

## "An Old Psalm at the Cross"

Psalm 22 is a psalm that falls into the category of a *lament*. A lament is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. In the psalms, an individual or the faith community cries out to God, perhaps complaining that God is unfair or absent. The psalms of lament can be a heartfelt cry for help and deliverance. Psalm 22 is perhaps the most profound of these laments found in the Psalms.

Let's look at this Psalm today. It's a psalm of David, Israel's greatest king. It begins: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" (Psalm 22:1). David feels forsaken by God - that God is absent from his life and situation. He goes on: "But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people"(Psalm 22:6). He's feeling humiliated and diminished as a human being. He describes his enemies – those who are threatening him – as a roaring lion, as bulls, angry dogs, a wild oxen. He begs God: "Save me! Deliver me!"

Bible scholars aren't sure when David wrote this psalm, or what the circumstances were that prompted him to write it. Scholars aren't able to pinpoint a time in his life when he experienced the kind of suffering he describes. It undoubtedly was a terrible time for him, so bad that he felt totally abandoned by his God.

But there's another reason why this psalm has become perhaps the most profound of all the laments found in the psalms. Look at how the psalm begin: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Where else have you heard those words in the Bible? *Jesus, on the cross!* "From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"(Matthew 27:45-46). Many believe Jesus quoted these words from Psalm 22 as He was dying on the cross.

Jesus, God's perfect, sinless Son, felt abandoned and forsaken by the Father. Sin separates us from God. Jesus had no sin; it was *our* sins and the sin of the *whole world*, that Jesus put on His shoulders that day. We can't begin to imagine how horrible that must have been for Jesus – not just the excruciating of being crucified – but the emotional and spiritual pain Jesus felt having that sin separate Him from His Father.

2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, "For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him." Walter Kaiser, Jr. says the emphasis found here in the Hebrew is on the word "my," not on the word "God." It should be read as, "*My God, My God*" not as, "*My God, My God,*" like Jesus was cursing God. *It's the cry of a broken-hearted son who feels like his cherished father has abandoned him.*

Bible commentator, William Barclay, summed it up well: "It is suggested that in that moment the weight of the world's sin fell upon the heart and the being of Jesus . . . that was the moment when He who knew no sin was made sin for us; and that the penalty which He bore for us was the inevitable separation from God which sin brings." It was because Jesus was willing to go through the horror of death by crucifixion that we can be made right with God.

But the connection of Psalm 22 with Jesus' death on the cross doesn't stop with just the first line of the psalm! The suffering described in this psalm is not the suffering of someone with a severe illness or an unexpected misfortune. Some suggest that it's an astonishing description of a *person being crucified*! Remember, King David was born about a thousand years before Jesus, and crucifixion was not even known or practiced during the time of David.

Let's look more thoroughly at this magnificent psalm. (Take a Bible and turn to Psalm 22). "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" The very words of Jesus: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

"But I am a worm and not human, scorned by others and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they sneer at me; they shake their heads" (verses 6-7). "Scorned...despised...mock...shake their heads."

Compare these words with this description of Jesus' crucifixion: "Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to, for he said, "I am God's Son"'" (Matthew 27:39-43). People passing by "derided" or "hurled insults" at Jesus. They "shook their heads" and said, "Save yourself...if you're the Son of God come down from the cross." Matthew 27:41 says "In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him..."

"Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!" (verse 8). David's enemies are saying: commit your cause to the Lord, let him rescue you, because you are supposedly one in whom God delights. The Jewish religious leaders are saying, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son'" (Matthew 27:43).

Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God (Psalm 22:9-10). David refers to his mother, and how as an infant God kept him safe on his mother's breast. Jesus' mother was at the crucifixion. So was the Apostle John. And this happens: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother'" (John 19:26-27).

Psalm 22:12-13 says, "Many bulls encircle me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion." David likens his enemies to strong bulls of Bashan, surrounding him. Bashan was a very fertile area east of the Sea of Galilee, known for producing strong bulls. Some think this could equate to the Roman soldiers there to carry out the crucifixion.

David's psalm continues: "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" (verse 14). David says he's poured out like water, his bones are out of joint. It's the picture of a body that's broken, and depleted of its strength. During crucifixion, as the blood drains from the victim's body, it becomes so weak that the bones can come out of joint.

David says his heart is like wax. It's like his heart is broken. William Barclay, in his commentary on the Gospel of John suggests that Jesus, too, might have died with a broken heart. John 19:34 tells us that one of the soldiers thrust a spear into Jesus' side to make sure He was dead, and when he did, blood and water came out. Barclay says that possibly Jesus' experience of the cross, both physically and emotionally, was so terrible that His heart was ruptured. When that happened, the blood of the heart mingled with the fluid of the pericardium that surrounds the heart. And when the soldier shoved the spear into Jesus' side, both blood and the mingled fluid came out.

In the psalm David complains, "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death" (verse 15). King David describes his mouth as being dried up, his tongue sticking to his jaw. Remember Jesus' word from the cross, "I thirst" or "I am thirsty" (John 19:28).

David continues, "For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they bound my hands and feet" (verse 16). These are not our pet dogs, but snarling wild dogs. In Scripture, sometimes Gentiles are referred to as dogs. This could compare to the hostile crowd around Jesus.

In Psalm 22 it says, "They divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots" (verse 18). David pictures his enemies casting lots (gambling), already deciding who gets what of his clothing when he's dead. Matthew 27:35 says, "And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots." John's gospel also mentions this, and even says this was a fulfillment of the words in Psalm 22 (John 19:23-24).

*Isn't this amazing! So much of what David describes in Psalm 22 is a description of a crucifixion, and what Jesus went through a thousand years later!* It's kind of like someone in the year 1223 writing something that is a pretty clear description of a computer, or a modern airplane. It's not surprising, then, that Jesus would think of this psalm when He hung on the cross, and even perhaps recite the words of this psalm to Himself as His life ebbed from Him.

But there's more to the psalm, and more to the story! *The Christian message doesn't end with a cross, does it?* Easter's coming in 3 days! A resurrection is about to happen! And the message of this crucified and risen Lord is going to be proclaimed throughout the whole world! "You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him (Psalm 22:23-24). Even though to David it may have seemed like God forsook him, and was absent, that wasn't the case! David realizes

that God had not been hiding His face from him.

The Psalm continues: All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him" (verses 27-29). People from all over the earth are going to turn to the Lord! Even the dead will bow down before God. David himself will live for the Lord!

Do you remember what the Risen Christ said to His followers before He ascended back to the Father? "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). "Thus it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:46-47).

And just as it says in Psalm 22, someday everyone (even the dead) will bow down to this crucified and risen Lord: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"(Philippians 2:9-11).

Then, look at how Psalm 22 ends: " Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it" (verses 30-31). Here we are today – one of those "future generations". Millions are serving this crucified Son of God! And He is still delivering those who trust and follow Him from the powers of sin and death. And we are saying "that he has done it", as it says in verse 31!

*Isn't this a remarkable psalm! Describing so accurately what would happen 1,000 years after King David wrote those words.*

***What are some of the truths we can learn from this psalm that Jesus at least had in His mind the day He was crucified.***

*Jesus' death on the cross was not an accident.* God knew 1,000 years before it happened that it would happen. More than that, the Bible says that Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelations 13:8)! God was not surprised that His Son was put to death. Jesus was God's provision for our salvation from the very beginning of creation!

*Jesus' death on the cross is the central event in God's plan of salvation.* Christianity is not just another religion in the library of religions of the world. Jesus was not just a great teacher or prophet, among other great teachers and prophets. He is Lord – He rules over the nations! King of kings, Lord of lords, and He shall reign forever and ever.

*If Jesus went through all of that agony on the cross, we are saved and made right with God not*

*by what we do, but by what He did for us!* How many people – even people in the church who call themselves Christians – think that when all is said and done, we are made right with God and earn a place in heaven if we just live a good enough life. If that is so – why in the world did Jesus go through all He did that day on the cross? If we could save ourselves, all of that effort and sacrifice was unnecessary.

Sorry, Jesus. You didn't have to do that!

But He did...for us!

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