

If tormenters verbally, physically, and spiritually afflict you, cry to God for deliverance. When God hears and saves you, publicly and sacrificially praise him so all people will glorify the LORD for rescuing you from agony. See in your own suffering a glimpse of Christ’s cross, and glory in its unmatched holiness.

Introduction – “Where’s God?” is perhaps the most emotionally powerful skit our youth mission team performs at the Boardwalk Chapel. Because its words are raw, real, and yet somehow feel so wrong.

I. Feel the Agony of Innocent Suffering

A. Despised and forsaken by my God? (vv. 1-5, 9-11)

Who has not felt this kind of pain? Psalm 22 depicts the most severe type of suffering: the sense of being abandoned by God. How is this even possible for David, whom God described as “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam 13:14; 16:6-13)? Even though David does not here call upon God’s covenant name Yahweh, “My God” shows his close personal relationship with and dependence on the LORD. The words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” capture perfectly this feeling of agony, what the Christian mystics refer to as “the dark night of the soul.” Remembering the past when God heard the prayers of the fathers just makes it hurt more. As king he is the covenant and representative head of God’s people! And yet the God who has been so faithful to Israel seems to have turned away from the most important Israelite, king David! The one who has continuously trusted in God his whole life, whom God made to trust in him, going back all the way to infancy, is totally vexed at this horrifying turn of events. Why David? Have you ever cried to God, “Why me?” Can you relate?

B. Despised and forsaken by my tormenters (vv. 6-8, 12-18)

David’s acute pain from the scorn of all, and from being in such a miserable condition, make him feel like a lowly worm (Job 25:6; Isa 41:14). These tormenters freely speak insults they would normally hold back. They wag their heads like they wag their tongues—taunting the innocent sufferer, kicking him while he’s down. Their torture becomes crueler still as they taunt his faith. “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” (v. 8). What kind of people could be so cruel to the innocent? Look at verses 12-18. Here the psalmist describes his human tormenters as terrifying, beastly predators—influenced, even animated, by demons. Verse 12 is the giveaway: “strong bulls of Bashan surround me.” From the earthly perspective, the bulls of Bashan were noted for their power and size (Amos 4:1; cf. Psalm 68:30). Bashan is an area east of the Sea of Galilee, a region known today as the Golan Heights (Jeremiah 50:19; Micah 7:14). It’s where Israel defeated Og, the last of the giant Rephaim kings, before crossing the Jordan river to conquer the Canaanites (Dt 3:1-11; Ps 135:8-12). But from the spiritual angle, David is most likely alluding to the malevolent spiritual forces at work in Bashan against God’s people. [Quotation: *The Unseen Realm*]

II. Cry for the Glory of Public Salvation

A. Personal: praise, testimony, and repaying vows (vv. 21b-25)

In the second line of verse 21, we get an initial glimpse of the LORD’s deliverance. A sudden and dramatic awareness of divine response, of divine presence, of divine favor, begins to rest up on him. The word “praise” is a key word in the second section of Psalm 22, occurring in verses 22, 23, and 25. His praise starts out solitary, but praise never wants to be alone. We praise God in church because private deliverance demands public testimony. The salvation of our God cries out for announcement, for proclamation (Romans 10:14-15). Because in verse 23 “praise” is a command: you who fear the LORD, praise him! In their affliction many believers vow to praise God if he will deliver them. Such vows to praise the LORD for salvation are a delight to repay. Remember the mockers in the earlier

part of Psalm 22? Their taunts are drowned out by the continuous praises of God's faithful people telling of his mighty works, his saving the afflicted, his rescuing the innocent.

B. Together: feasting, remembrance, and intergenerational worship (vv. 26-31)

Cry also for the glory of feasting in the house of the Lord. At God's feast, celebrating deliverance and peace with God, the afflicted and the prosperous share a table. The poor and the rich dine together, so that no one is lacking, no one is dishonored, no one is left out (vv. 26, 29). One of the reasons we all need to be together is because we need each other to remember. We need each other to remember that kingship belongs, not to the powerful, prosperous, and privileged, but to the LORD because he rules over the nations (v. 28). We need everyone to remember, and to share in the joy of corporate remembering. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, afflicted and healthy, young and old. Even people who have died and future generations yet to be born (vv. 29-31). But the chain of intergenerational worship will only remain unbroken if we do what God commands. You must tell of the Lord and his righteousness, of the way of salvation, and of your own salvation to the coming generation, that he has done it (vv. 30-31)!

III. Kneel before the Holy: Christ's Cross

A. No cries for vengeance, only deliverance (vv. 19-21a; cf. Mt 27:45-46)

Now we have come to the holy mystery of Psalm 22. "He has done it." Psalm 22 lays out for us in striking, minute, prophetic detail *what* has been done, and *who* has done it. No one can approach Psalm 22 without seeing the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is the psalm of the cross, a foretelling of a supremely wicked yet holy execution. Let us kneel before the holy. Notice Psalm 22 is no typical lament. Psalms of lament almost always include cries of justice and divine vengeance against the enemy (Pss 12; 28; 44; 86; esp. 137). But as the Lord Jesus hung on the cross, he chose Psalm 22 as his prayer, crying out only for deliverance, not vengeance. Thanks be to God that on the cross Jesus prayed for deliverance, not vengeance, so sinners might find mercy. For those who drove the bitter nails into the innocent sufferer on that judgment tree, he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). All while his executioners unwittingly fulfilled Psalm 22 by casting lots for his clothing, and mockers perfectly acted out their part prophesied 1000 years prior. O that we would kneel and worship before the holy one, whose cries resulted in our salvation.

B. No acts of resistance, only submission as sacrifice (vv. 9-10, 14-15; cf. Mt 27:34, 39-44)

As his demonic, beastly tormenters close in on him, Jesus offers up no resistance. His strength poured out like water. Heart melting in his chest. Feeling shattered like a dry, broken, potsherd. Parched with thirst as his tongue clings to the roof of his mouth. Flesh so emaciated he can count all his bones. Pinned to the cross like a lion pinning his hands and feet to the ground, face to face, teeth bared ready to devour its prey (vv. 13, 16b). Like Isaac, the son of Abraham before him, Jesus obediently laid on the altar in submission to his Father, but this time as the lamb God himself would provide for the sacrifice. Made to trust in his God from his mother's virgin womb. Obedient to the dust of death, for the one who appeared to scoffers as weak and unable to come down from the cross could have called with one word 12 legions of angels to rescue him. The Savior who is mighty to save chose not to save himself for the sake of love. Love for his heavenly Father. Love for his saving mission. Love for the world, for sinners who he delights to call brother and sister (Hebrews 2:10-13; John 3:16-17). O kneel before the holy cross of Christ, before the Son of God sacrificed upon it for the forgiveness of sin!

Conclusion – Do you have a sense of what Psalm 22 is about? Suffering, Glory, Cross. Suffering and glory meet in the cross of Christ, where we find a meaning, a purpose, and a destiny for our suffering that is eternally glorious. See in your own faithful suffering a glimpse of Christ's cross. Glory in its unmatched holiness. And never cease to sing in the congregation Psalm 22, the psalm of Christ's suffering and glory—the psalm of the cross.