

The Passion & Consolation of the Cross

Psalm 22

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Good morning CPC. At this time, I invite you to open your Bibles to Psalm 22. I think PD forgot to mention superhero movies as well. Let's not forget that.

Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Shall we pray?

Heavenly Father, as we enter now into your word, Lord God, we ask you to bring us in deeply. Bring us in to the scenery, to all of the depths of what is presented to us here, Lord God. Let the event of preaching,

Lord God, be a profound one. Let it be one that causes our hearts to swell. Let us not only hear but feel what you have to communicate to us today. This I ask in the matchless name of your Son Jesus. Amen.

As I gathered around the breakfast table this morning and read Psalm 22, usually I try to read what's going to be preached and then give a brief commentary. But as I read Psalm 22, it just kind of felt like a passage that needs no commentary because it preaches all by itself. It brings me to the point of temptation that even as I read the Psalm 22 that we could pause and say, now, receive the good word, because the passage preaches all to itself. But since I've been tasked to preach, why don't I do so? Psalm 22 is a message that I've entitled the Passion and Consolation of the Cross.

If you haven't already been able to tell, I absolutely love the Psalms. The Psalms come to us with refreshing honesty and transparency. They do not blush uncomfortably at suffering and mourning. Instead, they meet those dark nights of the soul head on, maintaining their God and vision of life. From the Psalms, we learn how to deal, or rather, we learn how to maintain hope within the midst of singing the blues. As we saw in Psalms 42 and 43, they give us permission to cry out to God even when the content of that cry is, where are you, God? Moreover, the Psalms come to us with lessons on how to humbly repent and to rejoice. To quote our brother from last week, they bring us to the truth that "the depths of our sin is met with God's love and steadfast mercy."

In the case of Psalm 22, some have come to it seeking to glean similar sanctifying comfort. Viewing it purely as an independent prayer Psalm of David, they see the message or the teaching as resting in lamenting petition and celebratory praise. As such, they see David pensively musing over his suffering that he experiences at the hands of Saul, or some see it as David going through the internal turmoil of losing his son Absalom.

In fact, during the exilic period as the people of God suffered under Babylonian exile, some saw Psalm 22 as being something of a vehicle of personification as it looked at the whole nation of Israel as the sufferer in Psalm 22. And they saw Psalm 22 as speaking to the sufferings of Israel from verses 1-21, and then speaking to the eventual celebration of Israel as it stepped out of that place of exile and into a place of restoration.

But I submit to you as we peer into Psalm 22, we find more than that. We find more than a Psalm of lament and a Psalm of thanksgiving. In fact, this Psalm fits into a different category all together. We will refer to this Psalm as a messianic Psalm.

Now, we could – and as I've heard some folks scoff at the notion of referring to Psalms as messianic Psalms – say from a high-level generic perspective that all Psalms are messianic Psalms in that they anticipate the coming of the Messiah. And if we were to track along with the instruction that we receive from Luke 24:25-27, you could reason out that the whole of the Old Testament anticipates the coming of the Messiah. Yet, to quote Derek Kidner, "No Christian can read this," that is Psalm 22, "without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion." This Psalm does more than just anticipate the coming of the Messiah from a high-level generic perspective. It draws us into the very scenery around the cross. It puts us at the very foot of the cross where we're able to hear the sounds and see the sights of Calvary.

So, when we look at Psalm 22, we see more than David musing over his troubles because when we look at the descriptions here, we will be hard pressed to find these moments corresponding to any time in David's life. So, we would ask ourselves in light of this being a Psalm written by David and without wrenching it from the fabric of history, we would say, what do we do with this Psalm if it's not necessarily referring to David but looking forward to the Messiah? How do we grapple with it? What do we say to it?

Well, I think we are helped in our understanding of how to handle this Psalm in the same way that Peter helps us to understand a different Messianic Psalm that David writes. In Acts 2:25-35, the apostle Peter preaches and speaks of how David pens Psalm 16:8-11, a Messianic passage, and he does so as a prophet. He says that as David is speaking to us of Psalm 16:8-11 and as it is pointing to the resurrection of Christ, David is actually operating as a prophet. In fact, elsewhere, Peter teaches us that as the Old Testament prophets prophesied concerning the sufferings and the glories of Christ, they did so in the spirit of Christ, according to 1 Peter 1:10-11.

And so, when you think about that, what you have in this Psalm and in other messianic Psalms, Christ operating as our mediatorial high priest preaching Christ. I had to pause from studying for a moment. We have Christ preaching Christ.

And so, as David is going through Psalm 22 bringing us to the very foot of the cross, he's doing so in the office of a prophet. And he's using language that narrows our focus on the Messiah. Now, as you gaze through Psalm 22, as I said before, you see the sights and you hear the sounds of Calvary. You hear our Lord's cry of dereliction in the very first verse, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" You see and hear the mocking voices, "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him." And we hear that around Calvary. We see our Lord thirsting as Psalm 22:15 describes the twisting and the desiccation of His body to speak of how He's drying up. And we hear from Calvary Christ crying out, "I thirst." We see the soldiers gambling for His garments, and again we are thrown into the scenery of Calvary.

As we come to Psalm 22, we don't come to Psalm 22 seeing ourselves as a suffering servant alongside the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't take a life application approach to interpreting this and look for ourselves in the midst of it and say things like, this is a picture of me going through my own personal Calvary, which you never have and never will. This is instead a picture of our Lord going through His passion, His suffering.

We find that the very first section, looking at verses 1-21, seems to engulf us into the setting. And as we are pulled into the setting, we can smell the sense of death in the air, and we can hear the cries of the bloodthirsty riotous crowd. But nonetheless, that is not our primary focus in this text.

While we hear the screams and the cries of, "Crucify him," and we hear the mocking, the environment tends not to be our focus as we peer into Psalm 22. It's as if we enter into this holy room where our Lord closes the judgement door behind us and draws us close to the cross. While there have been liberals and enemies of the cross who have attempted to blaspheme the name of Christ and do their own little depictions of the story of Christ as they put together stories like the last temptation of Christ forcing us into putrid and wicked thoughts concerning our Lord, Psalm 22 brings us into His innermost thoughts purifying us from that filth.

And from Psalm 22:1-21, brace yourself, we see something of an interlocution. I wanted to use that word as my kids look at me. We see an exchange. We see a dialogue taking place, and the psalmist is the one who is speaking. In one sense, we find him lamenting. And right on the heels of lament, we find him going into a petition of prayer only to come back to lament and petition of prayer. Verses 1-2, we find lament. Verses 3-5, we find a petition of prayer. Verses 6-8, we find lament again. And then we go into verses 9-11 where our Lord is praying, only to go back into lament, and then prayer.

What's going on in the heart and in the mind of our Lord is what draws us in. We're reminded as we come to this passage what we find is the suffering Savior prophesied in the book of Isaiah. It's not merely the ideal king David, but it is David's greater son being depicted. We're drawn in closer and closer. And as the door is closed behind us and locked shut and we are forced to see this work of redemption taking place and being accomplished on our behalf, we find our Savior suffering as a substitute. We find Him exchanging places with every guilty sinner that the Lord would give Him. We find the Lamb of God embracing His law suffering obedience as a satisfaction for the eternal debt that we all owe.

We can see that from the very opening verse that the passage doesn't appear to be very kind to us. As we have been given to academic writing in school, we are always taught that we gradually take our way into the story, and then we build and build and build to something of a climax, and then we bring down the resolution. But as we go into verse 1, we're taken to the very heights and the climax of His suffering. We're just launched in at the high point where He cries out, "My God, my god, why have you forsaken me?"

And it brings us to a point of struggle when we think about it. And as we study Psalm 22, we're pressed into this thinking that some commentators, as I was reading, will say that we find the psalmist here, the sufferer, the suffering servant issuing out complaints to God, to himself, and to his surroundings. And we wonder, this is the Son of His love. This is the one who has been in communion and union with God, the Godhead before the very fabric and foundation of the earth. Before time itself, they were always in communion and union. There was always this harmonious relationship of love.

In earlier Psalms, we see things like Psalm 9:9-10, “The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.” And yet, we see Him stretched out in agony, writhing under the wrath of God. And what we do not find is complaint. We find a cry of disorientation. This has never been the case before. This has never been a situation where Christ has cried and the Father has ignored Him. The silence appears to be deafening. He cries, and there is no response. He cries, and our minds are taken to the gospels where we see the Lord always hearing our Lord.

The gospel of John 11:41-42, “They took away the stone. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me. I always knew that you heard me.’” Or Matthew 26:52-53, “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my father and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?’” Such confidence. The Father always hears me.

And so, when we come to grips with this unbroken, unhindered flow of harmonious love between the Godhead that we see exercised in time and that we hear took place even prior to time, we see this more as a Psalm or a cry of disorientation. There’s dereliction here. There’s abandonment. You could say that He is the God-forsaken one. And we almost want to watch along as if we are watching a movie and say, wait a minute, why is this happening? Why? This is a travesty. This is something of an injustice because you are not guilty. You’re the innocent one. But in the language of Habakkuk 1:13, our Lord is “of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.”

What we find is that He made Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be sin. The one who knew no sin, He became sin or treated as if He were sin so that we would become righteousness of God. An exchange has taken place. An exchange has taken place.

In the midst of His suffering, this suffering servant does not deny God. He does not – I’m going to stand by this – raise a complaint against God. In fact, when we look at verses 3-5, we find Him rehearsing truth about God in the midst of the colliding of the reality of His experience and the theological truth that He knew. We find Him reflecting on the otherness of God, “You are holy,” reflecting on the sovereignty of God, “You are enthroned,” and reflecting upon the great faithfulness of God, “In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued. In you they trusted and were not put to shame.” Great is your faithfulness. Great is your faithfulness, O God.

And so, we find no complaint on His lips. We find Him nonetheless in the midst of His twisting and disjuncting suffering as the Lord our God, our Father, was pouring out His wrath on our Lord, our redeemer. We find Him, in a sense, worshipping.

And He makes something of a comparison. He goes from “Yet, you Lord,” to recognizing or referring to Himself as a worm. “I am but a worm and not a man.” He sees Himself as being trampled by the judgement that’s laid upon Him. And even in the midst of feeling like He was trampled, He still feels that connectedness, that delighting in the Father. He realizes that in crying out to God the Father, this wasn’t just sort of a passing acquaintance, but this is a long and intimate connection that they had. He uses picturesque language to describe the Father as being a nursemaid, taking Him from the womb and putting Him in the intimate place of His mother’s breast, using figurative language to speak of the personal connectivity between them.

And even as He transitions through that into another lament, the biggest problem never seems to be the physical struggle or the enemies that encompass Him or surround Him. The biggest problem is in verse 11, “Be not far from me, for trouble is near.” It’s almost as if He’s saying, trouble is near, and I’d be able to bear it if you were near. “Be not far from me.”

But since He’s been made a substitute on our behalf, there is no answer to His cry. There’s no Lord descending with angels to draw Him up out of the situation. But instead, we see Him twisted. We see Him suffering. We see Him engulfed in the wickedness surrounding Him. And He never sees Himself as necessarily a victim of circumstance. He never sees Himself as someone who has been overcome by man. He

knows full well that this was according to the determinant council of God. He knows full well that in eternity past as they were working out the covenant and plan of redemption that within the Godhead this was the agreed upon solution.

And so, in verse 15, He says things like, “you lay me in the dust of death.” It is you. You are the one. You, my God, you are the one who’s superintending this situation. Yes, they’ve pierced my hands and feet. Yes, they surround me. Yes, I am so emaciated by suffering that I can see on my bones. And yes, they mock. And yes, they jeer against me. But you are the one who is superintending this entire moment. “Be not far from me.” “Come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!”

I find it interesting that the reference here to the dog, the lion, and the wild oxen is a repeat of what was said earlier if we go back to verse 12. But instead of staying with the same order, we see the order of the animals depicted there reversed as if we’re coming down to the point of the reversal of this whole situation. The Lord is hearing Him.

I love the ESV. But the way that the ESV reads here in verse 21, it would only comfort you as if this were merely an individual Psalm of lament and thanksgiving. Looking down at verse 21, it says in the ESV, “You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!” Now, if this is David, you have a sense of excitement. He’s crying out for rescue; God hears him and saves him. If it’s Jesus, it’s frightening. Why is it frightening? Because if God enters the scene and rescues Jesus from the cross, you’ll pay for your sins. The payment will not be on Him. But the eternal debt that is owed by every man and every woman coming into this world will fall heavily on their shoulders. It will fall on us.

So, when you look at this, the actual better rendering of this as it is communicated in Young’s Literal Translation, instead of “rescued,” “You have heard from the horns of the wild oxen!” I’ve cried, and you’ve heard me. In the midst of all the suffering, our Lord has confidence that the Father has heard Him.

And then when we come to verses 21-31, this is when it just kind of takes off for us. And it jumps ahead. It jumps ahead like you’re watching a story. You completely miss a huge theme, and then something miraculous happens. I’m not this old. I watched old movies. It reminds me of the old serial television shows where they would always end with a cliff hanger. And you see the hero going in the car and the brakes would go out. And then in that episode as it’s ending, you would see him go over the cliff, still in the car going over the cliff, and then it would stop. Tune in next week. Next week would come, they would show the scene. But this time, just before the car went off the cliff, you would see the door open and he would roll out. Like, wait a minute. That’s not what happened.

And so, I kind of felt that way when we come down to verses 21-31 as it takes us from the passion of the cross to the consolation of the cross because in verse 21, “You have heard me.” And then we go right into something of a praise session. Okay. So, He heard you. What did He say? What happened? What’s going on? It just jumps ahead. It doesn’t fill in the blanks for us right here. But essentially, just giving you spoilers in case you’re not familiar with the gospels – I’m joking, I’m sure you all are – Christ dies to pay the eternal debt of our sin. He is buried in the tomb. Then you have the open and empty tomb showing that the Father has accepted this payment. The eternal debt has been paid. All of our sins have been washed away. And so, in light of that, we move into the consolation.

And the consolation takes on high and celebratory language. And in doing so, it depicts a capture of the already and not yet. Here we find the one who was suffering and writhing in pain now amongst the worshippers. He’s amongst His family who He is calling brothers. He’s with us in the worship service. We find Jesus in the worship service as the worship leader’s telling the congregation that I will praise you, God, in the midst of the congregation.

And not only will He praise, but He invites us to join into the praises. Those who He calls His spiritual family, He’s beckoning and summoning them to praise God as well. He’s calling them. Those who fear or reverence the Lord, join me in worship. You who are the offspring of Jacob, glorify Him! It is celebratory.

The already is seen there in the fact that Christ currently participates in our worship. The already is seen there in the fact that He not only participates but He summons us to join in. The already is seen there in that He gives us reasons to praise God and to worship Him. The already is seen here in the fact that it is not a small sector of identical humanity that is joining in in the worship of this passage. But we see something of a rainbow coalition of folks from every tribe and tongue gathered together. We find families, all the families of the nations. We find folks from the ends of the earth as we see something of the universal body of Christ in our various sectors gathered and worshipping God. It is a beautiful picture.

What does it say to us? It says to us that even within our diversity right now, our unity in diversity is a current, a present reality. Regardless of my preferences, regardless of my ethnic background, regardless of my upbringing, despite all of the things that may make me different from you, there's still unity there because with the cross, Christ has broken down the middle wall of partition that divided us. Ephesians 2:14-18, He is our peace and with His blood He has made us all one.

But the not yet aspect is the fact that this picture of consolation, this universal picture of consolation reaches with such a comprehensive scope that it's bringing in the whole of creation. It's bringing us to a point that is illustrated in Colossians 1:20 as it speaks about Christ reconciling all things to Himself. This, my family, is bringing us to a place of seeing our reasons for worshipping the Lord. It's bringing us to a place of seeing while we cannot allow our differences or our politics or our economic structures or social structures or whatever this world system would identify as a cast system to press us into a mold that keeps us from one another. We're one. We are one. And not only did Christ pay it all to make us one with Him, He paid it all to make us one with one another.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you, Lord. We thank you for the weightiness of your word. We thank you for the beauty of what's being communicated here in Psalm 22. I pray, Lord, that you would take this word and press it firmly to our hearts, giving us a deeper and richer appreciation for what was paid for our redemption so that as we transition into the next aspect of service and as we partake of the elements, let the word of God be preached once again in the visible sign of the elements bringing us to a place of celebration. This I ask in Jesus's name. Amen.