noted in verses 12-13 and 16. There it was the strong bulls, raging lions, dogs and band of evil men. Now in verse 20-21 it is the sword, dogs, lions and wild oxen. Once again the pattern of Psalm 2 comes into play as the nations rage...and the kings of the earth and its ruler take counsel against Yahweh and His Messiah (2:2). The wild men are not just enemies of Messiah. They are the enemies of God! The metaphors are picturesque and striking. There also is a beauty in the parallelism and symmetry of verse 20-21, but with a striking break at the end of 21.
 - Verse 20 - “Deliver (imp.) Me from the sword”, an instrument of execution and death. “Deliver My precious life (lit. “my only one”) from the power of the dog, the wild scavenger that bites and tears at my body.
 - Verse 21 – “Save (imp.) Me from the lion’s mouth” (raging and roaring, vs. 13). Save Me from the horns of the wild oxen (powerful, untamable beast capable of enormous destruction).
 - There is some debate as to proper understanding of the end of v. 21. I believe Allen Ross of Beeson Divinity School makes the most convincing and compelling argument. Verse 21 ends the petition not with a 4th imperative for help as we might expect. Rather the Hebrew perfect is used with a single powerful word of salvation: *anitani*, “you have answered!” From this point in the Psalm to the end there is no lament, no complaint, only words of praise, rejoicing and worship. From this point onward there is a new tune to this song, a tune made possible by a empty tomb and a glorious resurrection.

III. Meditate On The Mission Of Our Lord. 22:22-31

In my Bible between vs 21 and 22 I have written the word: resurrection. God in sovereign power and glory saved this righteous one not from death but out of death. He did not rescue the Suffering King, He resurrected Him. God came through and answered His prayer and because of that, the psalmist must honor Him and praise Him. With conviction and undeterred resolve He will see to it that the Lord is praised (4X in vs 22-26) in the gathering of His people, and He will see that the Lord is praised among all the nations. A missionary/evangelistic mandate captures the heart of the Messiah-King. That same mandate must seize our heart as well.

1) The people of God will worship the Lord. 22:22-26

- Messiah now declares the name of Jehovah to His brothers and sisters, in the midst of the assembly (the congregation) He praises Him. Hebrews 2:12 puts these very words in the mouth of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Clearly the author of Hebrews saw Psalm 22 as Messianic, and those to whom Messiah

declares and praises the name of the Lord as believers, members of the family of God.

- Previously surrounded by a congregation of evil doers (v.16), He is now surrounded by those who fear the Lord and praise Him (vs. 23), descendants of Jacob who honor Him, descendants of Israel who revere Him (vs. 23).
- The rationale for fearing Him, praising Him, glorifying Him and revering Him is given in vs. 24: “The Lord did not despise nor abhor the affliction (suffering) of the afflicted one. Nor has He hidden His face from Him.” When the Righteous One cried, the Lord heard. He had mercy and showed His favor. He looked upon Him and answered His prayer. Jesus prayed and He was heard by His Father.
- Therefore Messiah will praise Him in the great assembly for the Lord is both the source and object of His praise. Further Messiah will pay or fulfill His vows as a witness to those who revere the Lord.
- A new day has dawned with the Lord’s vindication of King Jesus. The poor will not hunger. They shall eat and be satisfied. Indeed their Shephard-King will “prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies” (23:5) and “our cup will run over” (23:5).
- Seeking Him, we will praise Him for all that He is and all that He has done. Our hearts will not melt like wax as was the case with our Suffering King when He bore the full measure of the wrath of God and the scorn and abuse of sinful humanity (v.14). No, our hearts will live forever through the one who James Boice says, “was thinking of you and me just before he committed his spirit to the Father” (vol 1, 202).

Trans. The people of God will worship the Lord.

2) The nations of the world will worship the Lord. 22:27-31

- Of verse 27 Spurgeon said, “In reading this verse one is struck with the Messiah’s missionary spirit.” (p. 333). Of this final section James Boice again notes, “the psalmist burst all bounds, so intent is he on stressing the universal value and world-embracing proclamation of the gospel.” Sam Storms simply ask, “What does v.27 tell us about the prospects of an end-time revival?” I will tell you what it says: get ready! It is coming! The seed for the grand fulfillment of Rev. 7:9-17 is here before us.
- (vs 27)- All (4X) the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. All the families of the nations shall worship (“bow down”) before You.
- And why? (vs 28) For the kingdom is *Yahweh’s*, and He rules (as king) over the nations. The parallelism of both vs 27 and 28 emphasize that all will worship and that the dominion and sovereign reign of this God is universal.
- Not only will it be people from everywhere worshipping the God of Messiah-King-Jesus, people of every sort and from age to age will worship this great God as well.
- (vs 29) – All the prosperous (rich) shall eat (feast) and worship.
 - All those who go down to the dust (cf v 15), who are aged and dying shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. The

Lord brought Jesus to the dust of death (vs 15) that the dust though I may return, dust I will not remain!

- (vs 30) – Indeed a posterity shall serve the Lord because the old, old story of Jesus and His love will be recounted generation after generation. It was told to us that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:10). We too must tell others.
- (vs 31) Oh how the Psalm’s ending in v. 31 contrast with its cry of abandonment in v. 1! The telling of redemption’s story will not end until the kingdoms of this world became the kingdoms of the Lord and His Messiah. We will tell others, who will tell others, who will tell others...When people today, 100 years from now, 1000 years from now, hear that the one true God Jehovah, answered the prayer of His Righteous One, delivered Him out of death in resurrection power that sinners might be saved, the nations will turn to Him, they will worship Him, they will submit to Him, they will enjoy Him and they will tell all the ends of the world, “He has done it!” “It is finished” (John 19:30).

Con. Derek Kinder says of Psalm 22, “No Christian can read this without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion. It is not only a matter of prophecy minutely fulfilled, but of the sufferer’s humility...and his vision of a world-wide ingathering of the Gentiles” (p. 105). This is His heart. This is His vision. Let us not consider, let us not be satisfied, with anything less.