

Psalm 22

We have in Psalm 22 one of those places in the psalms that so clearly is the words of Christ that Psalm 22 serves as a key that can open up to us all the rest of the psalms. When we read verse 1, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” we can hardly see David, the type, who wrote this psalm, but rather see the Lord Jesus Christ prominently and clearly. These were the very words that our Lord cried out upon the cross. Psalm 22 is one of those great passages in the psalms that shows us, then, what the psalms are as the songs of Jesus Christ. These are the songs that he sang *and* the songs that he sings; for he said, “In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (vv. 22, 25), which means that Christ yet today sings these psalms with his church. This is one of the psalms that the Lord used to teach us very clearly the truth of the psalms.

When it comes to the content of this psalm and we want to identify the theme of this psalm, we can say that the theme of Psalm 22 is the agony and the victory of the cross. We are dealing with the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ in Psalm 22, and the psalm deals with both the agony of the cross and the victory of the cross.

We can see that the psalm deals with the cross especially when we look at verses 1, 16, and 18. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” That is one of Jesus’ cross words. Verse 16, at the end: “They pierced my hands and my feet.” And then verse 18: “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” Psalm 22 is very clearly and prominently about the cross of our Lord.

Psalm 22 shows us the agony of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross. As we look through the psalm, we can find different aspects of that agony. First of all—and most of all—the agony and affliction of our Lord was the curse that God laid upon him. That is the way the psalm opens: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” What Jesus is expressing there is the agony of God’s curse upon him. The agony of God’s forsaking him was the agony of God’s curse because the curse is the word of God that says to the accursed one, “Get away from me. I want nothing to do with you. I have no part with you. Be gone from me.” That is the opposite of blessing. Blessing is a word of goodness and a word of mercy. In a word of blessing, God says, “Grace be to you, and peace, from the Lord Jesus Christ.” That word of blessing is a word that gathers us to God and brings us right to him. “The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee.” That is God’s gathering his people. “Come to me, my people. Live with me.” That is the word of blessing. The word of curse is the opposite; it is the word that says, “Get away from me.” And that was what the cross was. In fact, death on the cross was a symbol of the curse because when men would crucify a man, they would thrust that man away from the earth by lifting him up on the cross and planting it in the ground, so that the whole earth was saying to that man, as it were, “You have no place here. Get away from me.” And yet the cross did not lift a man up into heaven—so that that man was suspended between heaven and earth, with both heaven and earth saying, “Be gone from us. We don’t want you here.” That is what Jesus is expressing in verse 1. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” God poured out that word of curse upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And the amazing thing about that curse is that that was the curse that you and I deserved; but the Lord bore it in our place, so that you will never hear God say to you, “Be gone from me.” Never will you hear that. Always the word of God to his people in Christ is, “My beloved people.”

The agony of the cross, above all things, was this curse of God upon Christ for our sins.

What else belonged to the agony of the cross? We find the reproach and the shame of men. “I am a worm, and no man” (v. 6). We say that about ourselves, but Jesus said that about his hanging on the cross. The shame of the cross was prominent. “I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” (vv. 6–8). The shame of the cross was no small thing. In fact, Jesus returns to that shame in verses 17–18. “I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” That refers to the fact that Jesus was crucified naked, disrobed. They took off his clothes; and all his bones being told doesn’t mean first of all that he was skinny, like we might sometimes use the phrase “You can see all his bones,” but that he was naked. Men stared upon him, and his nakedness was a symbol of shame. Shame is being exposed—being exposed to the reproach and the mockery of men, being exposed in our sin before Jehovah God and before the face of man. Jesus Christ on the cross was covered with shame. A later psalm, Psalm 89, talks about that too.

And there is something to Christ’s shame for our salvation. What we deserve is that we be exposed before the face of God with all our sin. But God took all our shame and put it upon Christ and covered him with our shame, so that you and I will never, ever have to blush before the face of God for our sin. You and I in the great judgment day, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, will not blush. We will not be ashamed in that day, even though the books will be opened and even though all the deeds and all the thoughts and all the things that men ever did will be brought forth. All that shame has already been suffered by the Lord Jesus Christ, so that when all your words and deeds are opened up to the view of the whole world, what the world will see is the covering of the blood of Christ as a sheet that covers all of those things; and you will be clothed with the white robes of the righteousness of Christ. In Christ’s shame on the cross, he bore our shame in our place.

What else do we see in the agony of the cross? In verses 11–13 we see opposition from strong foes. The bulls of Bashan that compassed him and gaped upon him with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion, were strong and mighty. These were the foes who represented the great world power of the day—the Roman kingdom and Pontius Pilate, a servant of the Roman kingdom—and the soldiers who crucified him. But also, the mighty foes who opposed him were the representatives of the false church, the leaders who had brought Jesus before Pilate and cried out, “Crucify him.” Jesus was opposed by strong foes.

What else do we find in the agony of the cross? In verses 14–15 we find the suffering and affliction of Jesus’ soul. These verses are so deep that they can even be hard to understand because here we are looking at the *mind* of Christ. We are seeing what he felt. We are seeing what you might call his emotional state. We are seeing the thoughts that went through his mind. And he was poured out like water. That was all he felt like: like water, with no substance, no strength to stand. All his bones felt out of joint. His heart was like wax and melted in the midst of his bowels, and his strength was dried up like a potsherd. His tongue clave to his jaws, and God brought him into the dust of death. You can hear there the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ in the hell that God brought to the cross during those three hours of darkness and the aftermath of it, when the Lord cried out, “I thirst.” Verse 15 speaks of his tongue cleaving to his jaws and dust. “I thirst,” cried Jesus after suffering the agonies of hell.

What else do we find as we look at the agony of the cross? We find that running through that agony from beginning to end was Jesus’ perfect trust in Jehovah God. That trust never wavered, not once. You see that trust in verses 3–5. “Thou art holy...our fathers trusted in thee...they cried unto thee.” There upon the cross, under that curse and suffering that shame, Jesus still knew God! He knew who God was.

He knew God's faithfulness and never wavered in his trust in God's faithfulness. Verses 9–10: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly." Never did his knowledge of God's goodness to him waver. Verse 19: "Be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me." The Lord Jesus Christ all through his agony trusted in God, *even* at that point when God's curse rested upon him and he cried out, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Do you hear what he called God in that being forsaken, in that curse? *My God!* "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And that trust of Jesus in who God was and what God was doing means that the Lord Jesus Christ—even in the greatest agony of soul that there could ever be, under the curse of God—never wavered from fulfilling God's purpose in our salvation through the cross. To speak foolishly, if we would imagine what would have happened if Jesus had wavered, he would have come down from the cross. He wouldn't have stayed there. That was the mockery. That was what they were calling him to do. "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40). And if Jesus had wavered in his perfect trust in what God was doing, if he had deviated from the course that God had set for him, he would have come down. But Jesus hung upon the cross with perfect trust in God's purpose, in God's goodness, in God's faithfulness, even when the curse lay upon him and the agony of his soul was unbearable.

That is the agony of the cross that Psalm 22 opens to us.

And the psalm ends with the victory of the cross. What is the fruit of that victory of the cross? We come to that in verses 22 and following. The fact that Jesus declares God's name unto his brethren implies his resurrection, so that even though the word *resurrection* isn't in this psalm, that is in view here. Jesus died on the cross and by that covered his people's sins, paying for every one of the sins of his elect people; and because of that perfect sacrifice he rose from the dead as the demonstration that our sins were forgiven.

Now notice what Psalm 22 says of the victory or the triumph of the cross. What is happening in verse 22? What does Jesus say that he will do? Worship! Worship! The worship of Jehovah God is the fruit of the cross! In times of reformation or at other times in the life of the church, she might forget how significant the matter of worship is, when in Psalm 22 the purpose of the cross and its victory, its triumph, is that Jesus worships Jehovah, and his people do in him. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." This is what God has made us for; this is what God has elected us for; this is what he gave Jesus Christ to the death of the cross for: for the worship of Jehovah's name. And why? Because there is nothing like Jehovah's name. His name is worthy. His name is exalted. Jesus Christ, declaring that name, is doing what is at the heart of God's counsel, in glorifying the name of God. The significance of worship must not be minimized, as it is by so many today and as we ourselves are tempted to do, as well—as if worship is a secondary thing, in fact, as if worship is not the point of the reformation of the church but as if something else is the point. The worship of Jehovah, because it is the worship of Jehovah's name, is at the very center of God's counsel in the Lord Jesus Christ. And as Christ speaks of the victory of the cross, he repeats the matter of worship. Verse 25: "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him."

If we press a little further into the worship that is the fruit of the victory and the triumph of the cross, what we find in verse 22 are preaching and singing. "I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren"—that is Jesus' declaring God's name in the preaching of the gospel. "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." And that is quoted in Hebrews 2: "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (v. 12). So Jesus connects preaching and singing together as the declaration of the name of Jehovah God. The

singing of the church is no insignificant thing, nothing that is “up for grabs,” you might say, but a thing that is very precious to God, as evidenced also by the fact that he gives us songs to sing.

In this psalm we see Jesus’ declaring God’s name and singing—and doing that in the midst of the congregation, so that our worship of Jehovah is worship with him. He is our head. We are members of his body. He suffered and died on the cross that he might bring us with him into the presence of God to praise Jehovah God. What a gift of God’s grace. What a tremendous gift of the grace of God.

The result of this salvation in the cross, and the victory and the triumph of it, is also that salvation is accomplished for God’s people. Verse 26: “The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.” God feeds us through Jesus Christ. And then the psalm ends with the great promise of Acts 2:39 that “the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” That promise of Pentecost is already present here in the Old Testament, in Psalm 22. “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD” (v. 27) and “A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation” (v. 30).

Through his suffering on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ has won our salvation and brings us with him into the worship of our Lord God. That is the agony and the victory of the cross.