

“My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?” As Jesus was lifted up, dying on the cross at Calvary—Golgotha—the Place of the Skull—He spoke these haunting words. They are from Psalm 22. I sent you home last week to read this Psalm. And we read some of it as our Introit today—although not all 31 verses.

It is one of the most profound pieces of Hebrew poetry that you will find in the whole Old Testament. This Psalm was written by King David nearly a thousand years earlier. And being written so long before, you wouldn’t think it would have anything to do with Jesus. And yet, it does.

This Psalm is prophetic. It is messianic. Psalm 22 expresses the experiences of Jesus as He suffered. But it is also an expression of the meaning of the cross—as we will see. Christ is anticipated throughout the Old Testament. It is all about Him.

As you know by now, when we harmonize the Gospels, we find they record seven statements from Jesus on the cross. All of these words of Jesus give remarkable insight into His heart—and His mission.

This reference from Psalm 22 is found in both Matthew and Mark. And these words are the opening line of the Psalm. This supplication is known as the *Cry of Dereliction*. And our Gospel includes the Hebrew—or Aramaic—of this Psalm—the language of the Old Testament.

And as Jesus takes up these ancient words, it might even be something that makes us feel a little guilty. It is our sin that put Him there. I am sure these words burned into the hearts of the few followers that trailed Him all the way to the cross. They should also have caught the attention of the Scribes and Pharisees—they knew this text.

When we read the Psalms—instead of making them about ourselves—we do well to hear them through the life and death of Jesus. The Psalms generally center on His person and work. Fundamentally, the Psalms are His prayers—even more than they are David’s or ours. And this Psalm especially points us to Good Friday and God’s purposes in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Many try and find an incident in the life of David that matches Psalm 22. And this is always a good place to start. When we interpret the Bible, we first have to ask what David says—and what David meant as he wrote—and then, how his first hearers would have understood him.

We have to understand his context. They are David’s words. But they often anticipate something more. And sometimes they just don’t fit his life at all. In fact, if anything, they sound more like the words of Job.

In this Psalm, the Psalmist is despised by the crowd—in verse 6. Those who see Him, mock Him—they wag their heads at Him—verse 7. They cry out, “He trusts in the Lord, let Him deliver Him; let Him rescue Him, for He delights in Him”—verse 8. We see the Psalmist’s hands and feet pierced—look at verse 16. His opponents cast lots for his clothing—verse 18.

The language of this Psalm defies a personal explanation in David. This is not his life. He is clearly talking about another. Peter makes this point for us. In Acts, in the

Pentecost sermon, Peter says, “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, being a prophet, he foresaw and spoke about the Christ.”

It seems obvious that this must be the case in Psalm 22. Now this requires a supernatural view of Scripture. It requires us to admit that God foreknows all things—that God drives human history to His intended end. God has David write about Jesus—about the cross of Jesus—a thousand years in advance.

Now, *there* is something for the critics to wrestle with. And it is something for us to wrestle with as well. It should cause us to take the Scriptures more seriously—to take Christ more seriously. And it is also something that should bring us something more than guilt—perhaps a little hope—in this season of Lent.

God knows what He is doing even at the crucifixion. Jesus was not caught off guard by the betrayal of the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, Herod, Pilate, Judas, or even Satan. The cross was the plan all along. He endured. And He kept the Father’s Word until the end.

It is as Jesus says in John 10, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Now, this Cry of Dereliction from Jesus—from this Psalm—is both a prayer of lament and a pleading question. Of course, Jesus knows the answer. This isn’t the cry of someone who has lost His faith. Jesus knows what is going on. And He wants us to know as well.

It is as the Prophet Isaiah said, seven hundred years before, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted...The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Jesus is bringing salvation to His people. This is the substitutionary atonement—the vicarious atonement—in His blood. Jesus has taken on the sins of the whole world. He has taken on our sins—and the punishment we deserve—which includes the kind of suffering related to hell—separation from the Father. This is what must be done. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

But as Jesus speaks these words on the cross, He had the entire Psalm in mind. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?” was the overture for everything else. This is just the first verse. And as we see, this Psalm *is* a Psalm of suffering. But it is also a Psalm of victory.

Collectively, these thirty-one verses contain the full intent of what Jesus meant when He spoke the first verse. We are told in Mark’s Gospel that when Jesus uttered these words, the crowd didn’t understand Him.

Here, He prayed this Psalm, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” The crowd thought He was calling Elijah. But the crowd never understands Him. This was a perpetual problem for Jesus. Although—it was a greater problem for them.

His own followers—that little remnant present at the cross—that we talked about last week—they knew what He said. It is through their witness that these words are recorded in Holy Scripture. And Jesus prays these words for their benefit—and for ours.

Even more, Jesus meditates on the Psalm as He hung on the cross. This is what the Psalms are for—the meditation of our hearts. They give us something with which to fill our minds—beyond the news, the gossip, and social media. They give us something to talk about.

Jesus knew this Psalm by heart. He would have prayed and recited this Psalm over and over again His whole life. What a heavy burden to know what suffering He would have to endure. But what joy in knowing what He would accomplish. Even here, He is thinking about His followers.

And even here, Jesus is in control of things. In John 10, predicting this moment—and we have talked about this verse already in this sermon series—Jesus says, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” Jesus’ work was completed, and Scripture was fulfilled.

And this leads us forward to the victorious elements of this Psalm. It is a little surprising when we read this Psalm that the pain and struggle of the cross are so closely tied to praise and victory. And praise is peppered throughout the Psalm. This moment that began in darkness and despair eventually ends with a proclamation of confidence and victory.

But I think this ties in nicely with what is said of the cross in John’s Gospel. John employs a double meaning of *lifted up* throughout the Gospel, demonstrating that the crucifixion is also the exaltation of Jesus.

The Lord of glory has been crucified. The Father has abandoned the Son. God has died. And we are all to blame. And yet—He is exalted—high and lifted up on the cross—drawing the world to Himself. Pilate is not so far off as he says to the crowd, “Behold, the Man.”

In our Psalm, the turning point comes as the suffering Savior finds His communion with God restored. Here, we find a cry of triumph, not despair. And in these moments, the Psalm takes on an entirely different tone. There isn’t a clear confession of the Resurrection. Although we do find such statements in the Old Testament—in Job, Isaiah, Hosea, elsewhere in the Psalms, and in the life of Isaac, among other places.

There is just the sense that all the suffering is resolved in a way that brings praise and glory to the Lord. The Psalm marks the moment at which the period of darkness passes.

Jesus—having suffered a true alienation from the Father as the punishment for our sins—becomes aware of God’s presence and favor once again. The Psalm begins to celebrate the great victory of the cross. The cross is a sign of triumph. It is the symbol of our redemption. It is something beautiful—something that should fill our minds—and fill our souls.

Now, of course, this is all in keeping with what we celebrate on Easter Sunday. Good Friday leaves us with some tension—between the already and not yet. Thankfully, Holy Week doesn’t end on Friday. We celebrate the resurrection of Our Lord as well.

But it is a wonderful thing to know that Jesus died for sinners—vicariously. He died in our place. He died under the weight of sin—so that we wouldn’t. Here, He was

separated from the Father—alone with evil and darkness—so we would not suffer the isolation of sin. So that we would overcome sin. And so that we would endure with Christ to the end.

And Jesus is able to pass right on through death—spiritual and physical—to victory. It is amazing to see this played out in this Psalm a thousand years in advance. God has secured our salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ.

So, “My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?” is not the cry of someone who has lost His faith. It is a prayer that pours out of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to carry our sin—and then make a way possible for us to have eternal life.

Now, it shows the severity of sin—and sin’s effects. Sin breaks our fellowship with God. We hear this in Jesus’ words to the Church in Thyatira. Sin isn’t to be practiced—and it isn’t even to be tolerated in the local church. Sin leads to death—even eternal death—as separation from God’s gracious presence. At the cross, we see that sin isn’t some plaything.

But Jesus’ cry also shows us God’s purposes for renewal and restoration. Jesus shows His followers that He is still working in obedience to the Father’s perfect will—even as His fellowship with the Father is temporarily broken.

And when He says, some of these other words—“It is finished”—He means that He has completed the work the Father has given Him to do. And when he says, “Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit”—He displays His loyalty—His humility—His faithfulness—to the end. He was obedient to death—even death on a cross. And we will deal with these words in the weeks to come.

Next week, we will look at His word, “I thirst.” This may seem like a relatively trivial detail, after all the profound theological words that Jesus has spoken. And obviously, He did actually experience physical thirst.

But there is a purpose here for why—of all of the ways that Jesus suffers—His thirst is singled out. There is more here than dehydration. And, in fact, it has some parallels to today’s word—and today’s Psalm—and even our Gospel reading from last Sunday. And we will turn our attention to this word, “I thirst,” next Wednesday. Until then, **may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*