

Psalm 22 (The Psalm of the Cross)

We were thinking last Sunday (on Valentine's Day) of the awesome love of God demonstrated for us in Christ Jesus crucified for us. We looked at 1 John 4¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We were also reminded of the famous John 3 v16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Today as we rejoin our series on the Psalms on this first Sunday of Lent we are looking at a most amazing passage. It has been called "The Psalm of the Cross" and its opening words are very familiar: ¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

They are (of course) the words of Jesus from the Cross that Matthew records (27:46). Not just a cry of desolation, but a quotation from a Psalm that his hearers would have known very well. As we go through the Psalm we will see how Jesus' death is foreseen and described by David a thousand years in advance.

Indeed it is hard to identify the original context of this Psalm, as nothing like this seems to have happened to David.

What we find though in this Psalm, is a lament for the first 21 verses, that turns into a song of joy and proclaims a boundless kingdom.

The lament is very clear, if we continue verse 1: *Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?* ² *My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.* ³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.* ⁴ *In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.* ⁵ *They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.*

David is in need of a rescue, but it seems to him that God is not providing it - the implication is clearly that he is disappointed and complaining bitterly.

The good news here is that God can take whatever we have to say to Him. We do not have to tiptoe around Him as if treading on eggshells. Even if we are wrong in our complaining we will get a hearing from Him, because he likes us to pour out our hearts to Him - he is big enough to handle us!

Whatever David's experience behind this lament, it is certainly making him feel sorry for himself: ⁶ *But I am a worm, not a human being; I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people.*

It reminds me a bit of the little ditty called the "Worms" song, which was used as a kindly tease in both Tracy's family and mine as we were growing up, maybe you have heard it:

Nobody likes me, everybody hates me I'm going down the garden to eat worms.

I have to say though the experience David is portraying would be pretty unbearable.

If verse 1 was the first clear link to Jesus on the Cross, we see the second in verses 7 and 8: 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

In his Gospel Matthew records the cruel mockery and abuse hurled at Jesus after his flogging. Listen to these words (27: 39-43): ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's 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 rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

Derek Kidner writes: "The very gestures and words of [Psalm 22] verses 7 and 8 were reproduced at Calvary." It is the most amazing prophetic fulfillment and at the same time the most horrendous taunting of Jesus.

We see the anger and scorn of the leaders of Israel as Jesus endures unjustified human wrath in order to turn aside God's righteous wrath.

Verses 9-11 show the security of David's big picture, he is in the world because God ordained it. ⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me feel secure on my mother's breast. ¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. He knows God's lifelong care and so he looks for help now. ¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

His enemies are described as bulls and lions and later dogs (verses 12-13) no wonder he says ¹⁴ My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

Next we get some physical descriptions that speak volumes and fit the reality of a crucifixion (verses 15-17): ¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

Nicky Gumbel on the Alpha Course describes the crucifixion like this: *When they reached the site of crucifixion he was again stripped naked. He was laid on the cross and six-inch nails were driven into his forearms just above the wrists. His knees were then twisted sideways so that the ankles could be nailed between the tibia and the Achilles tendon. He was lifted up on the cross, which was then dropped into a socket in the ground. There he was left to hang in intense heat and unbearable thirst, exposed to the ridicule of the crowd. He hung there, in unthinkable pain, for six hours while his life slowly drained away. It was the height of pain and depth of shame.*

During this process, in what seems to me again a breathtakingly accurate prophecy - the soldiers do just what David describes in verse 18. [18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.](#)

In John's Gospel we get the most detail:

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ²⁴ "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

Back to Psalm 22, the Lament part of David's psalm is concluded with a cry for deliverance and rescue (verse 19-21) before the song of joy in v22. But in the words of Derek Kidner: "the Hebrew text has merely a verb in the perfect tense" as its last word so he suggests as with the NKJV that v21 should read: ²¹ [Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.](#) [And then] [You have answered me!](#)

That certainly makes sense for the change of tone that follows: ²² [I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.](#) ²³ [You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!](#) ²⁴ [For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.](#)

And so the Lament turns to joyful praise.

This praise is wonderfully honouring to God and includes a banquet not just for family and friends but also for the poor and needy. ²⁵ [From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.](#) ²⁶ [The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him - may your hearts live forever!](#)

Good news does tend to get out and we do celebrate, but here there is a conscious inclusion of other people to share in our joy - especially of those who can not return the favour. A reminder for us to always be looking to help those who are poor in this world and to do so motivated by the reality of God being our rescuer and helper!

And so to the last section of this Psalm (verses 27-31) and the proclamation of a boundless kingdom. This again, seems far beyond what David might speak of for himself - "All the ends of the earth" "all the families of the nations" "all the rich of the earth."

The suffering of the One whose execution is foretold in the Psalm, is clearly linked to the LORD who rules over all: ²⁷ [All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,](#) ²⁸ [for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.](#)

The presently rich (v29) will be able to join the humble poor at the feast if they humbly acknowledge their dependence on the One who gives life and worship Him alone.

Those yet to come (like us) will serve Him and be told about Him (v30) and will proclaim His righteousness and deliverance. It clearly applies to Jesus. The very Name Jesus means Saviour or Rescuer - "He saves" and he alone is the Righteous One, tempted like us in every way yet he did not sin.

This Jesus of Nazareth, this Righteous One, sinless one - He was crucified, executed for us... he hung there for you and for me though he had done nothing wrong.

Why? He died for the things we have done that are wrong. He died to remove the barrier that those things made between us and God. He died to take the punishment that those things warrant. He died for our forgiveness and freedom. He died to pay our debts!!!

Is that what you have experienced? It is why he died!

For Jesus, it is the Resurrection that completes the deliverance - he died and rose again for us... and we are invited to join Him at the feast in Heaven! The invite being based not on what we have done, but on what he has done. The final words of Psalm 22 make that point and also prefigure the final words of Jesus on the Cross.

Psalm 22 ends [He has done it!](#) Jesus' last words from the cross (John 19:30) were [It is finished](#) (in the Greek just one word "tetelestai") meaning it is paid for in full, it is finished or completed!

Have you let Him pay for you?