

Lament

*You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
my companions have become darkness. (Psalm 88:18 ESV)*

*O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses;
you have been angry; oh, restore us. (Psalm 60:1 ESV)*

The Psalm Of The Cross

March 27th, 2022

Psalm 22

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Introduction:

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads⁴⁰ and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying,⁴² “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:33-46 ESV)

As Jesus Christ bore the sin of the world on the cross, he pressed with his nail pierced hands and feet to take an unimaginably painful breath, and he used that breath to declare the opening words of Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Charles Spurgeon is right when he declares of our Psalm for this morning:

This is beyond all others “The Psalm of The Cross.”¹

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 1 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 99.

Church, this Psalm before us is sacred ground.

The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophet David² 1000 years before the birth of Christ to give a haunting articulation of the suffering that was to be endured at Calvary.

Did David realize that he was voicing the lament of the suffering servant? Did he know that he was writing the song that would be sung on the day that the world changed forever?

In all likelihood, David was writing here of his own trial, but the Holy Spirit led him to include imagery and details that pointed forward with *exact* precision to the crucifixion of our Saviour. Charles Spurgeon gives us this wise counsel:

David and his afflictions may be here in a very modified sense, but, as the star is concealed by the light of the sun, he who sees Jesus will probably neither see nor care to see David.³

I think that's exactly right. David wouldn't want us to spend our time this morning speculating as to what he was enduring when he wrote these words. Psalm 22 is prophetic. Psalm 22 points forward. Psalm 22 presents us with the Psalm of the Cross. When Jesus hung on the cross for our sins, he cried out and directed our attention to *this* Psalm. Why is that? What are we meant to hear in this cry?

What Are We To Hear In This Cry?

As we listen to this Psalm, it is almost as if we are lifted up and invited to see what Jesus saw from the cross. He describes his surroundings. He describes his pain. As Alec Motyer cautions:

Psalm 22 is such holy ground that we take off our shoes and walk with careful, even hesitant steps. More than any other passage of Scripture it penetrates into the actual suffering of our crucified Lord.⁴

² Luke refers to David as a prophet in Acts 2:29-31.

³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 1 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 99.

⁴ Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 61.

This morning, we are going to listen in with reverence and gratitude to the song that was cried out from the cross. As we do that, we're going to consider the powerful notes of this song that resound from Calvary. What are we to hear in this cry? First, we are to hear:

1. A cry of rejection

Look with me now to verses 1 and 2:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest. (Psalm 22:1-2 ESV)

Over the last month, we have been considering how the Psalms of Lament give voice to those seasons when we feel like God is not listening. Have you experienced that before? Have you ever prayed your prayers and felt like they were bouncing off the ceiling? Have you come before God in desperation only to feel as if He's left you alone in the dark?

Over the course of this series, we've observed how frightening it is when it feels like God has turned a deaf ear to our prayers. But what we discover in Psalm 22 is that Jesus Christ – the Son of God – knows what it is to feel rejected by God!

With respect to his humanity, Jesus felt the horror of the Father turning His face away. He felt abandoned to his enemies. He cried out in desperation and heard utter silence in response. Think about that for a moment: Jesus Christ – the second Person of the Trinity – who has FOREVER existed in perfect, uninterrupted fellowship with the Father, willingly and purposefully entered into a season of God-forsakenness!

If we had the capacity to understand how profound these verses really are, there would be a revival in this city! If we could even grasp an inch of this mystery, we would turn from our sin and cling to Christ with every ounce of strength that we have!

Do you know who deserves be forsaken by God? I do. You do.

People who have sinned against a holy God deserve to feel forsaken, but the sinless Son of God absolutely, positively DID NOT DESERVE THIS.

And yet, in order that sinners might be saved and that God's glory might be displayed, Jesus felt the undiluted wrath of God against sin. And it was awful. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

Jesus entered into an unspeakable anguish that he *did not* deserve so that we, as sinners, could have a way of escape from the anguish that we *do* deserve. He soaked up all of our sin and removed it from us as far as the east is from the west. But in doing so, he felt a God-forsakenness that we will never fully comprehend. He did this to glorify God by setting sinners free. The Apostle Peter tells us:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. **By his wounds you have been healed.** (1 Peter 2:24 ESV)

When Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22 from the cross, it was a cry of rejection. But that's not all. It was also:

2. A cry of humiliation

Listen to verses 3-8:

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
⁸ "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" (Psalm 22:3-8 ESV)

Sometimes it can be disillusioning to witness God's faithfulness to others when it feels like He has left you to languish. Have you ever experienced that? You were both pleading with God for a job, and he got one but you didn't. You were both battling with addiction, and she was freed while you're still struggling. You were both suffering from a chronic illness, and he's healed but you're still suffering. You're happy for them, but there's a sense in which their victory only amplifies your defeat. Their victory proves God's faithfulness, but it furthers your longing. "*He delivered them... So why hasn't He delivered me!?*"

We see something of that here in verses 3-5. The sinful Israelites – the people who grumbled and rebelled and who deserved every judgement they ever received – THEY cried out to God. And do you know what happened? They were rescued! They were delivered by their holy God!

But Jesus, as he bore the sins of the world on the cross, received no such rescue.

The One who hung the stars in their place had descended beneath even the plight of men. He had become a worm. He had absorbed the curse of sin in a way that no human ever has or ever will.

As Jesus hung on the cross, he assumed in his flesh every sin that has ever been committed in the history of the world. He had become like a sponge fully saturated with venom.

He felt God's righteous wrath against every war crime. He felt God's righteous wrath against every case of child abuse. He felt God's righteous wrath against all of the grossest, most heinous sins imaginable. The worst thing that you have ever done – the thing that makes you feel sick any time it comes back to your memory – was placed on Jesus Christ.

Under the guilt and shame of all our sin, Jesus no longer felt like a human being – he felt like a worm. William Plumer says here:

Low as believers may sink, their Saviour sank lower.⁵

⁵ W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 303.

Again, we need to acknowledge the fact that our minds are too small to understand the scandal of what these verses are describing. Jesus – the author of the UNIVERSE – is describing himself as a worm! Not only did God humble Himself to become a man, but he humbled Himself even further to become *less than a man!*

That level of condescension – that level of scandalous, self-sacrificing love – is unlike anything that you or I could ever fathom.

For example, we are all overwhelmed with admiration for President Zelenksi because he has chosen to stand in solidarity with his people. As president, he could hide in safety, but instead he fights and suffers with his countrymen. The world honours this man, and rightfully so.

But Jesus left his HEAVENLY THRONE! And He came to save – not his fellow citizens – but his ENEMIES! And as he saved us – as he suffered in our place – we mocked him and said, “He trusts in the lord. Let *him* deliver him.” This was the height of humiliation! The Creator hung naked on a cross while His creatures abused, insulted, and taunted Him.

As he cried out the words of Psalm 22, it was a cry of rejection! It was a cry of humiliation! And, it was also a cry of unimaginable pain.

3. A cry of unimaginable pain

Look with me at verses 9-21:

- ⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.
¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.
¹² Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
¹⁴ 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;
¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶ For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
¹⁷ I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
¹⁹ But you, O Lord, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion! (Psalm 22:9-21a ESV)

Before we go any further, I want you to notice that this prayer has been peppered with statements of confidence. In verses 3-5, he declared that God is holy and that God has been faithful to His people in the past, and here again he declares that God preserved him from his earliest days. Even as Jesus endured a pain that was unlike any pain that any human has ever endured, he never spoke against the goodness or the power of God.

As we bring our lament to God, we must follow the example that Jesus has set. We can and should express our fears, our questions and our pain to God, but we should never call into question His goodness. Even in the height of Jesus' suffering, He never misspoke about God.

And that is remarkable, because oh how he suffered! As Ben Myers explains:

To be crucified was to be cast out of the human community, rejected by God and the world. It was literally a fate worse than death.⁶

These verses vividly portray Jesus' experience as he hung on the cross. Once again, I would remind you of Alec Motyer's warning that this is sacred ground. Here we are invited to stand next to Christ and to hear the cry of his heart as he endures unimaginable pain.

⁶ Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 68.

As he looked out, he saw soldiers laughing as they gambled for his cloak. He saw the scribes and the pharisees – the men who spent their lives studying God’s word – the men who should have been the FIRST to recognize him – taunting and mocking him. He saw an angry crowd staring with glee at his broken body as he slowly and painfully died. He described the scene as if he were surrounded by wild, fierce bulls preparing to gore him. It was as if a lion were stalking him and preparing to pounce and a pack of wild dogs were preparing to fight over the corpse.

Physically, his body was ruined. He had been poured out like water. There has never been a man more courageous than Jesus, but in that moment his heart melted like wax. He was fastened to the beams of the cross with nails that were driven through his hands and his feet. As he hung from those nails, his joints dislocated. Every breath would have left Jesus in agonizing pain.

As a result of the 39 lashes that he had received before the crucifixion, what little skin that remained on his back and his chest was flayed and shredded. The bystanders who gawked at him could count his bones as he hung there, naked and emaciated. Charles Spurgeon says it powerfully:

The first Adam made us all naked, and therefore the second Adam became naked that He might clothe our naked souls.⁷

There has never been and there never will be a scene more grotesque and horrific than the day when we tortured our Creator and laughed at his death. This was betrayal at its very worst. This was cosmic treason⁸. This was the cross.

Before we go any further, we’re going to stop for a moment of silence and we’re going to honour Jesus for what he did for us on that cross.

When Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22, it was a cry of rejection. It was a cry of humiliation. It was a cry of unimaginable pain.

⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 1 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 104.

⁸ R.C. Sproule, *The Holiness of God*, (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2010), 140.

And yet, as Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22 it was also mysteriously, and gloriously and *surprisingly* a cry of VICTORY!

4. A cry of victory!

A most unexpected note rang out from the darkest hour of the darkest day in the history of the world. Tucked away in the middle of this Psalm, when it appears that the lament has descended to the depths of hell itself, something happens. Look again at verses 20-21:

²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!

²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!

You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! (Psalm 22:20-21 ESV)

YOU HAVE RESCUED ME! The Psalm of the cross is a Psalm of deliverance!

What a shock this must have been to the devil who delights to see God's people enslaved by the bondage of sin and death. He must have been so excited to see the Son of God hanging helplessly from the cross. He was overjoyed to hear Jesus lamenting and feeling forsaken by God. But he must have forgotten how Psalm 22 ends. As he struck what he thought was the death blow, he was shocked to find that the death of Christ was actually the way of victory and deliverance! One old preacher said this so well. He said of Jesus:

He, coming to perform the great work of redemption, did cover and hide His Godhead within the worm of His human nature. The grand water-serpent, Leviathan, the devil, thinking to swallow the worm of His humanity, was caught upon the hook of His Divinity... By thinking to destroy Christ, he destroyed his own kingdom, and lost his own power forever.⁹

The death of Jesus disarmed the accuser! The death of Jesus opened the door for the captives! The death of Jesus paved the way for life everlasting! The death of Jesus was victory!!

⁹ Lancelot Andrewes as quoted by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 1 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 101.

When Jesus died – covered as he was in the sin of the world – he satisfied the wrath of God against our sin. It was as if he assumed all of our debt in his body and took it to the bank of death to pay it all off for us. But – and this is the part that the devil didn't anticipate – death could not hold Jesus! Death had no claim on Jesus! Death is the penalty for sinful men, but Jesus is the sinless Godman, so he made his entrance, and he paid our debt, and then he stole the keys of death and hell, and he walked out of the tomb victorious!

In one fell swoop, justice was served, and a way was made for forgiveness and restoration to be doled out to the nations! And that's what we find in the rest of Psalm 22 – worship, celebration, and a feast that is shared with the nations! Look again at verse 22:

- ²² I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
²³ 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!
²⁴ 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.
²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
May your hearts live forever!
²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.
²⁸ For kingship belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.
²⁹ 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.
³⁰ Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it. (Psalm 22:22-31 ESV)

Psalm 22 ends with deliverance and vindication and a celebration that blesses the nations! Now, the afflicted shall eat and be satisfied! Jesus has prepared a feast and he has invited everyone without distinction to join him and to receive life!

The cross is the answer to the problem of sin. It is the answer to the problem of evil. It is the hope for those who feel like they are forever separated from God. It is the place where death and darkness were dethroned and disarmed once and for all. Psalm 22 ends with the declaration:

he has done it. (Psalm 22:31b ESV)

We cannot read that without hearing Jesus' final words from the cross:

It is finished (John 19:30b ESV)

Do you believe that this morning? It is finished. He has done it! There was nothing lacking in Jesus' sacrifice. There is nothing left for you to add to. You don't need to earn God's grace – Jesus has earned it. You don't need to clean yourself up, Jesus has washed you whiter than snow. If you turn away for your sins and believe that Jesus Christ has taken those sins from you then – can I tell you some amazing news this morning? – HE HAS DONE IT!

IT IS FINISHED!

John Piper says it so well:

God took the record of all your sins that made you a debtor to wrath, and instead of holding them up in front of your face and using them as the warrant to send you to hell, God put them in the palm of his Son's hand and drove a spike through them into the cross.¹⁰

If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ then your sin is GONE! It is PAID FOR! It is DONE!

So, come. Come to the feast that Jesus has prepared for you. Join in the celebration. Lift your voice in praise. Tell your neighbours. Tell your friends. Pass it on to your children, and your grandchildren, and teach them to pass it on to the next generation.

¹⁰ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 45.

³⁰Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
³¹they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it. (Psalm 22:30-31 ESV)

Let's pray together.