

# Why Do Christians Gather for Worship?

Psalm 22:21-31-b

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## **Introduction:**

For 2000 years now, Christians have been gathering for public worship.

- It is estimated that there are over two billion Christian worshippers in the world today!
  - But why do they do it?
  - Why do they gather each week to praise God?
  - What started it all?
- Well I would suggest to you that it is but one simple event that spawned Christian worship.
  - It is a very simple event,
    - but an event that changed the course of the entire world.
  - Two thousand years ago,
    - God answered the prayers of a suffering man whose name was Jesus.
- Today, I want to show a most remarkable account of the prayer that Jesus prayed while He was suffering.
  - It is remarkable because it was written a thousand years before He was born.
  - It was written a thousand years before He was born,
    - Yet it describes how God's answer to His prayer produced worship all over the world.
    - This account of this man's prayer is found in Psalm 22.
      - I invite you to turn there and see why Christians gather for worship?

## **I. Christian worship began when God answered Jesus' prayer from the cross.**

A. See how Jesus cries out for deliverance from the depths of suffering.

1. The opening cry is one that He spoke out loud from the cross:
  - "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"
  - Both Matthew and Mark record how Jesus spoke these words while He was suspended between earth and heaven, rejected by both!

- The rejection of God the Father at that time was Jesus' greatest anguish!
  - From all eternity He had lived in perfect love and harmony as God the Son with God the Father.
  - But now, having taken to Himself human flesh and being consigned to the cross,
    - He suffered utter rejection by the Father.
    - This was the only time He had ever experienced such rejection—for it was on the cross that He was cursed by God.

TRANS> From here, He goes on further to explain His sufferings...

2. In verse 6, He describes Himself as:

- “a worm and no man, a reproach of men and despised by the people.”
  - Here He had come to His own people and they had rejected Him and delivered Him up to be crucified.
- Throughout this Psalm, He refers to them as vicious animals, surrounding Him to destroy Him.
  - This is especially brought out in verses 11-13 where He says:
    - Psalm 22:11-13: Be not far from Me, For trouble *is* near; For *there is* none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me *with* their mouths, *Like* a raging and roaring lion.

3. In verses 14-15 He goes on to further describes the extreme anguish He is experiencing...

- He says:
  - Psalm 22:14-15: I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.
  - This is the language of desperate exhaustion and debility.

4. In this Psalm, we also have details that correspond exactly to the accounts of His sufferings as they are recorded for us in the gospels.

a. In verse 16, He speaks of the piercing of His hands and feet.

- He says,
  - “They have pierced My hands and feet.”
- Clearly this refers to the nails that were driven into His hands and feet when He was crucified on the Roman cross...

- Yet, when this Psalm was written, no one had come up with the despicable method of crucifixion...
  - It was yet to be invented by the Romans centuries later.
- b. In verse 17, there seems to be a reference to His nakedness—
- which was a matter of great shame to the people of His day.
  - There He is, hanging openly before the eyes of all.
- c. And in verse 18, there is reference to His garments and the casting of lots for them.
- Not only does this show that His clothes were His only possession...
    - this was the only estate his executioners could claim...
  - But it also describes to a tee an event recorded in the gospels—
    - that the Roman soldiers did indeed divide His garments and cast lots for them.

TRANS> Everything in this Psalm shows that it refers to the suffering of the Lord Jesus on the cross...

- Clearly, we have before us in this Psalm an account of the prayers of our Lord when He suffered on the cross.
    - It is the fullest picture we have in the entire Bible, even fuller than the gospels, yet it was written a thousand years before the fact.
5. In verses 19-21, you see how He now asked for God to deliver Him.
- He says:
    - Psalm 22:19-21: But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious *life* from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen!
  - Note that He did not cry out to the angels who were **under** His authority and would easily have delivered Him...
    - But He cries out to His Father who is **over** Him in authority and would determine when He had suffered enough.
    - He does not wish to be delivered until His sufferings are complete.
      - But clearly,
        - he does wish to be delivered as soon as possible...
        - He cries out for deliverance!
      - That is essentially what He is doing in the first 21 verses!

B. But suddenly, everything changes!

1. At the end of verse 21 He exclaims with joyful gratitude:

- “You have answered Me!”
- His cry for deliverance has been heard!
  - In verse 2, He had said,
    - “O My God, I cry in the daytime but you do not hear,”
    - but now He says:
      - “You have answered Me!”

2. From this point on the tone of the Psalm completely changes!

- It changes from deep anguish to glad rejoicing!
  - He has finished His work on the cross!
  - Now it is time to rejoice in His completed work—as difficult as it was.

3. I suggest to you that the rejoicing of Jesus here is the beginning of true Christian worship!

- He was the first Christian worshipper as the head of the church,
- He is the one who leads the whole church in worship!
- God’s answer to His prayer for deliverance is what ignited the worship that continues all around the world to this day!

A. Out of His joyful gratitude for God’s deliverance, He promises to call His brethren to join Him in giving thanks!

1. This was a common practice in the Old Testament times...

- a. Whenever someone received something from God for which he was profoundly grateful,
  - he would take a vow to give public thanks to God for it.
- b. The performance of the vow involved several things:
  - It involved calling an assembly together—a group of people to celebrate with you—your family, friends, the poor, the Levites—
    - You would declare to this assembly what God had done for you...
    - You would offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God on the altar...
      - The fat and the blood were given to God...
      - The remainder was eaten by the assembly you called together in joyful celebration for what God had done.

2. You can see how Jesus promises to do this because the Father has heard Him!
  - a. In verse 22 He says:
    - Psalm 21:22: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”
    - This is exactly what Jesus did after He rose from the dead.
      - The same day He rose from the dead...
        - on the first day of the week...
        - He came to His disciples to declare to them what God had done—
          - to show them that He was alive forever more—
            - that God had raised Him from the dead.
            - that God had heard Him from the cross.
      - He showed Himself alive to them that the worship might begin!
    - It should be understood that “declaring God’s name,”
      - as it is used in verse 22,
        - means declaring the wonderful work that God had done in delivering Him from the cross!
  - b. In verse 23, you see how Jesus exhorts this assembly to praise the Lord!
    - Psalm 22:23: You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!
      - Notice that He wants all of God’s covenant people to join Him—
        - all the descendants of Jacob and the offspring of Israel.
        - With this summons,
          - Jesus was calling all the covenant people,
            - all of God’s worshippers...
            - to move from Old Testament worship to New Testament worship in spirit and truth.
      - And the reason given for this new worship is the fact that God has not rejected Him (but has answered His prayer from the cross).
        - Look at verse 24:
          - Psalm 22:24: For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard.
          - God did not continue to reject His afflicted Son,
            - but after He had been afflicted,

- He heard Him and accepted Him and delivered Him.

TRANS> So you see then that Jesus is the one who started Christian worship.

- It all began with His praise to God for hearing His prayer from the cross.
- And now I want you to see further that Jesus considered His deliverance to be so monumental that He promised to gather more and more worshippers.

## **II. Christian worshippers continue to multiply because Jesus continues to gather them.**

A. First He shows that the praise spawned by His deliverance will spread into the whole assembly of God's true worshippers.

- We already saw that He called all the sons of Jacob and offspring of Israel to join Him in worship.
- In verse 25 He promises that they will come.
  - He says:
    - v. 25: "My praise shall be of You in the great assembly."

1. What Jesus is saying here is that the whole church will praise God for His deliverance.

- The great assembly is the church.
  - The word church means the assembly of those who are called out to do business...
  - And in this case, they are called out to praise God for answering Jesus prayer from the cross.

2. God only has one assembly of worshippers, and it is the same that He had in the Old Testament.

- Jesus is showing here that those who continued to be God's true worshippers from the Old Testament church all joined in the praise that Jesus started after God heard Him from the cross.
- Those who did not join in the praise, but rather rejected Jesus ceased to be a part of the true assembly of God's worshippers...
  - They excluded themselves by refusing to rejoice in the Messiah that all their Old Testament worship anticipated.
  - They were completely out of step with God...
    - Jesus shows that all those who truly fear God become part of the assembly He calls together to praise God.
    - God does not have two assemblies of worship,

- but God's assembly of worship becomes the same as Jesus' assembly called together to give thanks.
3. In the history of the New Testament church, we see that this is exactly what happened.
    - a. Jesus initiated the rejoicing with His disciples, and sent them out to proclaim the good news first to the Jews.
      - On the first day of that proclamation, 3000 joined them in the rejoicing...
      - And within about 30 years, there were tens of thousands who believed.
    - b. Certainly, there were many in the great congregation who did not join in this rejoicing—
      - There were many that neither feared God nor truly sought God, and they did not join in the rejoicing...
      - But Jesus is saying that all the true worshippers in the great assembly of God's people did join in the praise!
        - As soon as the true worshippers hear what God has done for Jesus, they will join in the praise.

TRANS> So first of all you see that Jesus adds worshippers from among God's covenant people.

- But He does not stop there!

B. He promises that many more people will be added to this great assembly of praise.

1. In verses 27 and 28, He promises people from other nations will be added!
  - Psalm 22:27-28: All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S, And He rules over the nations.
  - a. Of course, we can now look back and see that this is exactly what happened!
    - Within a generation from the time that Jesus was answered from the cross,
      - the gospel began to spread to all the nations!
      - People from all over the world began to praise God with Jesus Christ, the great head of the church.
  - b. And now today,
    - Here we are, almost directly across the world from the place where it all started...
      - here we are, praising God for the great event described in Psalm 22!
    - Isn't it amazing?

- A thousand years before Jesus even came, this remarkable Psalm told how people from all nations would come and join the praise.
  - When this Psalm was written, the kingdom of God was confined to just one nation.
  - But now we see Christ ruling all over the world!
    - Who could have every anticipated it but the Lord?
    - Truly God alone can declare what is going to happen before it happens.
      - Even at the time when Jesus actually prayed this to the Father—who would have anticipated it but Him?
- c. And notice that Jesus says the praise will reach to all the families of the earth.
- This points to an even more ancient prophecy—
    - that which was given to Abraham—
    - that in His seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.
  - Slowly but surely, the world is coming alive with praise to God for Jesus...
    - God’s praise for His deliverance will spread to all the families of the nations.
    - Jesus says so.
2. In verse 29, Jesus promises that He will gather worshippers from every class and condition of persons.
- He says:
    - Psalm 22:29: All the prosperous of the earth Shall eat and worship; All those who go down to the dust Shall bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep himself alive.
- a. The event of Psalm 22 is so momentous that even the prosperous will respond to it.
- You know how hard it is to impress a rich, self-sufficient man...
  - But this news is so glorious that it makes even the most prosperous to see that compared to Christ, he is nothing but a dying man!
    - Every thing else pales in insignificance when the good news of Jesus is understood.
    - The rich man realises that though he is often heard in this world,
      - the Lord Jesus was heard by God from the cross.



- b. And just as the prosperous come to join in the praise, so also do the utterly destitute—even those who cannot keep themselves alive.
    - They come rejoicing in Jesus because they see that He was made far lower than they have ever been when He was on the cross.
      - They come to realise that they know nothing of suffering compared to Him.
      - Just as no prosperous man is higher than Jesus, so no suffering man is lower than Jesus.
    - And so they all come (prosperous and afflicted) to join in praise.
      - There is none too rich and none too poor to rejoice in what God has done in answering His Son.
  - c. Such has been demonstrated in history...
    - Kings and rulers, peasants and nomads—all have been among those who have joined in the praise...
3. In verses 30-31, Jesus further promises that this praise will continue in all generations.
- Ps 22:30-31: A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the *next* generation, They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, That He has done *this*.
- a. God's hearing His Son on the cross was too great an event to be forgotten after one generation...
    - In the book of Judges, the people are condemned for not telling their children the great things God had done...
      - The result was that a generation grew up that did not know the Lord.
    - And although there have been those worshippers who have neglected to tell their children plainly what God did for Jesus throughout the history of the church...
      - or who have continued in churches that were so corrupt that the good news was scarcely visible...
      - Jesus shows that the praise His deliverance has begun will continue from one generation to another.
  - b. There are many who have tried to stamp out the faith, but they have never succeeded!
    - 1) God sometimes will remove His light from one nation because of their ingratitude,

- He did this with the Jews in the first century...
  - He did this in some of the places like Egypt where the gospel first took root...
  - But He always preserves a remnant among the descendants of those who have once known the gospel...
    - just as there is to this day a remnant in Israel who truly believe.
- 2) But over the whole earth, there is always an increase from one generation to the next.
- Here we are today, two thousand years later, worshipping the Lord...
    - And the reason? Because Jesus promised that the good news of His deliverance would be declared from one generation to the next.
    - The praise will continue until Jesus returns at the end of the age.

TRANS> So you see then how Jesus promises to expand His church:

- God's praise for Jesus' deliverance will spread:
  - to all the families of the earth
  - to both rich and poor
  - to all generations!
  
- But now I must address something very important that I have intentionally held back thus far...
  - Here we see the all world filled with rejoicing for the deliverance of this one man!
  - But question presses us...

### **III. Why should the deliverance of one suffering man ignite praise all over the world?**

- A. It is because the man who suffered is no ordinary man!
1. This is not just the account of a suffering man whose prayer was heard.
    - That would surely not be cause for the whole world to praise God from generation to generation!

TRANS> So what is it that makes this man's suffering different?

- It is this...
2. The man who suffered was a priest!
    - a. A priest is someone who offers sacrifices to God for sin.

- He offers sacrifices to put sinners right with God.
  - The idea is that sin incurs a debt to God—
    - We owe to God what we have failed to do in glorifying Him and serving Him...
    - And we owe to God the penalty that His justice demands for our sins.
    - The priest is the one who makes an offering to God to pay the debt.
- b. The whole world is in desperate need of such a priest!
- 1) Soon after the human race was created, we rebelled against God.
    - We should have given all honour to God and should have loved Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
      - As our Creator, He is our glorious ruler.
    - But instead of loving Him, we rejected Him and tried to set up our own government...
      - We said,
        - “I will not have God to rule over me...”
        - and we chose to set up our own rules and to live by our own standards...
          - to live to ourselves instead of living to God
  - 2) This was a very grave injustice!
    - God is holy and pure and cannot allow such grave injustices to go unpunished!
      - To do so would be to deny His holy and righteous character!
        - He would have to be untrue to Himself—
          - and because He is perfect and unchangeable, He can never do that!
      - But if He ever did, there would be no hope for the world!
        - If God did not remain pure and righteous,
          - there would be no one to restore us to righteousness?
          - If God abandoned His just government, He would be corrupt like us.
    - But God did not ignore our sin...
      - We fell under His divine wrath and curse.

- He sentenced us to misery for our rebellion.
  - Not only do we suffer the afflictions of this world,
    - but after all has been done,
      - we are sentenced to an eternity in Hell...
        - away from the comfortable presence God...
        - a place where we are to experience grievous torments in body and soul without intermission forever!
- I know that this is not something you want to think about...
  - But let me urge you to do so...
  - You can't rejoice in what Jesus did unless you face your own predicament as a sinner before God.

3) And not only are we worthy of judgement—

- We are also corrupted and ruined because of sin...
  - We were first created to live as a beautiful reflection of God,
    - a glorious moral picture of Him, made in His image...
      - to live in perfect love...
      - but sin has grossly marred us...
  - We can't even comprehend what real beauty is until we see clearly what God is really like...
    - We will not know the true shame of our sin until we see the glory of God at the last day...
      - Then we will admit all that we try to deny now.
- And not only are we corrupted by sin...
  - We also are unable to enjoy the glory of God, which is what we were made to do!
  - It is no wonder that we are never satisfied—

TRANS> But what is the bottom line here?

- The bottom line is that we desperately need a priest to restore us to God!

3. What makes God's answer to Jesus' prayer on the cross so much a cause of rejoicing is the fact that Jesus is such a priest!

- a. You see, this man Jesus is the Son of God who came from heaven to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world!
  - 1) He does not offer mere animals the way the priests in the Old Testament did.
    - These offerings could never take away our sin...
      - They were just symbolic until Jesus came to offer the one and only sacrifice that can pay our debt to God!
  - 2) That is why when John the Baptist first saw Him he pointed to Him and said:
    - “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
    - Jesus was different than all the other sacrifices because He was the one who could actually take away our sin!
  
- b. And you see, that is exactly what He did when He went to the cross!
  - 1) The reason God forsook Him was not because of His own sins...
    - It was because He was offered up for the sins of the world!
    - On the cross, He was not just suffering at the hands of men—as awful as that was...
      - He was suffering the eternal wrath and curse of God against sinners!
  - 2) On the cross, our sins were laid upon Him...
    - a) He was charged with them before the Father whom He loves...
      - He was looked upon as someone who had that bitterness and hatred that you find in your heart...
        - charged with that lust and adultery...
        - charged with that envy and malice...
        - charged with that deceitfulness and greed...
      - All the things you try to deny and minimise.
    - b) For Jesus, these things are absolutely detestable!
      - He hates these things as much as the Father does...
        - He sees sin in its true colours—
        - He is not hardened and blinded to it the way we are.
      - Yet, on the cross, He willingly allowed God the Father to punish Him for all our sins!

- He bore the shame as well as the pain of our sin.
  - The wrath and curse of God was concentrated upon Him for all the sins of His people!
- 3) And in the height of that terrible suffering—
- He prayed the words of Psalm 22 to the Father, crying out for deliverance!
  - a) He knew that the Father would accept His offering for sin,
    - but not until He had paid the full debt of those He came to save!
  - b) And so it was that when He said those wonderful words in verse 21:
    - “You have answered Me!”
    - His suffering for our sake was complete!
    - He had finished paying the penalty of His people’s sin!

TRANS> So you see why Christians rejoice that God heard Jesus from the cross!

B. We rejoice because God’s when God heard Jesus,

- He accepted Him as a perfect offering for our sins!
1. You see, that turning point in Jesus’ prayer was the turning point for the whole world.
    - The world was accepted when Jesus was accepted as an offering to take away our sins.
  2. You can see His great love for us!
    - a. First, in that He would make such an offering—
      - that He would go to Hell for us when He knew what Hell really was!
    - b. And secondly, in His zeal to declare to us what He has done—and what the Father has done in accepting His offering!
      - He declares this wonderful news to us so that we might believe.
      - He declares it so that we will stop trying to avoid God and stop trying to pretend that we can make our own way to Him!
        - We can’t!
        - Jesus is the way, the truth and the life...
          - No one comes to the Father but by Him.

- To this day, Jesus continues to send out ministers to preach His word—
  - to declare in the midst of the assembly that God has accepted Jesus' offering for our sins...
  - And to lead the church in praising God.
    - That is what we are doing here today and what we do each week!

TRANS> But now I must address a very important question...

3. Who is it that benefits from Christ's accepted offering for sinners?

- To answer that, I would direct you again to verse 25-26.
  - a. You see here that it is those who join with Jesus to praise God in the great assembly.
    - All who look to Jesus are called to repent and be baptised.
    - When they are baptised,
      - they are added to the church where they become a part of the great assembly that praises God for accepting Jesus' offering.
  - b. But it is not enough merely to be baptised and join the assembly...
    - 1) Jesus says that He pays His vows before those who fear God.
      - Not everyone in the assembly fears God—
        - In fact, there are many that don't!
        - You may be a member of the church and not fear God...
      - What does it mean to fear God?
        - You fear God when you take Him seriously.
          - Fearing God means you believe that He is truly God...
          - It means you regard Him as far more important than anything else...
          - It means that nothing else really matters to you except pleasing Him.
    - 2) When you take God seriously, it is then, and only then, that you truly learn to rejoice in Jesus' accepted offering.
      - Before that, you spend your life either trying to avoid God by diverting yourself from Him in some way...
        - with romance,
        - pleasure,
        - addictions,

- acquisition of wealth,
- recreation,
- learning,
- career...
  
- or you try to please Him in some very superficial way.
  - That's what false religion is all about...
  - People flatter themselves and say,
    - "God will accept me because:"
      - I say my prayers
      - I go to church
      - I had an experience
      - I went forward at a crusade
      - I am baptised
      - I try to be kind to my neighbour
      - I try to help people
      - I do the best that I can...
      - and on and on the list goes!
  
- But I tell you that any religion that teaches you that you can be accepted by God apart from reliance on Jesus Christ is totally superficial!
  - Jesus went to the cross because there was no other way for us to be saved!
    - We know there was no other way because on the night He was betrayed, He prayed most earnestly to the Father and said:
      - "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me."
    - In other words,
      - "if there is any way for my people to be saved without Me having to go to the cross, let me avoid it!"
  - But there was no other way—
    - Jesus had to go to the cross!
    - Any religion that thinks God can be pleased without the self-offering of Jesus is a religion that does not take God seriously...
    - If you think that, you do not fear God and you are not truly a part of the worshipping assembly of Jesus...
      - even though you may be baptised and be a member of the church.



TRANS> So you see then that you cannot benefit or truly rejoice in Jesus' sacrifice unless you fear God.

- You must not try to deal with Him on your terms—
  - He is God.
  - You must deal with Him on His terms.
- c. And His terms are Christ crucified.
  - If you try to come to God in any other way, you will be utterly rejected.
  - You must look to Jesus and rely on what He has done on the cross if you want to be accepted.
- d. Jesus goes on to say (in verse 26) that those who are poor will eat and be satisfied.
  - 1) He is not talking about poor in a material sense...
    - He means that you realise that you have no resources in yourself to gain acceptance with God.
    - You realise that God must make the way of acceptance because you can't do it.
  - 2) Jesus says that it is such poor persons that "shall eat and be satisfied" in the assembly He calls together to give thanks to God for delivering Him.
    - This is clearly a reference to the Lord's Supper.
    - At the Lord's Table, Jesus Himself is the offering that we partake of.
      - Paul said:
        - 1 Cor 10:16-18: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?
    - When Christians eat with faith, looking to Jesus,
      - He promises them that they share in the sacrifice of His body and blood that God accepted.
      - In other words, through His offering,
        - they have eternal life and the forgiveness of sin.
    - But note well—it is only those who are poor that are satisfied.
      - They are the ones who come to Jesus with desperate need.

- They are the ones who praise Him because they seek God for help and find it in Jesus.
- They are the ones that truly rejoice that Jesus' offering was accepted.

### **Conclusion**

And now in conclusion look at what Jesus says to you if you are one of these ones who is truly praising God for accepting His son's offering—

- "Let your heart live forever!"
  - This is the blessing He pronounces on all those who rejoice in His accepted offering for sin!
  - He is the Lord of all and you can be sure that when He says,
    - "Let your heart live forever,"
    - It will live forever!
      - His word never fails.
      - So let me urge you to join in the praise that Jesus began two thousand years ago when God heard His cry on the cross.