
The Pilgrim's Suffering Savior

Psalm 22¹¹

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The Psalms can often be taken up on our lips and in some way, sung as our own. They can give voice to our sufferings. But the 22nd Psalm is not quite like that. It has a unique place on the lips of our Savior.

This Psalm is both personal and prophetic. It looks forward through the lens of David's suffering to see the Lord's suffering. Sometimes that lens is dark and cloudy. Here, the experience is vivid and excruciating.

I want you to see a man – the pilgrim who is the singer and Pilgrim who is the savior.

Groaning

(v. 1-5)

The song opens with shocking groans of being forsaken.

Forsaken by God

(v. 1-2)

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.

Abandoned... Forsaken... Far away... Not answering... Crying by day and writhing as the darkness falls. David is going through a dark time. Some of you have shared similar experiences. The awful quiet of the hours, days, weeks with a sense of being forsaken by God.

Now, for us as believers, this is never a true experience. God does not forsake His own. Our experience of this is an expression of doubt and disobedience. God will never leave us. He will never turn His back on us. But if we think He has, we will feel this, experience this.

But Jesus experienced the full reality of this. These words were taken up by Jesus and agonizingly spoken as He struggled to breathe, riven and torn on the cross. The physical pain was horrendous. As the awful reality of the Father's wrath and punishment swept over Jesus and He cried out, "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

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Confessing Truth**(v. 3-5)**

The next stanza confesses the truth.

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.

Do you hear it? “Why have you forsaken me? ...Yet you are holy, enthroned and trusted.” This is the language of faith. This is believing God in an obeying way. We may cry out in the pain of the moment or hours days but we sing that God is God. Even God’s seeming to turn away His face and His favor is okay because He will do what is right. And God has the right to do whatever He wants. And all that He wants and does is aligned with His holiness.

David remembers that others have trusted God in the midst of great darkness and difficulty. We should remember that Jesus cried and confessed this Himself. Though He was suffering the punishment of God and pain of *forsaken* and *alone* Jesus knew His Father was holy and just. Jesus trusted in God. He believed His Father in an obeying way. Even while suffering for the sins of His people, He trusted His Father all the way through.

Struggling**(v. 6-11)**

The Psalmist sings and sighs his being mocked. In his isolation he cries out to God, “Do not be far from me...”

Mocked by the Wicked**(v. 6-8)**

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!”

Is this just a sad, sad case of poor self-esteem? Or is David full of self-pity, self-loathing and fear of man? If you were a helper called on to speak to David, what would you say? David feels the sting of people mocking him. He has been very public about how he walks with God and trusts in God. Now, some terrible trouble has come and people are throwing his words back in his teeth. It is hard to bear the ridicule and scorn of people. It is hardest when it seems, on the surface, that they are right.

Purple robe. Thorn woven crown. Limp reed. Hailed and slapped. A snide sign. Vinegar. Gall. Mocking words. His Jewish kinsman and religious leaders. “He saved others; but he can’t save Himself!” While in the very act of saving His people, Jesus our Redeemer hung naked, mocked, scorned, laughed at, a worm.

Dependent on the Lord**(v. 9-11)**

Though rejected and mocked by people, he has been cared for by the Lord. Even before he knew it, he was utterly dependent on God.

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.

Here is how we know that he is not just writhing in a pool of the fear of man. David's care is for the reputation of God. He has depended on God his whole life. He has been very public about his relationship with God. Now, he prays and pleads in the nearness of trouble for the nearness of God. There is no one else to help. There is no rescue or safety anywhere else. He is cast utterly upon God. It as though he asks, "Be at the table with me in the presence of my enemies."

Surrounded by enemies, Jesus is supported by God. Even though God has turned His back on Jesus in eternal punishment, God is sustaining Jesus all along. Yes, Jesus is God and able to sustain His own life by the Word of His own power. But He has cast Himself totally upon God. Even while surrounded by sinners and suffering under the wrath of God, He will depend on God to sustain Him. Jesus' life here on earth was lived just as any other human being. In His humanity He needed God, His Father. And so this prayer Jesus' lips is even more poignant as He suffers the wrath of God for His people. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... "Be not far from me for trouble is near."

Suffering**(v. 12-18)**

This prayer is offered up in groaning and struggling. He is forsaken by God and mocked by his enemies. Now he expresses in agonizing language his suffering. Through the lens of prophetic poetry, David expresses what Jesus experienced hanging from a Roman cross a millennium later.

Threatened**(v. 12-13)**

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.

He feels threatened. These words have a dream-like, surreal quantity. They are symptomatic of the state of someone in extreme pain. David feels himself surrounded by the images of the pagan bull gods. They have thrown him down and now encircle him, jaws slathering and snapping like ravenous lions.

Wounded**(v. 14-15)**

We shudder at the next words for we can see the images of what he is going through.

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.

What horrible pain. Stretched. Hanging. Sweating. Heart hammering trying to beat. He thirsts. He cries out in agony. But who is the “you” here? Who lays him in the dust? Who will slay the Lord? The enemies around both Jew and Roman will bring this pain. His heavenly Father will bring spiritual pain and death. But Jesus will willingly and voluntarily lay down his life. He dismisses His spirit. No sword or piercing spear took His life. No broken legs and suffocation ended His earthly time. No, He rises up and surveys the Scripture: all is fulfilled. Now, it is time die. Go spirit.

Crucified**(v. 16-18)**

Surrounded by bulls; now surround by dogs.

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.

This is the scene from the cross. Roman dogs surround him. Nails have been hammered into His hands and feet. His skin is drawn tight over his skeleton. Flashing hateful eyes dance in triumph. Click, click, tumble the dice roll. Naked He hangs. His simple, one-piece undergarment, too expensive and useless if divided is passed to the winning soldier. This is more than David. The writers of the New Testament crucifixion narratives intentionally draw from this Psalm. Behold here is the sovereign King and He is our suffering savior.

Pleading

(v. 19-21)

Here these words again, "Do not be far from me..." In His circumstances and to His God, he pleads.

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!

His Simple Request

Here is cry of the sufferer. Be near, come quickly, deliver, save... In the throes of unimaginable suffering, never forget that your Lord is also your help.

God's Saving Response

See how verse 21 reverses verse 12? He is rescued... He is saved. But neither David nor Jesus experienced rescue in the midst of life. Jesus was rescued from death through the resurrection. David will ultimately be rescued from death just like all of us, at Jesus' coming.

Praising

(v. 22-26)

A prayer that brings rescue then surely turns to praising.

Its Call

(v. 22-24)

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.

All of this is to call and enable God's people to praise Him.

This is quoted in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:1-13:

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

So Jesus now stands to declare to us what His mighty doings have accomplished. We trust Him. We fear Him. We are in awe of Him. Thus we are prepared to praise and glorify the Lord *in the midst of the congregation*. As a result of the what the Lord has done on the cross, He gathers His children and presents us before His Father.

Its Contentment

(v. 25-26)

We are brought into a relationship with God that is full and satisfying.

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!

The Psalms are full of the most amazing leaps from stanza to stanza. The rescued soul now has the praise of God among God's people. The one who was suffering and dying now is receives the affirmation of God. As a result, this pilgrim will keep his promises. This is beyond David. It is not speaking of us. It seems to me that once again we have the Lord Jesus. He is praised before His people. He will keep His commitments to His people. He who went through unimaginable suffering *now is the One who satisfies His people*. But this is how redemptive history was designed. It is always the cross before the crown. The Lord is both our savior and our sovereign all so that He will be our satisfaction.

There is an implied call here. Come and trust Jesus. Come and fear the Lord. Come and seek Him and in finding Him, savor Him and be satisfied in Him.

Anticipating

(v. 27-31)

Together we look forward to a coming day, anticipating the crowning of the One who suffered for us.

The Worship to the Lord

(v. 27-28)

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.

All the people groups will worship the Lord. That is the unfolding reality since the resurrection. Jesus is King. He rules over all. The resurrection and ascension of Christ put Him on the throne. He is there on the throne now. He has already been crowned in heaven. There will come a day in which all will bow.

I think there is greater vision here. Every living being that can worship will worship before the Lord. For some that will be a glad and glorious day in which their faith and hope and love are fulfilled. They will enter into the joy of their sovereign Lord. The rest

also will bow. The iron scepter guarantees it. No one will be allowed to go into eternity *still conducting their rebellion against God*. No, they will come and they will bow before the Lord and acknowledge that He is Lord. Then they will enter the eternal fire of the wrath of God. But make no mistake. All will bow.

The Serving before the Lord

(v. 29-30)

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;

This is the trajectory of history. We anticipate the day when Jesus will be honored in worship and obeyed in service. Eating here speaks of fellowship and all that surrounds food. It may even point oh so dimly to the cup and bread we call the Lord's Table. Generation after generation will bow down to serve and worship the Lord. How does that come about?

The Proclamation of the Lord

(v. 31)

It will be brought about through the proclamation of the Lord.

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 the people of God are gathered in, they come to worship, to serve, to fellowship through the proclaiming of the righteousness of God.

In this text, what does that mean? It means the gospel. We tell the good news that it was right, holy and good for the Father to pour out *this kind of wrath with this kind of suffering*. This was accomplished so that His people may believe and bow, may worship and fellowship. Then wherever God's people go, the gospel is proclaimed and in every age in all the tongues, tribes and nations, God gives His salvation to His people. They believe and bow, confess their faith through baptism and the regency of Christ is extended.

Reflect and Respond

God comes to us in our suffering to help and to deliver. Sometimes that deliverance is simply the grace of submitting to the sovereign God as Christ did on the cross.

Hebrews 12:3-4

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

He is scorned and despised (22:6).

- He is mocked and insulted (22:7-8).
- He is viciously attacked by his enemies (22:12-13, 16).
- His life is poured out like water (22:14).
- His bones are out of joint (22:14, 17).
- His heart is melted like wax (22:14).
- His strength is totally dried up (22:15).
- His hands and feet are pierced (22:16).
- His clothes are divided up and gambled for (22:18).

This Psalm also illuminates our own struggles and suffering. What Jesus endured on the cross as expressed in excruciating horror is what He “endured for the joy set before Him. There we must endure chastening...” Jesus endured the horrible wrath of God through the hands of sinners so that we may endure the loving chastening of our Father.

Jesus Christ is the only Savior and the only Sovereign. Repent today. Believe the truth about Him and bow to Him.