

Psalm 22: The Prophecy of the Suffering Christ
04-21-19

NOTE – this sermon outline is one prepared by Brent Kercheville and presented on January 22, 2006 at the West Palm Beach Church of Christ¹. Although the lesson presented by Brian Haines on April 21, 2019 was different in many aspects, this outline was the basis for that sermon, and so it has been presented here unaltered - BH

Introduction:

Psalm 22 is perhaps one of the more fascinating psalms composed in this song collection. There is quite a bit of debate whether this psalm refers to the Christ or not. It is amazing to me that there is even such a discussion.

The scriptures should vanquish any question we have as to whether this is referring to the Christ. The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 22:22 in Hebrews 2:12 and applies to the sufferings of Christ. This should be enough for us to know that this psalm was speaking about the Christ. If this were not enough, as we read the psalm notice how many points are indirectly quoted or referred to in the New Testament when Jesus is in the midst of His suffering in arrest, trial, and crucifixion. These also should be weighty evidences that cause us to believe that Psalm 22 is referring to Christ. The only question that I believe is worthy of debate is this: does Psalm 22 refer at all to David himself or strictly to the coming Messiah? Many psalms have a double image where David is not only referring to the things he is going through, but is also predicting and prophesying about what would happen to the Christ. In other psalms, David is merely talking about his own experiences. But we must also realize that David is called a prophet by Peter (Acts 2:30) and may not be speaking about himself at all, but only prophesying of the Messiah to come. I believe this is what David is doing in this psalm. None of the information we read in this psalm can be found historically as events in David's life. But these events can be found in the suffering of the Christ.

As we read this psalm it is important that we see the repeated contrasts the psalmist utters between what he feels versus what he knows to be the truth. If we miss these contrasts then we will easily misapply these words to Jesus and attribute a false doctrine that the psalmist did not intend.

I. Suffering Yet Calling For Deliverance

A. Jesus' quoted (22:1-2)

As we read the first verse we immediately recognize that Jesus uttered these words while on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). This statement has allowed many expositors to take some liberties with the statement to suggest that God the Father turned His back on the Son of God. It is usually stated like this: Jesus was bearing the sins of the people while on the cross. Since the Father can have no fellowship with sin, God had to turn His back on the Son, severing fellowship with Him. This is the reason why Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."

¹ https://westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com/old-testament/psalms/psalms_22.html

The sun turned to darkness to show the separation between the Father and the Son as the Father His favor and glory away from the earth during this horrible act.

Besides the scriptures teaching us that Jesus bore our sins, the scriptures make no references concerning the rest of this fanciful theory. Simply because the first point is true concerning Jesus carrying away our sins, the rest of the points made are not logical conclusions and, in fact, violate other plain passages. Jesus said the Father would never forsake Him. "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29). "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). Jesus clearly stated He would not be left alone or forsaken by the Father, even though the disciples forsook Jesus and fled. If you open your song books to number 334 which is 'Tis Midnight, And On Olive's Brow, please notice the third verse: 'tis midnight, and for others' guilt the Man of Sorrows weeps in blood; yet He that hath in anguish knelt is not forsaken by His God. We even have a song that teaches that Jesus was not forsaken. While this song is certainly not inspired, we must realize that this statement contradicts the common understanding in the religious that Jesus was forsaken by God.

If Jesus was not forsaken by the Father, since He told His disciples He would not, why did Jesus say the words "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It seems that the clear answer is that Jesus is quoting this psalm. By quoting the very first line, the Jewish listeners who watched Jesus die would have immediately thought of this psalm and the message it contained. As we already mentioned, this is a messianic psalm and Jesus is drawing his listeners to apply this psalm to Him. Therefore, whatever message is contained in this psalm is the point Jesus wanted His listeners and onlookers to remember and learn. It is our duty to explore this psalm carefully for its clear message so we can fully and correctly understand that Jesus was teaching from the cross and wanted His audience to learn.

B. Contrast #1: Feeling forsaken, yet still trusting (22:1-5)

The first two verses of this psalm exclaiming the feeling of being forsaken. Day and night he is crying out to God and God does not seem to answer. It is a time when God feels distant from hearing the words of his groaning and from saving him.

But verses 3-5 offering the contrast to this feeling of being forsaken. Though he feels forsaken at the time, he still has put his trust in the Lord. Here we see a total dependence on God to deliver. There are two reasons for this hope. First, God is holy. God is separate from others and is worthy of trust due to His holiness. God is not one who acts like common man and breaks promises. God is holy and righteous and worthy of our trust.

The second reason to trust in God is because God has delivered in the past. The fathers put their trust in God and God delivered them. They cried out to God and God saved them. When they trusted in God they were not disappointed. The proof of this point can easily be seen in the book of Judges. When the people in the days of the judges cried out to God for help and

deliverance, God would respond by sending a leader to the people who would deliver them from their oppressors. While feeling distant from the Father, the Son of God knew that deliverance would come to Him, just as the Father had delivered in the past.

C. Contrast #2: Enduring suffering, yet you are always my God (22:6-11)

Now the suffering and mockery is described. The treatment of Jesus was like that of a despicable worm. There was no human decency afforded to Him. Verses 7-8 are clearly fulfilled in Matthew 27:39-44. In fact the very words "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue Him; let Him deliver Him since He delights in Him" are uttered by the chief priests, scribes, and elders.

Despite this mockery and suffering, He has trusted in the Lord from the very beginning. The imagery used is beautiful as a newborn baby trusts in his or her mother for milk, so also the Son of God has complete confidence in God to deliver and provide for Him.

Therefore, His cry goes out again that since trouble is near and there is no one to help that the Lord be not far from Him. As we know and mentioned earlier, the disciples forsook Jesus and fled. There was no one to stand beside Jesus as He endured the false trials of the Jews and Pilate, the scourging, and the crucifixion. No one would come to Jesus' side and protect Him from what was happening. Therefore, the cry is made for the Lord to remain near Him because no one else is near.

D. Contrast #3: Crucified, yet still looking for deliverance (22:12-21)

Things go from bad to worse in our third movement in this psalm. The end is near for Jesus. The enemies have surrounded him and the lions have their mouths open ready to devour their prey. But the agony continues as death approaches. He is poured out like water and his heart has melted away from within him. His strength is dried up and his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. Notice the last line of verse 15, "You lay me in the dust of death." This verse shows the imminent reality of death. Verse 16 describes our Lord's crucifixion "they have pierced my hands and my feet."

Lest we think that we have stretched this psalm too far in applying it to Jesus, we are here clearly reminded that this must be prophesying of Jesus. David did not experience these things but Jesus did. Yet another proof is found in Psalm 22:18 which is fulfilled in John 19:23-24 as the soldiers cast lots for the garments of Jesus.

But in spite of staring at the sure face of death, again Jesus is trusting in God's deliverance in Psalm 22:19-21. Here we read him calling to the Lord for help and deliverance from the sword and the enemies. Then we come across four amazing words in the midst of this plea to God. Verse 21 says, "You have answered Me." This becomes the turning point of the psalm. After contrasting the way he felt which was distant, alone, and forsaken, we now see his trust in the Lord was not unfounded. God now comes through and deliverance. This deliverance is found in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He has been delivered from his enemies and from the sword.

The resurrection was the conquering of Satan, conquering of evil, conquering of sin, and conquering of all who would stand against him.

II. Praising God For Deliverance

A. Praise for remaining with him (22:21-24)

As we mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, verse 22 is quoted in Hebrews 2:12. The argument that the writer of Hebrews presents is really the beauty of this passage. The obvious understanding is that He would declare the praises of God among the congregation and the brethren. But there is a subtle point that the writer of Hebrews keys upon.

“I will declare Your name to My brethren.” We are called brothers and sisters with Jesus. Jesus has taken possession of us to say that we are His brothers and sisters. This is describing a beautiful family relationship just as we would speak of our brothers and sisters in the flesh. We are His brothers and sisters in the spirit through the death of Jesus, which reconciled us to God. Our Lord Jesus Christ does not describe us as slaves or servants, which we are, but as brethren. Jesus is saying to each of us that when we are with Him, we are in an intimate close relationship with Him.

Therefore, everyone needs to fear the Lord and give Him the praise He deserves. Consider the reason that all should rejoice, glory, and fear: “Because He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.” There is so much that is stated in this verse that we must consider.

God does not despise or refuse to listen when we are afflicted. God does not look upon us with scorn when we carry our afflictions to Him and ask for help and deliverance. Our God is the Father who wants to help in our times of need. God is the loving Father who waits for us to ask Him for help and then offers assistance to us.

Even further, He has not hidden His face from Him. This sentence clearly tells us that God did not turn His back on Jesus while He was suffering on the cross. Though Jesus was in the midst of a time when He may have felt forsaken and it appeared He was forsaken and cursed by hanging on a tree, God never turned His face from His Son. When He cried to Him, He heard. God would never turn His back on His children, especially the only beloved and begotten Son. To suggest that God turned His back on the Son is to deny verse 24 of this psalm and the words of Jesus in the gospel of John. God was with His Son the whole time, though others had forsaken Him.

This is the central message of this psalm. We may feel forsaken by the Lord. We may be to the brink of death and in need of deliverance. We may be crying out for God to answer our prayers and feel the Lord is far from our groaning. But God is with us all along. God does not despise the afflicted and does not turn His back or hide His face from those who cry out to Him.

I believe this is the reason why Jesus said the first verse of Psalm 22 on the cross, crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me.” Jesus was applying this psalm to Himself. He is the promised Messiah and is calling on the Jewish people to remember that it had been prophesied

that the Messiah would suffer. So great would the suffering be that it would seem that God had forsaken Him. But His deliverance was about to come when He would be delivered from the sword through His resurrection.

B. Submit to the rule of God (22:25-31)

In light of this knowledge that God has delivered His Messiah from death, all need to worship and bow down to Him. He rules over the nations and has established His kingdom over all peoples of the earth. Every knee must bow, including the prosperous and those who have already died. No one is exempt from standing before the Christ in judgment and bowing down before Him. Further, those in the future will continue to serve Jesus. The mighty acts of God will continue to be remembered and recounted through the generations.

The psalm ends with the statement, "That He has done this." The word "this" is actually not in the original manuscripts but supplied by the translators to try to give clarity to the passage. Therefore the wording is "He is done" or "it is done." The last words of this psalm were the last words of Jesus on the cross "it is done" or "it is finished." Psalm 22 was being fulfilled before the very eyes of the Jewish nation while Jesus was on the cross. Through the death of Christ, the kingdom of God would be established, Satan would be conquered, sins would be forgiven, and reconciliation would be offered to all the world.

C. Final Lessons- Reasons for Confidence:

- God has delivered in the past.

- God answers prayer.

- God will not forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).