

Christ the Conqueror

Psalm 22

More than all others, this is the psalm of the cross, the clearest description of the agony and glory of our redemption. Like Isaiah 53, this text reveals the horror of Golgotha and Jesus' trust in the Father that carried Him to victory.

Summary of the Text

Psalm 22 divides into three parts. The first consists of his call upon God to hear and intervene based on His covenant relationship (vv. 1-10). The second asks for the same thing in the face of imminent danger and death (vv. 11-21). And the third section describes the actions of the one delivered and the effects on the whole world (vv. 22-31). In this Psalm we encounter what the apostle Peter meant when he said that David was a prophet (Acts 2:30). Jesus cries out to the Father, forsaken by Him, but receives no answer (vv. 1-2). He knows God is holy, and the fathers trusted Him and were delivered (vv. 3-5). But He crawls like a worm hated, mocked, and ridiculed for trusting the Lord (vv. 6-8). He has relied on God from His mother's breasts, and so needs Him now to be as close as the troubles are (vv. 9-11). Wild bulls of Bashan surround Him with gaping mouths (vv. 12-13). He is spilled like water, His bones out of joint, and His heart melted (v. 14). No strength remains and His tongue sticks in His mouth (v. 15). The enemy functions as a congregation, like wild dogs in a pack surrounding Him and piercing His feet (v. 16). He can see and count His bones as onlookers stare (v. 17). They divide His clothes and gamble for them (v. 18). He cries again to His Strength for deliverance from the sword, the power of the dog, the lion's mouth, and the horns of wild oxen (vv. 19-21). Despair turns to hope as He plans to praise God in the midst of the brethren (v. 22). He calls the congregation to praise, glorify, and fear the Lord who heard him (vv. 23-24). He will pay His vows, bless the poor, and wishes you eternal life (vv. 25-26). This isn't wishful thinking but includes the ends of the earth that will come, family by family, in all nations to worship the King (vv. 27-28). This includes rich and poor, and it will continue to the next generation who will tell those who will be born what God has done (vv. 29-31).

Godforsaken

The cross comes before the crown. All who would reign with God must be crucified with Christ, which means that every Christian is united with Christ in His death, that the judgment which should have fallen upon us in fact fell upon Him. Calvin: "And as He became our representative, and took upon Him our sins, it was certainly necessary that He should appear before the judgment seat of God as a sinner. From this proceeded the terror and dread which constrained Him to pray for deliverance from death; not that it was so grievous to him merely to depart from this life; but because there was before his eyes, the curse of God, to which all who are sinners are exposed." The cross of judgment contrasts with a life and legacy of faith that goes back to His fathers. They trusted in God and were not ashamed (v. 5). Jesus knew there were unfaithful people in Israel's history, but these don't displace those who trusted in God and triumphed (cf. Heb. 11). In the midst of despair He remembers all who have come before, and so should we. He also remembers the countless acts of mercy beginning with birth and infancy (vv. 9-10). Many Christians like David don't remember a time when they didn't believe; they had child-like faith as children, which we should celebrate. Jesus recalls these blessings while facing the darkness of death, but unlike every other object of mercy, He was forsaken by the Father: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). The wages of sin is death, and as our

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representative, Jesus took what we earned upon Himself, and thus was Godforsaken. It's that the Trinity was broken or that the Father stopped loving the Son. That could never be. But Jesus suffered something He had never known as He became sin for us and suffered in our place. There was no other way for God to remain just and become the justifier of a rebellious humanity (Rom. 3:26). When Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46), He still claims the Father as His own—My God. He knows why, but in that moment, in the overwhelming pain and despair of the cross, He cries out in agony.

God of Details

David composes Psalm 22 a thousand years before Jesus fulfills it. The prophetic details are remarkable. Many Christians have believed that Jesus sang this and other psalms, concluding with Psalm 31:5: "Into Your hand I commit My Spirit" (cf. Lk. 23:46). David saw the crowds surrounding and mocking Him, telling Him to save Himself (v. 8; Matt. 27:42; Lk. 23:35). He predicted His hands and feet would be pierced and His clothes cast lots for (v. 18; Matt. 27:35). What we have here is a vivid anticipation of what would happen, much like the prescience Jesus had as He approached the cross (Matt. 26:34; Mk. 14:30). God is sovereign over all things, and rather than remove our responsibility for our sins, it is established. His power and goodness assures that justice will come and that we can trust Him not to leave or forsake because that's what Jesus did for us. The apostles were steeped in this hope and thus could walk in the steps of Jesus: "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5). Suffering in hope makes all the difference. The malice and violence of Jesus' enemies comes to nothing.

All Ends of Earth

The darkness of this psalm is swallowed up in light. Jesus looks to come back to His people and praise the Lord with them (cf. Matt. 26:29). Small and great, rich and poor, the ends of the world will remember and turn to Yahweh, all the families of the nations (vv. 27, 29). This is what God promised Abraham, and it will come true in the fulfillment of the great commission (Gen. 17:6; Matt. 28:19-21). All unbelief and pessimism about the progress of the gospel is confounded by the cross. What is it that overcomes the world? Our faith (1 Jn. 5:5). Remember this song is about Jesus and what He believed. We're not to think about we believe apart from Him, but to take Him at His word. He was right about the cross and resurrection, and He is right about the spread of His kingdom (cf. Jn. 12:32).