

Order of Worship for March 29th, **Good Friday**, title, “Telling the Name”, text, Psalm 22

Invocation: John 19:16b-30

Message theme: to “tell the name” of the Lord we must speak both of what He suffered and the triumph He gained.

Worship theme: expressing both our wonder and our thanks for His death on our behalf

Welcome

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer:

John 19:16b-30

Congregational Hymn:

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus” Song # 320

Special Music: “Scars” Mike Kokoletsos

Congregational Songs:

“Nothing but the Blood” Song # 337

“There Is a Redeemer” Song # 308

Special Music:

“The Old Rugged Cross/Were You There?”

Beverly Gentry

Congregational Song:

“Jesus Paid it All” Song # 305

Message: Psalm 22 “Telling the Name”
Pastor John Bronson

Closing Song:

“Hallelujah, What a Savior!” Song # 311

Parting Word of Grace

Invocation: John 19:16b-30

Looking at the two passages selected for this evening's service one could reasonably expect the Psalm to be the invocation and the section from John's Gospel to be the teaching passage. A psalm is, after all, a poem or a song and as such is primarily something that helps us in worship but is not in the same way designed for teaching the truths of the faith. Certainly there is much to learn from John's account of the death of Jesus. But there is also much to learn from David's prophetic prayer-song, prophetic because it miraculously describes the crucifixion of a man a thousand years before anyone had been crucified and because Jesus chose to recite the opening verses of this very psalm as He hung upon the cross, dying for the sins of the world.

As we take up the psalm it is helpful to recognize what Biblical scholars and students of ancient Jewish culture have long known regarding citations from the Old Testament. In the extensive writings of the Rabbis the common practice was to cite a verse or two from a longer section rather than reciting the whole even though it was the whole section which was intended. Reasonably the specific portion cited would indicate the perspective with which the person was viewing or taking up larger section of scripture. Based on that, we understand that when Jesus recited the opening verse of Psalm 22, He was actually referencing the entire psalm. This simply reinforces what the content of the Psalm already indicates: it is a description of a crucifixion, although it is much more than that as well. By citing the first verse as we are told in Matthew's Gospel, we understand that Jesus was emphasizing the negative miracle, as it were, the impossible reality that the Son, eternally one with the Father, is alone, separated from the Father, encased, as it were, in the dark night of humanity's sin.

The description of the crucifixion is given in verses 14-18, *“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; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.”* These verses are part of longer section which is part of a pattern. In verses 1-2, 6-8 and 12-18 we hear the lamenting cries of the one who is suffering. In verses 3-5, 9-11 and 19-21 we hear his prayers to the God from whom he is so grievously separated. Then from verse 22 on there is a rising song of praise. As we take up the psalm this evening our purpose is to learn what it tells us of Jesus' name, that is the very essence or core of who He is, His essential identity.

Although David wrote the psalm, and there is a necessary sense in which we would say it is about him, what is said simply cannot fully or completely connect with David's life, especially not in terms of the kind of physical suffering endured as described in vv. 14-18. We know that Jesus is not the only one of God's children seemingly abandoned by God. That is what the book of Job is about: it was a demonstration to Satan of Job's true faith that he continues to believe in God even when God withdraws from him and he endures almost total loss of God's former blessings. So there is no reason to doubt that David experience a time in which he felt himself to be grievously, almost desperately abandoned by God.

What Jesus endured was a loss infinitely greater even than Job, for as the Son of the Father what He had and enjoyed was infinitely greater. It is this which makes the first cry the most gripping and revealing: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”* What Jesus accepted for our sakes was separation from His Father. Scripturally separation from God is the equivalence to death and is the consequence of sin. This is what Paul meant when he said that Christ became sin for us (2Cor.5:21). In **John's Gospel (20:17)** Jesus refers to the Father as His God and His Father, for this was the eternal relation between them. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus relied on God in a faith which is the model for our own. If Jesus knew the hearts of others, it was through the revelatory work of the Spirit rather than from His capacity for divine knowing. This is essential for understanding these verses. At some point as Jesus went through the horror of the night of His betrayal and arrest and the mock trials which followed, the Spirit withdrew from Jesus and He, for the first and only time in all

eternity, is alone; He is forsaken by both Father and Spirit and is powerless on His own to penetrate the black void of sin which blinds the eye and blocks the ear from hearing the presence of God. His soul is then in such pain He can find no rest.

David at some time knew a similar emptiness and in that emptiness he remembers and affirms what he knows of God (vv. 3-5): *“Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.”* The holiness of God is far too large a reality for brief commentary. At a minimum here it points to God’s incorruptibility and perfect faithfulness. The seeming absence of God is not to be taken as a flaw in Him or His character. Rightly is He enthroned by Israel’s praises. Those honorific words are not empty phrases of flattery; they are accurate descriptions. Those praises are validated by the record of the deliverances which God has performed for Israel. In verses 3-5 the pronouns referring to God are each emphatic: Yet you, in you, you delivered, to you, in you. In the end, David affirms, those who cried to God *“were not put to shame.”* This is what Jesus affirms, is able to affirm through the depth and strength of His faith as He hangs on that cross, bloodied, spat upon, mocked and reviled and abandoned by all men. He remembers the faithful goodness of God.

This is not, however, escapism. Jesus remains acutely aware of His present condition. He suffers consciously as the One who endures the truth and consequence of our sin: He is suffering for those who treat Him as less than human, as a throwaway. He is scorned, despised, mocked. Those things can be done while retaining a certain respect for the one despised. David however goes further (v.7): *“...they make mouths at me; they wag their heads.”* Those who mock Him lower themselves and abandon personal dignity and self-respect by carrying on as mean and undisciplined children. Finally he says they make fun of the very core of His being, His faith in the God Who has withdrawn from Him. This is what was done to Jesus by the highest religious authorities and leaders in Israel, the chosen and covenant people of God.

How is such behavior to be countered; where do we find resources within to protect our hearts? David recalls the miracle of life and the goodness of maternal love (vv. 9-11), *“Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.”* We are speaking of the name, the essential identity and character not of David – although that would be true enough – but of Jesus, the Son of God who became the Son of Man. The formation of a child in the womb of a woman is a miracle. It is the Father’s first act and expression of love to anyone of us. We gain a glimpse of the sacredness of the family, of the union of man and woman, for here is the connecting point of divine power and human submission which brings to fruition the love of God. We are told here that Jesus draws strength in the moment of His dereliction by remembering the great truth of the Father’s love by which He was incarnate in his mother Mary’s womb and then nurtured by her as an infant child. God the Father’s love is manifest in and works through a mother’s love for her child.

In verses 12-18 David first recounts the dread experience of utter defenselessness in the midst of terrifying adversaries characterized as the most frightening of animals – bulls and ravening lions. Then he gives what must have been for anyone who had never seen a crucifixion an almost incomprehensible description of physical suffering and disintegration, that of a person hanging on a cross. Beyond that we have the prophetic statement that some of his clothes will be divided and for some they would cast lots while others gloat over his misery and death (vv. 12-18).

“Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and 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 my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they

have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Out of the utter silence and isolation of His suffering there rises up from David’s heart a cry of faith: “...O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!” In the structure of the Psalm this is the very extremity of Jesus’ need. As this section describing the mortal agony of His death on the cross begins David wrote, “Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.” But this was exactly the state of things, the necessary state of things: Jesus had to die that sin would be atoned. What we hear however is that Jesus enters the hour of ultimate loss with unfailing faith in the absent God. Then, as we read on, we notice a most dramatic change in v. 21, “Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!” That is it: “You have rescued me!” David knows and remembers. Jesus knows and anticipates. Faith triumphs in even the most desolate and abandoned of hearts! But it is not faith relying upon itself; it is not faith in faith, as it were. (v. 22), “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: you who fear the Lord, praise him!”

The best commentary on this remarkable psalm is found in Hebrews 2:14-18, “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” What we realize from these verses is that God’s purpose in the incarnation and most specifically the suffering he endured leading up to and on the cross was not limited to His death for our sin. Jesus’ faith is the model for our own. He has endured all that we ever will as we seek to be faithful to God’s call upon us, that we should be holy in the midst of an unholy world. To understand or rightly appreciate what we are told in Hebrews we need to have a right understanding of death. What does it mean to say that the devil has the power of death? What sort of power is that? The essence of death for us is not the cessation of life as when a plant dies or an animal dies. Rather the essence of death is separation from God. Death is also helpfully thought of as a process: the power of death is the fear we have of continual diminishing, of always becoming less, of the opportunities and experiences of life slipping away beyond retrieving. This leads to the soul’s despair and in that despair the soul will reach for whatever appears to offer security against death or access to that which gives life. But all life comes from God. If we are separated from God life is diminishing; it is passing; it is wasting away. We want to affirm life, lay hold of that which fills rather than empties us, but if we are divorced from God there is nothing that can do this, and not only do we know this at some intuitive depth, but the devil reminds us of it just as he tantalizes us with some new possibility while also always reminding us that we are destined only to die. The triumph of the psalm is simply the triumph of the Gospel (v.26): “...those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever!” From this triumphant affirmation there flows five verses which lift up the rule and worship of God:

(v. 27) *“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.*

(v. 28) *For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.*

(v. 29) *All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive.*

(v. 30) *Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;*

(v. 31) *They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.”*

This has been the joyous labor of the church since the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth than people from every tribe and tongue, every nation on the face of the earth will join in the adoration and praise of the one who conquered death, atoning for our sin and giving us the gift of God’s forgiving and reconciling love.