

Psalm 22 and Jesus

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Introduction.

- A. As Christians, we walk by faith and not by sight. God calls upon us to believe in Jesus and have life in His name, even though we have not personally seen Him. However, although God does require faith from us, He does not require us to believe irrationally or blindly. Instead, the faith of the Christian is founded on evidence.
- B. When we consider the material world around us, we recognize that the beauty and intricacy of God's creation proclaim the glory of the Creator. As Paul writes in Romans 1, the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen through what He has made. Only the liar and the fool can look at the universe and deny that there is a God.
- C. However, as significant as the evidence offered by our senses is, it is far from the only reason that God gives us to believe in Him. Indeed, perhaps the strongest reasons that we have to believe in God's word are found in the Bible itself, especially in the meticulous way that the Old Testament prophetically chronicles the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled the Old Law perfectly, not only by perfectly keeping its precepts, but also by fulfilling every prophecy made concerning the Messiah. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of prophecies in the Old Testament that came to fruition in the life of Jesus.
- D. These prophecies and fulfillments occur most densely during the time of Jesus' crucifixion. One Biblical scholar has estimated that during the last two days of Jesus' life, He fulfilled prophecies at the rate of one per hour. The study of this web of prophecy is beyond the scope of one sermon, but we can see its complexity by looking at one set of strands: the prophecies of Psalm 22. Although Psalm 22 was penned by David hundreds of years before the Christ, it clearly chronicles His crucifixion in Psalm 22:1-21. Let's consider this text now, that we may build up our faith and gain fresh insight into the sorrows of the One to whom we owe so much.

I. Psalm 22:1-2.

- A. When we look at Psalm 22, we recognize that it is one of the most hauntingly beautiful examples of divinely inspired writing in existence. Its craftsmanship is magnificent. Even if we knew nothing of Jesus, we could read it and clearly recognize the anguish and the faith of its author. In heart-wrenchingly poetic language, it describes his perils, perils that will result in his death, but that cannot shake his trust in God. However, once we recognize that it prophetically describes the death of our Lord, it becomes even more compelling. No other passage in Scripture gives us more insight into the mind of Christ during those horrible final hours.
- B. This portrait of divine suffering begins in Psalm 22:1-2. This passage conveys two things: the subject's feeling of abandonment, and also a sense of unfairness. He wants to know why God has left Him alone like this. Hasn't He always put His trust in God? Hasn't He cried out unceasingly to God for help? Where is God? What is God doing? God has always helped His people. Why isn't God helping Him?
- C. This prophecy was fulfilled in every detail during the last hour of Jesus. In fact, in Matthew 27:45-46, we see Jesus crying out with exactly these words. At first, this doesn't make sense. After all, Jesus knew exactly why He was on the cross--to suffer for the sins of mankind. We need to remember, though, that Jesus wasn't just a God. He was also a man, bleeding on that cross, and what was happening to Him was monstrously unfair.
- D. Indeed, the entire Christian system is based on the unfairness of what happened to Jesus. When we as Christians come before the throne of grace and receive forgiveness for our sins, it is a benefit we do not deserve. It is unfair. In order for God to satisfy the requirements of justice, He had to balance the scales with an offsetting unfairness. That we who deserve death might have life, Jesus, who deserved life, had to die.
- E. That's wonderful for us, but for Jesus on the cross that dreadful day, it was anything but. He knew He had the right to demand life from God. He knew He had the right to be delivered. After all, since the beginning of time, God had worked spectacular miracles to save believers who were far less righteous than Jesus. However, God's plan, which had required Jesus to give so much up already, required that He give up one last thing: His life. God's purpose for our Lord demanded that He who deserved to be saved should die forsaken.

II. Psalm 22:6-8.

- A. The next prophetic segment of this psalm is Psalm 22:6-8. This portion of the psalm addresses the subject's separation, not just from God, but also from humanity. No one who encounters Him in His distress is sympathetic. Instead, they sneer at Him for His folly in trusting the God who has obviously not saved Him.
- B. Once again, this prophecy precisely describes Jesus' experience during His crucifixion. We see that the enemies of Jesus unwittingly testify to His genuineness by fulfilling the prophecy themselves in Matthew 27:41-43. The rulers of the people, the leaders of God's chosen nation, left Jerusalem and came all the way out to Golgotha to mock their own Messiah. Nor were they the only ones. Matthew also reveals that others joined in the mockery. Travelers on the road beside Golgotha added to His shame by cursing at Him and reviling Him. Even the thieves crucified beside Him insulted Him.

- C. This treatment must surely have added to the misery of Jesus' death, not because of His own mistreatment, but because of the disastrous folly of the people He loved. The Jews had been God's chosen people for 2000 years. During that time, they had rejected His message repeatedly. Now, God Himself had come down to them, to give them one last chance to repent, and in response, they have taken Him and delivered Him to death. Now, as Christ is dying on the cross, they confirm their choice by insulting Him for trusting God.

III. Psalm 22:11-13.

- A. This mosaic of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus continues in Psalm 22:11-13. In this passage, the subject of Psalm 22 continues to describe His plight. Here, He focuses on two sides of the same coin. His friends have deserted Him, but His enemies have surrounded Him.
- B. We see the prophetic fulfillment of the first part of this statement in Matthew 26:55-56. The loyalty of Jesus' disciples here is put to a severe test when the armed mob of the chief priests arrives in the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him. Some of these disciples had previously affirmed their willingness even to die for Him, but when put to the test, their loyalty evaporated. They fled and left their Master to His enemies.
- C. The second part of this prophecy, that Jesus will now be surrounded by His enemies, is evident throughout the story of the crucifixion, but one of the places it is most apparent is in the story of His mockery in Matthew 26:67-68. Anyone who has ever seen a group of schoolyard bullies in action will have no trouble picturing this scene. The soldiers here are crowding around Him, mocking Him, blindfolding Him, slapping Him, tormenting Him. From Psalm 22, we know that Jesus felt as though He were being attacked by a mob of wild animals.

IV. Psalm 22:14-15.

- A. In this same section, we see the subject of the psalm's reflection about His own attitude and His own condition in Psalm 22:14-15. This passage seems to reflect the dissolution of His world. All the things that used to work are now paralyzed by the terror of His situation, and He knows that He is soon going to die.
- B. We see the fulfillment of the first part of this prophecy, especially with respect to the function of speech, in Matthew 27:12-14. Once again, it's hard to imagine just how painful this must have been for Jesus. He was literally the Word made flesh. No one ever in the history of the world has had the power to move others with words the way Jesus could. Now He is on trial, and His life is at stake. His opponents are pathetic. These are enemies whom Jesus has verbally embarrassed before. All Jesus has to do is open His mouth, talk for five minutes, and He will go free. But He doesn't because He can't. If Jesus speaks in His own defense, He Himself will be saved, but the whole world will be lost. Jesus here is like the man who stands on the train tracks in front of a freight train, knowing he will die if he stays where he is, who is able to save himself, but who does not. Jesus' death is not yet inevitable, but He makes it inevitable by refusing to speak.
- C. We see the consequence of this silence described both at the end of Psalm 22:15 and in its fulfillment in Matthew 27:25-26. The efforts of the high priests to destroy Jesus have now succeeded. Jesus has been condemned to die, and He will die. What must be going through Jesus' head? Love, first and foremost—love for His Father, for all the people whose lives His death will save. Joy in the knowledge that soon He will be with God again. Determination to see God's plan through to the end, to defy the mockers who will dare Him to come down from the cross, to defy even His own desire to live. Pain from the abuse that He has already endured. Grief for Himself, but mainly for the foolish, evil men who have condemned Him. And beneath it all, fear, the fear that any living thing feels when it knows it is about to die slowly and painfully. All of these things come together to mark a moment that is simultaneously horrible and glorious, sorrowful and joyful. Unique.

V. Psalm 22:16-18.

- A. The final anguished segment of Psalm 22 is Psalm 22:16-18. It describes two events, one shatteringly important, the other, inconsequential. The first is the fact of Jesus' crucifixion, prophesied in Psalm 22:16, and carried out in Matthew 27:33-35. Crucified. Nailed to a cross; left to die. Death never came quickly or easily to the crucified. It was the death of robbers and rebellious slaves. It was the death Jesus died for us.
- B. Even as this event of events, this consummation of everything, is taking place, the people around Jesus are going about their business, even right at the foot of the cross. Let's consider Psalm 22:18 and its fulfillment in Matthew 27:35. The Lord of heaven and earth was dying inches away, yet His guard was more concerned with who got to keep His tunic. These bystanders at the cross turned away from Jesus to consider a matter so trivial no one would remember it if it had not been prophesied. Why was this preserved for us? Why was this detail remembered in all four gospels? Perhaps it was to remind us that we too are bystanders at the cross. The cross is the central fact of life for every Christian. Every time we worship, every time we pray, every time we seek forgiveness, the cross is right in front of us. What do we do about it? Do we regard it mindlessly? Do we turn aside to trivialities? Or do we give this heart-wrenching, magnificent spectacle the attention it deserves? Let's think of these things as we now partake of the Lord's Supper.

Conclusion. However, as riveting as the first 21 verses of Psalm 22 are, they paint an incomplete picture. Psalm 22:22-34 is a message of hope, for Christ, and for all of us. If you want that hope for yourself, come to Him now.