

Hope in Troubled Times

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Psalm 22:1-21

Rev. Freddy Fritz

April 10, 2020

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Scripture

Psalm 22 is an appropriate psalm for our meditation tonight, Good Friday, and also for this coming Easter Sunday. The reason is that the first part of Psalm 22 (verses 1-21) focuses on the experience of suffering on a cross, and the second part of Psalm (verses 22-31) announces the resurrection and expresses praise to God.

Psalm 22 is a psalm of David. However, scholars are not able to pinpoint a time in his life when he experienced the kind of suffering he describes in this psalm. He did go through extremely difficult times, but the Lord never abandoned him and always provided friends to help him in his time of need.

Moreover, the suffering described in this psalm is not the suffering of someone with a severe illness or an injury from battle. *It is an astonishing description of one being crucified as a criminal!* It is astonishing because crucifixion was not known in the time of David as it only became a form of execution centuries later.

This fact has led one leading Old Testament commentator to write, “No incident recorded of David can begin to account for this.... The language of the psalm defies a naturalistic explanation; the best account is in the terms used by Peter concerning another psalm of David: ‘Being therefore a prophet... he foresaw and spoke of... the Christ’ (Acts 2:30f).”¹

Most scholars agree that Jesus was meditating on Psalm 22 as he hung on the cross on that first Good Friday. As I read Psalm 22:1-21, you will see many expressions that confirm this.

¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 122.

So, please follow along as I read Psalm 22:1-21:

To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
from the words of my groaning?
- ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised
by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me;
they wag their heads;
- ⁸ “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”
- ⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you
at my mother’s breasts.
- ¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother’s womb
you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.
- ¹² Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,

like a ravening and roaring lion.
¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶ For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
¹⁷ I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
¹⁹ But you, O Lord, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!
You have rescued me from the horns
of the wild oxen! (Psalm 22:1-21)

Introduction

After Jesus had the Passover meal with his disciples in Jerusalem, they went to the Mount of Olives. While he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas came and betrayed Jesus with a kiss to the security police of the religious leaders. Jesus was arrested and kept overnight under guard in the house of the high priest. In the morning, a hastily called meeting of the Jewish Sanhedrin convicted Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus was taken to Pilate, the governor of Judea, for sentencing. The Jewish leaders were not allowed to sentence a person to

death, since they were under Roman occupation, but they wanted Jesus sentenced to death. Pilate vacillated when he met with Jesus, but eventually he gave in to pressure and ordered Jesus to be sentenced to death by crucifixion on a cross.

By Friday morning the Romans had nailed Jesus to his cross. Jesus hung on the cross for six hours, from about 9 a.m. until 3 p.m., when he died. However, from noon until 3 p.m. a very unusual and intense darkness came over the entire land. James Montgomery Boice says, “The darkness was sent by the Father to shield Jesus during the hours he was made sin for us. These were private hours. It is as if God had shut the bronze doors of heaven upon Jesus so that what transpired during those hours happened between himself and Jesus alone.”²

During these three hours, it seems clear that Jesus was meditating on Psalm 22. We shall see how Jesus saw his crucifixion as a fulfillment of Psalm 22.

Lesson

Psalm 22:1-21 gives us the experience of the Sufferer.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Abandonment by God (22:1-5)
2. Abuse by the People (22:6-11)
3. Accusations by the Law (22:12-21)

I. Abandonment by God (22:1-5)

First, the Sufferer experienced abandonment by God.

The opening words of Psalm 22 are the most emotionally

² James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 192.

gripping of the entire psalm. David cried out in verse 1a, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

David lived an exceptionally crisis-filled life. There may have been times when he felt abandoned by God. As I said earlier, we don't know when David wrote this psalm. He may have felt abandoned by God when he was on the run from murderous King Saul, or when the promise of God did not come to fulfillment, or when he experienced losses in his life. We don't know when he experienced abandonment by God.

Have you ever experienced abandonment by God? I have experienced a few very precious times of communion with God, but I have never experienced abandonment by God.

I remember my pastor when I was a student at the University of Cape Town tell of his experience that has stuck with me to this day. He said that one day he went to his study to read the Bible and pray. Suddenly, he had no sense of the presence of God. It was as if someone had switched off the light. He described it as an incredibly intense and difficult time in his life because for many weeks he felt abandoned by God. During this entire time, he had to serve his wife, family, and church. Then, one day he went to his study again, put his head in his hands and cried out, “Oh God, why have you forsaken me?” And suddenly, it was as if someone switched the light back on again! He sensed the presence of God in his life. My pastor went on to say that he believed that God gave him the sense of abandonment—God never really did abandon him—because of sin in his life. He was incredibly gifted evangelist. Every Sunday evening our church had an evangelistic service. And every Sunday evening as many as twenty people professed faith in Christ. My pastor said his sin was pride because he thought that he was South Africa's Billy Graham. He believed that God gave him the sense of abandonment to humble him.

When Jesus cried out on the cross, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), he really was abandoned by God. He was being punished for sin. But not for his own sin. Jesus was paying the penalty for our sin, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Jesus really did experience abandonment by God on the cross. We don't know how it is possible. But, we believe it to be true because that is what Scripture affirms.

Jesus suffered the wrath of God that was so fierce that his Father actually abandoned him on the cross. Jesus experienced hell that day so that we might experience heaven one day.

II. Abuse by the People (22:6-11)

Second, the Sufferer experienced abuse by the people.

The particular abuse that is being referred to here was to be scorned and despised by people.

There were times in David's experience when he experienced abuse by the people. For example, when David and his soldiers returned to Ziklag they discovered that their wives and children had been taken by the raiding Amalekites. This led the people to speak of “stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul” (1 Samuel 30:6). So, Psalm 22:6 would have been keenly felt by David, **“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.”**

Have you ever experienced abuse by people? That is, have you ever been scorned or despised by others? I know that I have experienced the annoyance and even anger of others (mostly because I deserved it), but I cannot think of having

experienced being scorned or despised by others.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’ ” (Matthew 27:39-43). This was a direct fulfillment of Psalm 22:8, which undoubtedly went through Jesus’ mind as he was hanging on the cross, **“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”**

Jesus’ entire life was leading up to his crucifixion. The Father had never failed him before, and Jesus had full confidence that his Father not fail him now. Nevertheless, Jesus experienced abuse by the people because he did trust in the Lord.

III. Accusations by the Law (22:12-21)

And third, the Sufferer experienced accusations by the law.

We don’t know when David experienced accusations from the law as he described in verses 12-21. David certainly experienced accusations from God’s law, but not in the full description of these verses. These verses clearly point to Jesus.

Paul, quoting Deuteronomy 21:23, wrote in Galatians 3:13b, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’ ” The law accused and condemned a guilty person to death. Jesus went to the cross, accused and

condemned by the law, to pay our penalty for sin.

Verses 12-18 is an astonishing and remarkable prediction of what Jesus experienced on the cross:

- Verses 12-13, 16: He was surrounded by his enemies.
- Verse 14a: His life was poured out like water.
- Verse 14b: His bones were out of joint.
- Verse 14c: His heart was melted within his breast.
- Verse 15: His strength was dried up completely.
- Verse 16: His hands and feet were pierced.
- Verse 17: He was stared at and gloated over.
- Verse 18: His executioners gambled for his clothing.

Can you see Jesus hanging on the cross knowing that all these things happening before were a fulfillment of Psalm 22? Jesus was meditating on Psalm 22 while he was experiencing excruciating pain and suffocating to death.

This part of Psalm 22 does not end here, however. Verses 19-21 are a turning point between the first and second parts of the psalm. Jesus prays to his Father, asking him to help him and to come to his aid. Verse 21 actually ends on a note of triumph rather than despair. Some commentators prefer a different translation for verse 21. They suggest it should read as follows, “Rescue me from the mouth of the lions, from the horns of the wild oxen. You have heard me!”³

The darkness that Jesus experienced and the abandonment by the Father was over, and he was becoming aware of the Father’s presence and favor again. The next part of Psalm 22 (verses 22-31) announce the resurrection and express praise to God. We shall look at that on Sunday morning.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expositional Commentary*, 196.

Conclusion

Therefore, having examined the Sufferer in Psalm 22:1-21, be sure that the Suffering Savior died for you.

Jesus suffered and died to pay the penalty for sin. But, it was not for his own sin, because he was and ever will be the sinless Son of God.

He died to pay the penalty for sinners like you and me.

One of the great hymns of the Christian Church was written by Charles Wesley. He asks:

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?

Wesley went on to note that Jesus suffered on the cross because of an “amazing love.” He could not exhaust the meaning of this love, but he knew that it was indeed for him that Jesus died. His only hope of salvation lay in the suffering sacrifice of Jesus, as he said:

'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me.⁴

Has God's mercy found out you? Jesus suffered and died on the cross to save sinners. Are you trusting in the Suffering Savior to pay the penalty for all your sin? I pray you do. Amen.

⁴ *Logos Hymnal*, 1st edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org