

Hope PCA Sermon: March 31, 2024

“Cry of Faith, Song of Victory” (Psalm 22)

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I was talking earlier this week about picking a sermon for today and heard the question, “Are you going to do Psalm 22?” Well, I wasn’t planning on it, but I think that might be the first time in my pastoral ministry that I received something in the nature of a sermon request. And then I thought about it and realized that, yeah, this is a good text to look at for Easter Sunday morning, as I hope you will see. And though I did preach on it recently, it was three years ago on Good Friday, and I’m pretty sure that Good Friday there were, number one, fewer people there. That’s typically the case. But as I look around, many of you are new to the church, and many of you who were even in the church maybe weren’t able to attend Good Friday. Even though we went through this in our psalm study in Sunday school, we did so in a slightly different manner. So hopefully this is not too much of a repeat for most of you, and nevertheless still a good word.

So Psalm 22. If you would please stand as we honor the reading of God’s word. We’ll be looking at the whole psalm this morning, Psalm 22. This is God’s Word given through King David, both a king and a prophet. It’s to the choir master, according to the Doe of the Dawn, a psalm of David.

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.
- 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!”
- 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!
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

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.

So far, the reading of God's holy, infallible, and inerrant Word. May this powerful Word be planted deep in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives. Please be seated.

Once again, let me briefly pray for us.

Dear Lord God, we come this morning to your Word and a very, very striking, very profound Word given through your servant, David. to us and for us, for our instruction, for our encouragement. May it be that for us this morning. Make your Word be fruitful. Fulfill your promise that when it goes out, it does not return to you empty. We trust in those promises, again, here this morning. We thank you in Jesus' name, amen.

Have you ever thought or wondered what it would be like to go through the most horrendous experience that you can think of, the most terrible experience, whatever that might be, knowing that you'd come out of it all right at the end. How would you react in the midst of that terrible pain or suffering, whatever it might be? I've thought about this a little bit, and I'm not sure it would really diminish the pain of the experience all that much, even if I knew things would turn out all right in the end.

To give a kind of a different sort of example, one of my favorite book series is called "Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn", and the main character is a young man named Simon. And at one point in this long epic story, he endures just a horrific series of events. He's lost in darkness, deep underground. Can't find his way. He's weak. He's hungry. He's groping about. Everything seems lost. He's a failure. The world is going to end up in great pain and evil because of his failures. He eventually wanders into an area that he's familiar with. It's deep below ground where they have metal works and a great water wheel to help feed the process. And an enemy grabs him, ties him to this big water wheel, and the poor kid just spins slowly around, over and over and over again, his head, his upper body dipping into the water, coming back around. It's terrible. I probably read this series maybe, I don't know, four times. Every time when I get to that part of the book, I know how it's going to end. I know it's a happy ending. But reading those sections, it's gruesome. This poor kid going through terrible, terrible experiences. I don't know if you have that same experience. It's often for me when I read something I enjoy, or maybe a certain kind of movie, you get engrossed in it. You begin to identify with the characters and empathize with the story. It's a story in a made-up world, not even from my own personal experience. Yet again, there's that horror. It's just hard to read that.

And you might think of other examples. Another favorite story of mine, “The Count of Monte Cristo”. Edmond Dantes is stuck in prison. The poor guy is suffering unjustly. I know how it’s going to end. I’ve read it I don’t know how many times. But reading that section is tough. Or Pierre Buzukov in “War and Peace”, captured by the French, a prisoner being escorted out of Moscow in that terrible, terrible winter, not knowing if he’s going to be rescued, not knowing what his fate is going to be. Again, I’ve read that book several times. I know how it ends. But the poor guy is suffering, and you empathize with him. Maybe it’s Frodo and Sam in Mordor and that last trek up the mountain and how difficult it is. Maybe you read the story of Joseph in the Old Testament, unjustly accused and unjustly imprisoned. He had a dream: “The stars, the sun and moon are going to bow down to me, but here I am in prison.” Does he know the end of his story? We do.

And these thoughts came to mind as cruel humiliation, but also a psalm of joy and of triumph. It is, of course, a well-known messianic psalm. That means it’s a psalm that is very much about Christ. It has in the very first verse that well-known cry of Jesus from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” It’s not surprising that Jesus would quote from this Psalm when in that deep anguish upon the cross. Psalms express, they help us express the deep desires, the pains and sorrows, the joys and praises that rise up from the depths of our hearts and of our souls. Psalm 22 does that. It’s a powerful interplay of human and divine expression. The thoughts, the feelings, the mind, the heart. We’re told at the very beginning of it, the prefix, the preface, it’s a psalm written by David. It’s written for the director or the choir master. This is meant to be sung in worship. The psalm cries out to God because of enemies, yet the psalm never loses faith. And it ultimately ends in a song of victory, where the psalm sees victory for the Lord, even to the very ends of the earth, in verse 27.

And it’s natural to ask, who’s crying out in this psalm? Well, David for sure. David, no doubt, was writing in some way, shape or form, from his own experiences. We don’t know when, we don’t know what experience. Could have been Saul when he was persecuted by Saul. Could have been the middle of his life when he had troubles in his own kingdom. Could have been at the end of his life when his sons were rising up and rebelling and he had to flee from Jerusalem. We don’t know. David faced a lot of trial and difficulty in his life. And maybe he’s speaking for the nation as well as king, which he was allowed to do, or as prophet.

But in the end this is a psalm about Jesus, David’s greater son. And more specifically what I want to argue and present this morning, this is a psalm about Jesus on the cross. That excruciating, terrible event that he endured. It’s a psalm that Jesus remembered and quoted from as he hung on the cross. That one direct quote in verse 1, a couple references at least of the other six of the seven words spoken on the cross. So this morning I want to focus on this song from the perspective of our Savior as He hung there on the cross. But also, this is given to us today. What relevance does it have for us today?

So first, Christ on the Cross. This psalm has a very widely recognized, acknowledged structure among scholars and in commentaries. It has two main parts. Verses 1 to 21 are the first part, then verses 22 to 31. In the first part, there’s this back and forth cycle of what I think of as cries of rejection and cries of faith. James Boyce calls them “pairs of suffering and prayer”, or Derek Kidner in his commentary, “I-me” sections and “thou” sections, kind of

pulling off the I and thou concept. Cries of rejection followed by cries of faith. Three times this cycle repeats in verses 1 to 21, and then this long song of victory from verse 22 to the end of the psalm. Rejection, if you're taking notes, in verses 1 and 2. The first cry of faith in verses 3 to 5. Second cry of rejection in verses 6 through 8. The second cry of faith in verses 9 to 11. The third cry of rejection in verses 12 to 18, and the third and final cry of faith in verses 19 to 21. I want to look at those in turn, because there's a building of theme and idea here.

Again, verse 1, quoted by Jesus on the cross. In the traditional ordering of the seven last words, it's the fourth one. And His wrath is being poured out on the Son because of the stain and pollution of sin. It's the sin of the Son's people that He willingly took, that when Jesus quoted this first line, He meant us to think of the whole psalm. It's also possible that He actually quoted the whole psalm, but Matthew and Mark only wrote down the first verse because, again, by quoting the first verse, we're telling you he was referring to the whole thing. But it's more likely he just cried out that first line. All the words of the cross are very short. It was excruciating, it was fatiguing to hang there on the cross. I don't think he had much breath or energy for long recitations of a psalm. But either way, as we go through the psalm, I think we will see, I think we can see that the whole psalm was on his mind.

But then we have to make something of this statement that Jesus makes. *"Why have you forsaken me?"* he says to the father. Did Jesus, the Son of God, did he really have such despair? Did the father really abandon the Son? It's a tricky one. Some people see it as only a metaphor for the great suffering that Jesus went through on the cross. The Father didn't really abandon him, didn't really forsake him, but it was a way of Jesus saying, "Boy, this is really tough." This is a point of view that tries to protect the unity of the Trinity, which is worth protecting. I mean, how could the Father abandon the Son if the Father and the Son with the Spirit are one God? That would be impossible. It is impossible. But I think that perspective tries a little bit too hard, and it's not necessary. Abandonment isn't necessarily the breaking of a relationship. It could, in its range of meaning, include even just the idea of turning away, of a temporary withdrawal of protection. Christ being forsaken is therefore, I think, real. His anguish is real. It has purpose and meaning in showing us in a very powerful way, in a very powerful statement, the consequences of sin and God's attitude and judgment of sin. This is real. This isn't imagined. It's not just metaphorical. Because sin can never be taken lightly. Because God hates sin. He can't even abide it in His own Son.

How is that possible? Ultimately, it's part of the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of the incarnation of the Son taking upon himself human flesh. But in the midst of the anguish, we see that fundamental relationship between Father and Son is not broken, is it? Look at how Jesus addresses God, *"My God, my God."* And then later in verse 2, *"O my God, I cry."* Not "you God", my God. My God, my Father. This isn't impersonal. This is the Father and the Son, their relationship maintained and intact, though strained due to the sins of His people that were borne by the Son. In the end, how the Father can forsake the Son again is ultimately a mystery. But Jesus' cry is real. It's very real. If it's not real, we minimize sin. If it's not real, we minimize the consequences of sin that Jesus took on our behalf. And we see the reality borne out in the rest of the psalm.

So verses 3-5 bring us to the first cry of faith. He rescues. He delivers. He covered Adam and Eve with animal skins to hide their nakedness, their sin. He delivered Noah and family from the devastation of the flood. He protected Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Delivered Israel from slavery and bondage in Egypt. Rescued Israel from its enemies time and time again. Even gave them a king after his own heart. In the midst of trial and difficulty, pain and sorrow, the first step in building back our faith is to remember the kind of God that we serve. What has He done before?

Then verses 6 to 8 portray rejection again. The first was related to God: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Now we see the oppression of those around David or around Christ. scorned, despised, mocked, taunted. That's what "making mouths" is. Wagging their heads, "Oh, you trusted in God." He recalls the mocking of the soldiers as Jesus there was crucified, even before the crucifixion as they tortured him the night before. Recalls other instances of mocking and derision as well. The vinegar that was offered to him to drink. The crown of thorns pressed down upon his head. The inscription, mocking inscription, nailed to the top of the cross, "King of the Jews", what have you done for me? *"You are he who took me from the womb, made me trust you at my mother's breast. I was cast upon you from my birth. From my mother's womb you've been my God. Be not far from me."* This time, this cry is personal.

Again, we can learn something here. When despair or trouble comes upon us, when others mock us or despise us, not just remember who God is and what He's done, now remember what He's done for you. Remember what He's done for you in your past, ways in which He rescued you, delivered you, what he's done for you. It isn't just a general statement when we say that God saves or that God saves his people — he saved you. Each to his own adopted child, loved you with a great love, been rich in mercy to you, is immeasurable in his grace to you. He says in verse 11, *"there is none to help"*. No one else could help you, not even yourself. God rescued you. God did it. Step one in building up our faith: remember what God has done for his people. Step two, remember what he's done for you. For you.

The third section of rejection takes us right to the cross. Jesus himself being crucified. Here David is speaking prophetically for sure. He has enemies surrounding him. His friends are far off, or scattered, or watching from afar. You get this idea in verses 12, 13, and 16. But the power, the greatness, the depth of His suffering, we see in verses 14 and 15, 17 and 18. Verse 14 talks about Him being *"poured out like water."* This is, I think, a little echo of or pre-echo of the cry from the cross, "I thirst", in John 19, verse 28. Of course, elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus talks about Himself being poured out like water. poured out as an offering. Here's this idea: "I am poured out like water. I'm empty. I'm thirsty." Powerful images in verses 14 and 15, verse 17, of what the experience of the cross was: *"bones out of joint, my heart is like wax, melted within my..."* You ever felt that way? Something happens that's so horrible, painful, and your heart just... It's like it melts right out of you. *"My strength is dried out. My tongue sticks to my jaws."* It sticks to the top of my throat. I can't... I can't even talk. So thin, so emaciated, in verse 17, that all the bones can be counted, and *"they stare at me and they gloat over me."* Verse 18 is very clearly, again, a prophecy: *"They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing."* Exactly what happened at the foot of the cross in Luke 23 verse 34.

And then the third cry of faith in verses 19 to 21. A prayer for deliverance from the current agony that the psalmist, that Christ on the cross is experiencing. Looking for God, *"My help, my aid"*, he says. The one who delivers, the one who saves, the one who rescues. *"Don't be far off"*, and he uses the covenant name of God, *"Lord God."* *"Come quickly"*, *"Save me"*. There's a progression here in these cries of faith, right? First, looking to God in general, the character of God and what He's done for His people in history. We've got to know our Bibles if we're going to be able to do that.

The second step, remembering what God has done for me personally. But then based on that, cry for help. Do the practical thing that needs to be done. I need help. You've saved your people before. You've saved me before. Save me now. Help me now. Remembering these things in the past provides a powerful base upon which we might have confidence and trust and a sure hope (not wishful thinking, a sure hope) that the God who rescues will rescue again. I can cry out to Him in confidence that He'll hear and that He'll provide for my needs. That's the first part of the psalm.

And then verse 22, the tone changes to this amazing, wonderful song of victory. This is Jesus seeing the end, seeing the happy ending of the story. This is where this is going. And he can sing with joy. He can look with joy and hope to what is coming. If Jesus is thinking about this psalm, again, I believe he was, so were the cries of faith. And these lead to the song of victory. It's a song of hope. It's a song of confidence. It's a song of faith. It's a song of love. For Jesus on the cross, it's a song of sure expectation of future victory.

And it's described in this amazing way, ever-widening circles of people. that will join in. It begins in verses 22 to 24 with His own brothers, his own disciples, the people of Israel. The inner circle is the home congregation, if you will, the people of Israel, Jesus' brothers, the ones He came to and spoke to. Israel is referred in these verses, particularly verse 24, in the third person, *"he who cries to Him"*, Israel who cries to God. And God hears Israel. And Israel glorifies God and praises "the Lord" — Again, that covenant name for God. The psalmist, David in his time, Jesus Christ in the future, is a witness to this. *"I will tell about you in the congregation. I will tell your name to my brothers. I will praise you"*. He calls upon them to fear the Lord and to praise Him. *"He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. He has not hidden His face."* He's heard when we cried to Him. *"Praise Him"*: Praise Him, my brothers, my people. When He came to His people, many believed Him, but most rejected. Perhaps Romans 11 is pointing us to a future time when all who believe — that's a subject for theological debate, but one can be hopeful.

It begins close in, his own people, and then verses 25 and 26, it expands to *"the great congregation."* The earlier verses were just that smaller congregation. Now it's the great congregation. And I think that word "great" is significant. Because now it includes those who are not in the congregation. Those who are far off. Those who seek. Those who fear God. All of them. Now *"the afflicted will eat and be satisfied. All who seek Him will praise the Lord."* The great congregation, the expansion of the kingdom, is anticipated in this song of victory. Jesus spoke in John 10 about sheep outside this sheepfold. That's what He's celebrating here in verses 25 and 26. The great congregation of sheep coming in from everywhere.

And then in verses 27 to 31 in particular, it goes out to the whole world. The circle expands as far as it can to the very ends of the earth, which *"shall remember and turn to the Lord. All the families of the nations shall worship you."* This is the anticipation of the gospel going out to the whole world, every tongue, every tribe, every nation. Verse 29 anticipates Philippians chapter 2. "Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father", says Philippians. Here it says *"all the prosperous of the earth eat, they worship. Before him shall bow down all, all who go down to the dust, even the one who couldn't keep himself alive."* Everyone will bow and worship.

And then even in verses 30 and 31, it anticipates the progress of the gospel to a people who haven't even been born yet. *"Posterity shall serve Him. It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation."* Is it? Well, it's not political. It's not economic. It's not cultural or societal victory. It's not a victory by strength of arms or greater wit or greater wisdom. This is the victory that comes through the proclamation of the righteousness of God in Christ to all who repent and believe in him. From the congregation, to the great congregation, to the whole world, and to generations that have not yet even been born. What is the victory that overcomes the world? Our faith (1 John 5 verse 4). Remember God who saves us and cry out to Him, doing what Jesus did, as Peter told us, entrusting ourselves to a Father (1 Peter 2 verse 23).

The last phrase of this psalm in our English Bibles is the last word in Hebrew. In Hebrew it translates into, the one word in Hebrew translates into, a phrase in English: *"He has done it."* The "he", the way grammar works in Hebrew, could be "it". Something that has been done, something that has been completed, something that has been finished. In other words, this could be translated, "It is finished." And what is that but another of the seven last words of Christ from the cross in John 19 verse 30. *"He has done it"* is correct for the context of the psalm. David, or Jesus, is so confident in God that before rescuing him, because that's what he said: it's been done, it's been accomplished. Jesus quotes verse 1, makes reference to verse 14, and being poured out, being thirsty, And I think indirectly recalls the end of the Psalm when he says, "It is finished."

Three of the seven last words on the cross have some reference to Psalm 22. So I do believe it was on his mind as he hung there for us and for our salvation, with our sin nailed to the cross there with him as he died in our place. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, he was thinking of you and of me, a generation *"yet unborn"*, a people to come. *"People yet unborn"* in verse 31, *"families of the nations"* in verse 27, the grieves of the abuse and the ridicule of those around him, but he suffered far greater Far greater than that was the anguish He suffered because He bore your sins and my sins and the sins of every one of His people on the tree, because He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5 verse 21). He experienced the Father forsaking Him as He took the punishment of our sin on Himself. He did this for you. not abstractly for people out there, for His people, for you, for me. And He pours out His own righteousness on all who repent of their sins and turn in faith to Him. This perfect obedience of the Son for His whole life is now yours, a free gift of God's grace, received simply by faith. And while Jesus cries out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*, the Father has not forsaken you. Because when he looks at you, he sees the perfect obedience of his Son. And of course, what makes this all the more sure, what makes it all the more certain.

And without doubt is the same Jesus who hung there on the cross and poured out his life, died on the third day rose again. He knew the ending. He knew the ending of the story. Even in anguish and sorrow, he knew what was coming in three days. He could sing this song of victory, as it were. We know this end of the story because it already happened 2,000 years ago. Again, *"He has done it."* He obeyed in our place. He died in our place. He accomplished our salvation in His own life and death and resurrection. He has done it. Our cry to God, again, is not one of rejection. But rather, "my God, my God", He has done it. And He's done it for me. And He's done it for you.

This psalm describes the anguish and victory of Christ's work on the cross for His people. No wonder the apostle cries out, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" No, the victory, it's Jesus' victory. It's our victory with Him. It's a victory that's already been won. The final consummation is coming, realized when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead, to usher in the new heavens and the new earth. And may that day come quickly. But in the meantime, look in faith to your victorious, risen Savior. Serve Him and worship Him in the great congregation and in this little congregation. Tell His name to others. Proclaim His righteousness as you share the good news of redemption accomplished, of victory in Jesus. Share it with your friends. Share it with your family. Share it with your neighbors. that all the people may come in, even a generation not yet born. Praise God for His amazing, wonderful work for us.

Let me pray for us.

O God, our Father, we do praise You. We do give You thanks. You have done great, marvelous, and wonderful things. May indeed there be praise here in this congregation, throughout the great Church of Jesus Christ, wherever it meets, wherever it is, throughout the whole world, and to generations yet to come. We look forward to Christ coming again. We look forward to the new heavens and the new earth. When we will be raised from death to life, be with one another again, be with you and be with our Savior. Again, may that day come quickly. In the meantime, grant us a growing and deeper faith and a growing and deeper love for you. Increase our gratitude, our thanksgiving. In Jesus' name, amen.