

Psalm 22

The Portrait of the Suffering, Dying Christ

Psalm 22

(For the choir director; upon Aijeleth Hashshahar. A Psalm of David.)

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; And by night, but I have no rest. Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In Thee our fathers trusted; They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. To Thee they cried out, and were delivered; In Thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.

But I am a worm, and not a man, A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, "Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."

Yet Thou art He who didst bring me forth from the womb; Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother's breasts. Upon Thee I was cast from birth; Thou hast been my God from my mother's womb.

Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And Thou dost lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.

But Thou, O Lord, be not far off; O Thou my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, My only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; And from the horns of the wild oxen Thou dost answer me.

I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Neither has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations will worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness To a people who will be born, that He has performed it.

Mediating the Word

Being Purposeful in Reading the Word of God

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
Hebrew 4:12

God's Word is unique. The scriptures are inspired by an Infinite God and given to us, a finite person. They are a glimpse of His Mind that can only be understood by His grace and through the person of the Holy Spirit. And because His Word is given, I believe we are capable of receiving it in greater depth. His Word draws us to Him. It demands action. It calls us to a higher purpose, something beyond ourselves. Isaiah asked the question, "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" I answer, "Lord, I believe, reveal to me your Word in power."

Christian meditation is setting aside a time of quiet reflection on God's Word. It is conversing in prayer with the One by whom we were created. Abiding in God's presence, it is worship. If you will let the Spirit of God illumine His Word, you will be meditating on the scriptures. Meditation is the turning of the Word over and over in your mind. Like a stone that is polished by the motion of the waves, the Word of God wears away our rough edges. It wears away those things that keep us from entering deeper into His presence, those things that keep us from living out His will. God speaks to us through His Word. We need to train our heart and mind and soul to listen. Christian meditation is not merely emptying your mind, although in it we may often encounter a heart felt silence and peace. Meditating on the Word is allowing ourselves to be washed by water with the Word.

How can we meditate on the Word? If you are a student of the Bible and have spent any time in the studying, you probably have meditated. You will know this if the Word has changed your life, molded you. Has there been a transformation in your life? Are you being conformed to the image of Christ? A better question might be, "how can I more purposefully mediate on the Word of God?"

I am inviting you to enter into the truths of the humanity and suffering of Christ in order that you may see Him glorified and lifted up in greater measure. Since Jesus was like us when He walked on earth, we do not have to stretch our imaginations as much when we consider His humanity as we do when we consider His glorious presence in the expanse and indescribable beauty of the throne room of God. Contemplating God as man shows us that Christ's incarnation is the key to a close intimate relationship with the Father. We see clearer our "Way" to heaven.

In a quiet place each day, until you have worked through Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and John 17, take a brief section and mediate. Begin with prayer. Ask that the Lord would illumine your mind, that He Himself would speak to you. Invite Him to be with you. Sit quietly.

Taking a short passage or a verse from the scriptures read it aloud, certain words will stand out, a phrase or picture will bring a memory or emotion, questions will arise in your mind, other scriptures will be recalled.

Read the section out loud again.

Something new stands out or maybe you come again to the same word or phrase this time with more urgency.

I suggest at some point you pause and write down what comes to mind. Write down any questions you may have. Answer them later on.

Abide in God's Word, as you continue to read aloud and listen until you feel the process is complete.

The Word

Logos vs. Rhema

Logos

The expression of thought embodying a concept or idea. The full counsel of God as opposed to a specific verse. The phrase "Word of the Lord" expresses the revealed will of God and is used of the direct revelation given by Christ.
Vines

The essential Word of God, Jesus Christ, the personal wisdom and power in union with God, His minister in creation and government of the universe, the cause of all the world's life both physical and ethical, which for the procurement of man's salvation put on human nature in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the second person in the Godhead, and shone forth conspicuously from His words and deeds. Thayer

Rhema

That which is spoken or uttered in speech or writing, in the singular. An individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in a time of need.
Vines

John 15:7

"If you abide in Me, and My words (rhema) abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you."

Abide

means "to be at home with." It has the connotation of remaining with or continuing in, as to endure. Simply put, when you abide with someone you get to know them.

Mediation on Isaiah 53:1

I've written down for your benefit what a session of meditation might be like for me. The beauty of God's word is that it can be specific for each person. You will probably have a different reaction to any given scripture. It won't be like any other person's. It may be different for you each time.

Read Aloud: "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

What strikes me about this verse, what stands out? I immediately ask "who has believed? What is the message? What is Isaiah trying to tell us." Already I feel called to attention. Having read and reread the chapter in preparation, I know the answers lie within the text. Isaiah is about to deliver the message to us. He is attempting to show us who the Messiah is, what He was like and what He will do. I know Jesus is his message. His question penetrates me. Do I believe?

"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

This time God is speaking. He is calling out. He is searching hearts for those whom would believe. Does He see my heart? Do I believe? Do I believe in such a way that my life is changed. Am I living like I believe? Do I know Jesus, God's message? Do I long to know Him more?

"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

This time I am calling out to those around me, "Who has believed our message?" I am part of the body of Christ and I am pleading to those who pass me by to listen. Who Am I pleading to? A friend? A family member? I see their faces. I see their need to know Jesus. So I pray to have boldness to speak. I pray they would have ears to hear. I think of 2 Corinthians 5:20.

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

At this point I might take notes. I would write down questions, write down what thoughts and feelings were aroused. I would write down scriptures. I would ask God what is He trying to tell me? Is there someone who I need to share Jesus with?

"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

What stands out now is the arm of the Lord. I think of how Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Is Jesus the arm of the Lord? I picture a mighty hand stretched out. It is the power and strength and might of the Lord. I asked, "Who has seen the power of the Lord? Have I seen His power in my life? Has He been revealed to me? Did I receive His word with power when I believed? Is it only by power that the message can be believed? Is the Lord extending the power in His Word today?" Jesus is the Word of God. Isaiah is saying to us that the Lord is sending forth His only Son in power. Do we believe? I recall Romans 1:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Am I ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Am I ashamed to call it's message out? Do I believe there is power in the Word?

I would spend some time inquiring of the Lord. I'd ask Him to search my heart and show me where I shrink back. I would ask Him for an opportunity to share. I would thank Him that He was sent His Word in power, that I have believed that Word, that the power of that Word has changed me into something I never was before, His new creation.

Encountering His Glory

Meditations

Isaiah 53 - The Earthly Portrait of Christ

For me to speak of Jesus Christ, to express Him to others, to contemplate His glory, to seek His face is worship, pure and simple. As we approach the subject of Christ's exaltation we need to approach the subject with a reverent heart.

In Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 (Psalm of the Cross) we find Christ's glory must be considered in juxtaposition to His humanity and sufferings. That God should become flesh and dwell among us is a mystery that I can't explain. It is by faith that I agree it is true. In the person of Jesus, God became like us, dwelt among us. He abandoned His place of honor, the privileges of being equal to God. He gave up the manifestation of His glory and made Himself nothing, of no reputation, and appeared in a way so that He was not recognized as God. This nothingness included the vulnerability of the natural life of man. The vulnerability of a helpless infant hunted by an angry king, with his early years spent in exile. His earthly portrait is revealed to us in Isaiah 53.

He grew up like a tender shoot out of a dry ground, not a son of privilege, but of a common man. He had no beauty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, familiar with sufferings. He was like one whom men hid their face from. He was not esteemed. He was oppressed and afflicted and led like a lamb to the slaughter. It was by oppression and judgment He was taken away, cut off from the living, assigned a grave with the wicked.

Jesus knew hunger, cold, sickness, weariness, grief. He owned nothing and had no place to lay His head. In the wilderness He experienced the extremity of temptation. In the form of a servant He hid the glory of His Godhood. Not recognized, He looked to the Father in total dependence for all His needs. He was limited in knowledge and subjected to the law.

Philippians 2:9 and John 17 tell us that Christ humbled Himself in these ways, endured the cross and its shame and at all times was in submission to the Father; he did nothing or said nothing except what the Father told Him. He was obedient to death. Because of these things, He was greatly exalted, to the highest place. The Father bestowed on Him the Name which is above all names, a Name that declares His glorious position. Now exalted in heaven, Jesus Christ, the Coming King, will one day see every knee bow in heaven and on earth and hear ever tongue confess that He is Lord. The summation of Christ's exaltation will be for the Father's glory. Christ's exaltation began with His resurrection, continued with the ascension. He sits now at the right hand of the Father, our great High Priest, who lives to intercede for us. One day His exaltation will be complete as He fulfills the role of Coming King and Judge. He will complete the task of reconciling man to God, of restoring God's people and presenting them spotless before the Throne of God.

"Because of Christ's voluntary humiliation God lifted him above or beyond (upper) the state of glory which he enjoyed before the Incarnation. What glory did Christ have after the Ascension that he did not have before in heaven? What did he take back to heaven that he did not bring? Clearly his humanity. He returned to heaven the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. The name which is above every name (to onoma to upper pan onoma). What name is that? Apparently and naturally the name Jesus."

Robertson's Word Pictures

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Philippians 2:5-10

"The one undeviating object of the Son all through His life was, the glory of the Father: He came to do His will, and He fulfilled it with all the unvarying intensity of the most heavenly affection. What, then, will not be the exuberant joy of His heart, when in His glorious kingdom, He shall see the Father beyond all measure glorified?... The praise and honor and blessing which will be yielded to the Father in that day through Him, so that God shall be all in all, will make Him feel He underwent not a sorrow too much for such a precious consummation."

Matthew Henry

Meditations on the Suffering and Glory of Christ

Verse

Psalm 22:1- 2

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; And by night, but I have no rest."

Psalm 22:3-5

"Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In Thee our fathers trusted; They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. To Thee they cried out, and were delivered; In Thee they trusted, and were not disappointed."

Psalm 22:11-16

"Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong [bulls] of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And Thou dost lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet."

Jesus Our Sacrifice for Sin

Jesus Christ cries out to El Elyon, the Almighty God, whose name is strength and might. The root word of Elyon is power. It is the same word that describes passing from darkness into light, from forsakenness to life. The very name God Almighty contrasts to Christ's helpless condition. The more Jesus' distress, the greater the power of the Almighty is seen. When Jesus Christ was completely spent and gave up his last breath, the power was perfected. It is finished. The power to raise the dead, to create new life in me was made complete.

Three Times in the Psalm Jesus turned from His suffering to the only means available to God's people, to throw themselves upon the Sovereign Lord and acknowledge Him above all. Jesus knew that through worship there is a connection to God. He teaches us to cry out in worship believing God will hear. Do you long to feel God's presence? Praise Him.

The Psalm reveals the passion our Lord has for the Father, the depth of their relationship. Everything about Him was about the Father. Not just in His divinity, but in His humanity. Everything, every utterance was that of His Father, His submission to His will, His focus, His desire; all was for His Father. When considering the cross it has been my perspective to think about what Christ did for me and overlook the great love He had for the Father. It is this great love that Christ calls us into. And through His suffering and death we may enter and join with the Son, being found in Him and sanctified through Him to at last be able to fully love and worship our God in a manner that is fitting and pleasing to Him.

With bold brush strokes the Psalm details for us the physical suffering of Christ.

There is no one to help; everyone has deserted Him, even His disciples and friends. The men who surround Him are like wild animals, out of control. Jesus Christ is poured out like hot wax. His strength spills out and all His bones are out of joint. So intense is the pain He endures His heart is like wax and melts within Him. His strength dries up. His tongue sticks to the roof of His mouth with a burning thirst. He is laid in the dust of death.

In His agony they stare, never really seeing who He is or what is really happening. Hours earlier when Pilate found Him innocent the people had answered, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25) They did not understand the severe consequences of their actions. Unmoved by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God the soldiers who carried out the will of the people continued with their concerns of life and divided His clothing among themselves.

The Beloved

There is a sharp contrast between the first twenty-two verses where Christ suffers and cries out and the last verses where He fleshes out for us why the Suffering Servant endured and the joy set before Him. They speak of a time when all creation will recognize His glory.

At this point in the Psalm, Christ's focus turns from his suffering to His Church, His Beloved. If you maintain the premise that Psalm 22 is a picture of the suffering dying Christ and that the text represents His thoughts and words, than we are given insight into the heart and mind of Christ as he died. These verses express His desires for His Church moments before His death. He speaks of His purpose on earth and calls His Church to true worship and a genuine conversion. He gives us reason to praise the Father while He declares the results of the cross.

Verse

Psalm 22:22-25

"I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Neither has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard. From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him."

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High; Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

Psalm 50:14-15

Insight into the Thanks Offering is the key to the true worshiper. In Psalm 50:14-15 the Lord was speaking to the people who had offended Him with their sacrifices. Their sacrifices were unacceptable to Him because they did not keep His covenant and had rejected His way. The Lord instructed them to first to call upon His name in faith, then honor Him with praise and obedience.

The Devotion of the True Worshiper

God the Father was the source of Christ's praises and should be the cause of ours. The image given in these verses is that of the Fellowship Offering. Because Psalm 22 describes the sacrifice of the cross it is no mystery that the sacrificial system of worship is alluded to. The system of sacrifice provided a way for the worshiper to progress in his relationship to God. First there was the Guilt or Sin Offering which was presented for the atonement of sin. Next the Burnt or Grain Offerings called for complete devotion and commitment to the Lord. Finally the Peace or Fellowship offering celebrated the peace and fellowship that comes with communion with the Almighty. The system gives insight into the truth that communion with the Lord God Almighty is made possible only by atonement, devotion and celebration of worship.

The Fellowship Offerings were a voluntary offering that came in three forms, a Thanks Offering, a Vow and a Freewill Offering. As expressions of gratitude for deliverance, like the Psalm they show our relationship to God is forged in the times of His intimate involvement in our distress.

Thanks Offerings were voluntary acts of worship expressing a gratitude to the Lord for healing from illness, deliverance from trouble or death. The Thanks Offering was required to be consumed the day it was offered and was only eaten by the priests.

The Vow, which our text specifically refers to, is different in that it can be consumed within two days and is eaten by the worshiper too. "A vow is a solemn promise to offer a gift to God in response to a divine deliverance or blessing" As in the case of Psalm 22 it came in the form of a prayer. A vow demonstrated an act of great faith as it was offered before the deliverance had transpired.

The worshipers participation in the meal becomes significant when we consider that Fellowship Offerings were given during times of festival in the Old Testament. The king often provided the offering for the feasts. Solomon's Thanks Offering at the dedication of the Temple is an example of that.

A vow usually is accompanied by an offering, but it is always given in praise. Blessing and deliverance call for an offering, satisfying the need for recognition and praise of the One who Blesses and Delivers.

The Offering

as a reflection of the three themes of the Psalm 22.

Atonement

Guilt or Sin Offering

Christ's suffering and crying out to His Father

Devotion

Burnt or Grain Offerings

Christ's praise of the Father

Celebration

Peace or Fellowship offering

Christ's foretelling of the Great Celebration of Worship

Verse

Psalm 22:26

"The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied. Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your hearts live forever."

Psalm 22:27-29

"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD'S And He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep his soul alive"

Psalm 22:30-31

"Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness. To a people who will be born, that He has performed it."

Our Everlasting Communion with the Father and Son

The great assembly in celebration I believe is a foretelling of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in Rev 21. All worshipers will participate and rejoice. The use of the image of the Fellowship Offering introduces verse 26 and pulls the rest of the Psalm together. Our communion with God in celebration reminds us that only He satisfies.

It will be as if waking from a dream that those on earth will remember and acknowledge the Lord. Since the fall man has continually "forgotten" their creator. At the feast as the nations gather forgetfulness will cease.

The worship of the true worshipers will acknowledge that Christ reigns. His kingdom is the inheritance of the faithful, the nations His possession. Both the prosperous to those who are lowly will eat and worship at the communion meal provided by the King. Unity will be the order of the day. Celebrating that although all mankind cannot keep their souls alive, they will break bread with the One who declared He is Life Itself.

Before His last breath our Lord proclaims that the Gospel will go forth. Christ was completely spent and ready to cast His life upon the Father. He believed God heard and would deliver Him from death. He believed His sacrifice would be received and His message believed. The inheritance of His righteousness would be declared from generation to generation until the ends of the earth are filled with its glad sound.

The Psalm ends with the words "He has performed it." Referring to the work on the cross, it reflects the words recorded in John 19:30

"When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit."

Those who witnessed His death heard the words, "It is finished." But what Christ saw and what the whole world awaits is the declaration in heaven when every nation and tribe and tongue and people will declare:

"He has performed it"

Christ our Redeemer saw the celebration, the praise and the glory ringing out these words as He gave up His spirit.