

## Psalm 22

*Palm Sunday (The Sunday next before Easter)  
(From the Lectionary Psalms for Today's Morning Prayer)*

**(New King James Version)** *1* To the Chief Musician. Set to 'The Deer of the Dawn.' A Psalm of David. *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? 2* O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. *3* But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. *4* Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. *5* They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed. *6* But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. *7* All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, *8* "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" *9* But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. *10* I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. *11* Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help. *12* Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. *13* They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. *14* I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. *15* My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. *16* For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; *17* I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. *18* They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots. *19* But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! *20* Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. *21* Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me. *22* I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. *23* You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! *24* For 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. *25* My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him. *26* The poor shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! *27* All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. *28* For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations. *29* All the prosperous of the earth Shall eat and worship; All those who go down to the dust Shall bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep himself alive. *30* A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, *31* They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, That He has done this.

Psalm 22 is among the most gripping of biblical passages, for a host of reasons. Chief among them is that details from the crucifixion account contain almost verbatim references from the psalm. How such a thing could be defies all logic.

Detractors of Christ have sought a thousand ways to try to falsify His story, call into question the accuracy of the Gospels, and attach to Him the most ridiculously strange motives for His actions. Among them has been the suggestion that He merely took hold of messianic prophecies and borrowed them for His own purposes, making deliberately cynical use of these texts to convince the world of a claim He was hot to manufacture.

But think of it: how would Jesus, in the custody of both Rome and the Jewish establishment during the Passion accounts, completely at their mercy, have retained for Himself such

grand, manipulative powers, coolly ordering the course of things so that He could come out with the right line at the right time, even when impaled upon a cross?! No, we can have no doubts whatsoever that Jesus was ever out of His Father's will (Jn. 19:11), nor was He ever without recourse against His captors had He desired it (Matt. 26:53), but to suggest that Jesus was, in essence, making use of some sort of script He had cobbled together to make a good show is impossible, considering the circumstances.

What is remarkable is that the psalmist has written words, centuries before their fulfillment at Golgotha, which cannot properly or logically speak of any other circumstance. The psalmist speaks of desperate straits, but they are more than that: what he is describing seems a horrible physical torment, something like dismemberment. But he is also supremely abandoned, not only by man, but yes..., by God Himself. What sort of a state of things is this? Further, He is disgraced and ashamed and emptied of every vestige of self-respect: *But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people.* How would a man get so low as to make such a statement about himself?

This dire language reminds us of other biblical passages also considered messianic, containing similar descriptions of extreme suffering:

*3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed...7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.*

Both passages contain elements of descriptions that are illogical and inexplicable, without some sort of context of application. Why would the tormentors of the psalmist, for example *divide [his] garments among them, And for [his] clothing cast lots?* This sort of thing doesn't happen every day among unfortunates, to say the least, and it is hardly among the known experiences of men in such straits. When would the writer have ever been subject to such a circumstance?

Standing in stark contrast to the lament portion of Psalm 22 are the verses of confidence, faith, and rejoicing that conclude it. In spite of the magnitude of his affliction, the psalmist is rescued and marvelously delivered by God, although no details are offered about how this happened, or what form the deliverance took. We move from the depths of hell, as it were, to the heights of heaven, following what has been a great, great victory: *For 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.* The tables have been completely turned. Because of the complete reversal of the sufferer's situation, he turns to the highest of praise for the One whom he had accounted not long before as having abandoned him. We are reminded here again of Isaiah, especially chapters 52 and 54 which form the context of chapter 53 quoted in part above:

*54:4 "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. 5 For your Maker is your husband, The Lord of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. 6 For the Lord has called you Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused," Says your God. 7 "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," Says the Lord, your Redeemer.*

These words are addressed by the prophet to the nation of Israel as a whole, of course. But the sufferings of Christ are intimately connected with those of His people. Her restoration to God's favor will be the work of the One who died for her:

*6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... 8b For the transgressions of My people He was stricken...11b By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.*

Note also to whom these words of hope and deliverance in the psalm are addressed: three times, those who *fear Him* are mentioned, along with *the poor*, and *all those who go down to the dust* [who] *bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep himself alive*. This last phrase is especially precious to me. As a new believer, desperately in need of Christ's power in my life for so many reasons, I counted myself among those in this category, and I hope I always will. The psalmist's victory is shared joyfully by that class of unfortunates who have had at least some familiarity with the writer's hardships.

Lastly, notice the implications of the victory the psalmist has experienced. They go far beyond his own personal deliverance: *All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations*. Once again, there is no explanation within the psalm text itself as to how such a set of events as are described could yield this great and far-reaching result. Nor is there anything in Old Testament history that we could properly equate with the storyline of the psalm.

Faith allows us to see where this marvelous text was pointing. It looks way ahead, to the Messiah, to the Cross and Passion, and even beyond, to His resurrection from the dead, his Ascension and Reign at the Father's right hand, and even to His Second Coming. Now we can see how such depths and such heights can be woven into the experience of one Man. The psalmist

heard a cry from the Cross, and saw the circumstances of the Passion in detail, long before their occurrence.

*A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this.*

Yes, we also are there, --you and I-- among those referred to in the psalm.

This is surely food for our closing Lenten meditations.

Let us pray:

*O God, the Son of God--so loving, yet so hated--so forbearing, yet assaulted unto death-- Who didst show Thyself so gentle and merciful to Thy persecutors; grant that through the wounds of Thy Passion our sins may be expiated, and as in Thy humiliation Thou didst suffer death for us, so now, being glorified, bestow on us everlasting brightness; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.*

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*