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THE SUFFERINGS AND GLORY OF CHRIST

Psalm 22

by

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Lesson 6: Psalms

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If a "Time Machine" existed, which could take you back to any time and place in history, my first choice would be to go back to a Sunday a little over 1950 years ago, to a dusty road between Jerusalem and a village called Emmaus. There two men were walking on the day of Jesus' resurrection when the risen Savior appeared to them. Not recognizing Him at first, they explained to Him their confusion about the events of the last several days. He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27).

If there had been tape recorders then, I would trade the hundreds of books in my library to obtain a tape of Christ (in English!) explaining what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself! I'm certain that in that tape you would hear Him explain Psalm 22. It speaks of Christ's suffering (22:1-21) and His glory (22:22-31; see 1 Pet. 1:10-11).

On one level, the psalm refers to some event in the life of David, probably when he was being pursued by Saul. But there is no situation recorded in Scripture where David went through trials to the degree the psalm describes. David is going beyond himself, applying things prophetically to Christ. Thus to do justice to the psalm, we must leave David's experience and focus on how it applies to David's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It describes a death by crucifixion hundreds of years before that mode of execution was known. The details of the psalm were fulfilled by the Son of David, Jesus the Messiah, about 1,000 years after they were written.

We are standing here on holy ground. If you've ever wondered what Jesus actually said in the Garden of Gethsemane as He wrestled with bearing our sins (the gospels only give a brief synopsis), you probably have it here. I always feel inadequate to preach, but I feel especially inadequate to speak on a text as profound as this one. We see here something of what our salvation cost the Savior. Though His sufferings go far beyond anything we can ever comprehend, we get a glimpse of the agonies He endured for us. The only proper response is to bow in worship and to submit ourselves afresh to do the will of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

1. Christ suffered on the cross for our salvation (22:1-21).

The first section consists of three cycles of complaint and confidence:

- First Cycle: 22:1-2 = Complaint (to God)
22:3-5 = Confidence (in God)
- Second Cycle: 22:6-8 = Complaint
22:9-11 = Confidence and Petition [v. 11]
- Third Cycle: 22:12-18 = Complaint
22:19-21 = Confidence and (mostly) Petition

By looking at the complaint sections we can see with prophetic clarity something of Christ's sufferings on the cross. As we think about the fact that "Christ the mighty maker died for man the creature's sin," our hearts should well up in thanksgiving for what He endured for us. Note what happened to Christ on the cross:

A. He was forsaken of God (22:1).

When Jesus was crucified, darkness fell upon the land from about noon until 3 p.m., when Jesus cried out the haunting words of Psalm 22:1: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

We enter at once into the most unfathomable mystery of the gospel. No one can really know what was involved in God's forsaking Jesus during those three hours of darkness. We know that Jesus bore God's curse upon world's sin and that somehow God in His holiness was forced to turn His back upon His Son while He bore that sin. Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). He bore God's wrath which we deserved. Thus He was forsaken by God the Father.

So while the physical agony was terrible, the spiritual agony was infinitely worse. We can't understand, because we have not enjoyed perfect fellowship with the Father from all eternity as Jesus had. Not sharing His holy nature, we can't imagine what it was like for Jesus to become sin. But that's what happened on the cross.

B. His prayers were not answered (22:2).

He cried for deliverance from death; that, if possible, this cup should pass from Him. Yet He was not delivered from death or spared the cup. Instead, He went through death and was delivered in the resurrection. How awful it must have been for Him who enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Father to cry out to Him, only to have Him not answer!

C. He was despised and mocked (22:6-8).

He calls Himself a worm and not a man. A worm is an object of weakness and scorn. (Can you imagine a sports team calling themselves the "Worms"? We have the Giants, Bears, and Broncos, but no "Worms.") The worm referred to is the cochineal, which produces a scarlet color used as a dye when it was crushed. It was used in the Tabernacle to dye part of the coverings and

veils (Exod. 26:1, 31, 36). Jesus was crushed so that His blood might cover our sins. But from man's point of view, He was scorned and despised. Verses 7-8 describe the exact actions and words used by Jesus' enemies when He was on the cross (Matt. 27:39-43)! They mocked His own claims of trust in God.

- D. He was overpowered by ferocious men (22:12-13).

His enemies are likened to ferocious animals--bulls, lions, and dogs (22:12, 13, 16). (Bashan [v. 12] was an area noted for its well-fed bulls.) I read about a man who was attacked by pit bull dogs and I've read of David Livingstone's being mauled by a lion. I'd rather not go through either experience! That was what Jesus felt like as He hung upon the cross while the Jewish rulers snorted their ridicule and false accusations. Even though He could have called 10,000 legions of angels, the Savior chose to suffer silently.

- E. He went through the physical and emotional agony of crucifixion (22:14-18).

Verses 14-18 are amazing prophecies of Christ's crucifixion. I think they prove the divine inspiration of the Bible, since this was written hundreds of years before crucifixion was known to man. Crucifixion arose as a means of torture somewhere in the East, perhaps with the Medes and Persians. Alexander the Great seems to have learned it from them and brought it West. The Romans learned it from the Phoenicians through Carthage and perfected it as a means of execution reserved for the worst criminals. It was a brutal, torturous, humiliating means of execution. Note the psalmist's description, which goes far beyond his own experience:

"Poured out like water" (v. 14)--points to the excessive

perspiration caused by the suffering plus the feeling of weakness as life slowly ebbed away. This was reflected in Jesus' cry, "I thirst!"

"Bones out of joint" (v. 14)--not literally, but the feeling of being stretched out by the arms as He hung on the cross.

"Heart turned to wax and melted" (v. 14)--the heart struggling to supply blood to the extremities.

"Strength dried up like a potsherd, tongue sticks to roof of mouth" (v. 15)--weakness as His life ebbed from Him; extreme thirst as His body was dehydrated.

"Dust of death" (v. 15)--He is all but dead.

"Surrounded by evil men" (v. 16)--at the scene of the cross as His enemies waited for His death.

"Pierced hands and feet" (v. 16)--the vowel pointing (added by Jewish rabbis in the Christian era) of some Hebrew manuscripts renders it, "like a lion," but it is difficult to make any sense out of that meaning. Calvin argues that the rabbis changed the text to escape the obvious reference to the cross. The LXX (200 B.C.) translates the Hebrew "pierced." Two other Old Testament passages (Isa. 53:5; Zech. 12:10) refer to Messiah being pierced.

"Count all my bones" (v. 17)--from being stretched out naked on the cross.

"People stare" (v. 17)--a public crucifixion.

"Divide my garments and cast lots for my clothing" (v. 18)--a specific prophecy of the activity of the soldiers around the cross of Christ.

That's just a glimpse of Christ's suffering as seen prophetically by David 1,000 years before Christ. His great suffering shows us our great salvation and how we should respond.

How should I respond to Christ who suffered for me?

(1) I should see both the greatness of my own sin and the greatness of Christ's love.

My sin put Jesus on the cross. His love made Him willing to go there. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The famous Dutch artist Rembrandt did a painting of the crucifixion. The focus of the painting, of course, is the Savior on the cross. But he also painted the crowd gathered around the cross. Standing there in the shadow at the edge of the picture, Rembrandt painted himself! Rembrandt, a participant in the crucifixion!

How true that is! We need to join Rembrandt by putting ourselves there. We need to make it personal. It was *my* sin which put Jesus on the cross! I was raised in a Christian home and never did many of the gross outward sins that many commit. It's easy for me to think that I'm not as bad a sinner as others. But the more I grow as a Christian, the more I discover how utterly wicked my heart is. The way to holiness is not thinking more highly of myself, but rather, realizing more how sinful I am which drives me to cling more tightly to the cross, where I receive God's mercy.

It's not popular in our day to emphasize our sinfulness. We want an upbeat message that glosses over sin. Our hymn book has even changed the words of Isaac Watts's great hymn, so that instead of, "Would He devote that sacred Head for such a worm as I?" it reads, "for someone such as I?"

We're too good to call ourselves worms! A lady once told me in a Sunday School class, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to call myself a worm!" I explained that Watts took that line in his hymn from Psalm 22 and said, "That's what Jesus called Himself when He bore our sins. Don't you want to be identified with Him when He did that for you?"

Dear brothers and sisters, we need to be careful not to exalt ourselves against the Lord. If you think that you're a pretty good person and that God just had to give you a little boost to get you into heaven, you won't love Jesus much. "He who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47). But if you recognize the truth, that you were lost in your rebellion against God and that He saved you from hell in spite of your awful sin, forgiven much you will love Him much. As Spurgeon put it, "He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed" (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:54).

So this glimpse of the cross should impress upon me the greatness of my own sin along with the greatness of Christ's love.

(2) I should submit to and trust Him who ordains suffering to come into my life.

Note 22:15: "You lay me in the dust of death." The Hebrew verb for "lay" has the nuance of ordain or appoint. Although evil and godless men crucified the Lord Jesus, they did it in accordance with the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). And so in one sense it was the sovereign plan of God which put Christ on the cross.

The confidence sections of the psalm (22:3-5, 9-11, 19-21) show Christ's response to the Father. Did He malign God or

shake His fist in God's face for ordaining this awful suffering? No! He affirms the holiness of God and uses it as the basis for His plea (22:3). He recalls God's faithfulness with others in the past and in His own past experience (22:4-5, 9-10). And He calls out in faith to God for deliverance (22:19-21).

How do you respond when trials come into your life? The author of Hebrews says that Jesus "learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Not that He was disobedient before; but you don't know obedience experientially until you suffer. If you're going through a hard time, learn to obey by submitting and trusting.

Later, the same author tells us, "For consider Him, who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3). Jesus endured by entrusting Himself into the hands of a loving, sovereign God. So should we!

(3) I should trust God when my prayers go unanswered.

Jesus prayed for deliverance, but God didn't answer Him--at that point. God did answer in the resurrection. But Jesus had to go through crucifixion and death before He received the answer to His prayers. And yet He continued to call God, "My God" (22:1-2, 10) and "My Help" (22:19).

Sometimes God will answer our prayers in a better time and a better way from His perspective. But we may not understand it. But we have to trust Him as our God even though we don't understand. I've had times where I've prayed diligently for something that I believed to be God's will, but it seemed as if things couldn't have gone any worse if I hadn't prayed at all! It's easy to begin doubting God when you pray and He doesn't seem to answer.

At such times, come back to the miraculous prophecies of

this psalm, and let them bolster your faith. If God's Word could accurately describe a crucifixion hundreds of years before that mode of death was practiced, and predict the specific details of Christ's death, even down to the words His enemies would say and the gambling of the pagan soldiers for His robe, it's solid evidence that you're dealing with a supernatural Book! There are dozens more such prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ. So you can trust in God and His Word, even if you are going through trials and your prayers seem to be unanswered.

So verses 1-21 show us how Christ suffered on the cross for our salvation. But the psalm doesn't end on the defeat of the crucifixion. It goes on to the victory of the resurrection and the glories which follow.

2. The glories of Christ's resurrection require proclaiming God's great salvation to all peoples (22:22-31).

The psalm doesn't say in black and white that Christ arose, but several things indicate that the resurrection took place between verses 21 and 22. First, at the end of verse 21 most scholars translate, "You have heard" or "You have answered" (NASB, NIV margin, New KJV). There is a sudden note of confidence.

Second, in verse 22, Messiah says, "I will declare Your name to my brothers." Jesus never called the disciples His brothers before the resurrection. But immediately after the resurrection, He told Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brothers and tell them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God'" (John 20:17; see also Heb. 2:11-12).

Third, the results described in these verses are things that resulted from Christ's resurrection. They obviously go far beyond David's personal experience. They are:

- (1) Fellowship (22:22)--We're His brothers. He declares God's

name (= His character and attributes) to us.

(2) Praise (22:22-23)--If Christ only suffered and died, there is no room for praise. We would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). But Hallelujah! He is risen! We can praise Him!

(3) Testimony (22:24)--God did not abandon His holy one to the grave (Psalm 16:10). He listened to His cry and raised Him from the dead. Now we can testify to God's deliverance in raising Christ from the dead.

(4) Thank-offering (22:25-26)--These verses picture a Hebrew thank-offering. When God answered his prayers, a worshiper would offer a thank-offering at the temple. The poor would be invited and there would be a feast giving thanks to God. The worshipers would greet one another with, "Let your heart live forever!" (22:26). In the same way we have a feast of thanksgiving, the Lord's Supper (eucharist), where we gather to offer thanks and praise for God's gift to us in Christ and the deliverance we have from our sins through His death and resurrection.

(5) World-wide evangelism (22:27, 30-31)--The good news of the risen Savior will be proclaimed beyond the Jews to all peoples, and to succeeding generations. There is no good news if the Savior is dead, but there is salvation if He is risen. The message applies to the poor and rich alike (22:26, 29), to all who acknowledge their need.

(6) Kingdom Rule (22:27-28)--This part has not yet been fulfilled, but it will be soon. He will return bodily to crush all opposition and to rule the nations with a rod of iron in His millennial Kingdom. Every knee shall bow before Him. Just as the other prophecies have been fulfilled, so this one will be. You can count on it!

Conclusion

So the message of Psalm 22 is:

Because Christ suffered on the cross for our salvation,
we must proclaim it to all nations.

Two applications: (1) Put the cross at the center of your walk with God. When I focus daily on the cross, my heart is filled with joy and thankfulness for God's priceless gift to me. The cross also keeps me aware of my own sinfulness, so that I don't trust myself, but cling to Christ. Focusing on the cross helps me resist temptation as I remember that I was redeemed with nothing less than Jesus' blood. How can I sin against Him who so loved me? We tend to forget the cross, which is why Jesus ordained that we come often to His table in remembrance of Him.

(2) Put God's heart for the lost as the bottom line of your walk with God. He wants all the ends of the earth to turn to Him and worship Him (22:27). That means that if I'm not actively focusing on world missions, I'm too self-focused. I'm not in tune with God's purpose to be glorified in all the earth. We have His command to go and His promise that "all the families of the nations will worship" the Lord (22:27). How can they worship Him if they've never heard? How will they hear if we don't give, send, and go?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should we focus on the fact that we're sinners, saints, or both? Give Scripture to support your answer.
2. Which view results in greater faith in God: That He ordains suffering or that He only permits it?
3. Is missions for every Christian or only for some?

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