Jesus in the Psalms – Psalm 22 – the Crucifixion

1. Introduction

a. Today we are looking at Psalm 22. This psalm was written by King David around 1000 BC. Yet it goes far, far beyond anything that happened to him. It has 31 verses and about half of those have a direct reference and fulfilment recorded in the New Testament.

b. It begins with 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' and ends, in the original, with the expression 'It is finished'. And if you know the words that Jesus spoke from the cross then you will know that those are two of the most important statements that He made.

c. This chapter describes in amazing detail the process and results of crucifixion 500 years before crucifixion was first introduced or practised. While used widely by the Roman Empire, the Encyclopaedia Britannica reports that the first historical record of Crucifixion was about 519 BC when "Darius I, king of Persia, crucified 3,000 political opponents in Babylon.'

d. The Psalm can be split as follows:

i Wrath from God (verses 1-6)

ii Wrath from man - both verbal and physical (verses 7-21)

iii Blessing of God for Messiah & believers. (verses 22-31)

2. My God why have you forsaken me

Psalm 22:1-2 *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest*

a. Peter notes that David was a prophet (Acts 2:30-31). Indeed, he was filled with the Spirit at his anointing. But did David know what he was saying? I doubt it. When he wrote the first part of the psalm, he was probably expressing his own deep lament in highly figurative terms -- figures that were brought to his mind by the Holy Spirit.

b. This side of the cross, however, those figures speak to us strongly of Jesus' crucifixion. Were they intended by David to refer to the cross? No. Were they intended by the Spirit to speak of Jesus' crucifixion. Of that I have no doubt.

c. The first 6 verses of Psalm 22 not only record the very words from the cross but also the very thoughts of our Saviour at that time. They record how He was feeling and what He was thinking. It portrays the innocent Lamb of God, separated from His Father, alone for the first time ever, and facing the wrath of God.

d. *'My God, My God'* – This is a change in the way Jesus prays. Throughout the gospels Jesus used the more personal intimate title of 'Father'. This phrase shows us that something has changed in His relationship with His Father. What comes next is more telling.

e. '*Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me?*' - The dreaded 'why' question. Can you think of Jesus ever asking God 'why' something happened? We have probably all asked 'why' about something with God. Possibly many things! It is that great troubling question we ask when we feel confused or possibly forsaken by God. It is, in most cases, the word we speak when we are operating on our own understanding and resources away from the presence of God. We don't ask 'why' when His presence is near.

f. Through all the trials and difficulties that Jesus went through, He never asked 'why?' Yet on the cross, at the very end, He did and it is linked with the worst 'why' of all - 'Why have you forsaken me?'

g. Jesus had known what it was to be forsaken by his disciples. But forsaken by God? That had never, ever, happened before. Why was Jesus forsaken now? Christ was forsaken by God so that we might never be forsaken. The great exchange was taking place. He took our rightful place so that we might be given His.

h. As the song says: 'I'm forgiven because you were forsaken; I'm accepted- You were condemned.' Or, as scripture says:

2 Cor. 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'*

i. We may go through times of darkness or even prolonged silence where it seems that God has left us but it isn't true. The promise to His people remains and is true to the end:

Heb. 13:5 *God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

j. Verse 2 tells us that the cry went up by day and night but surely Jesus' crucifixion was during the day. However, the Gospels inform us that half of that time on the cross was in daylight and half was in darkness. From 12pm - 3pm there was darkness across the land. It reminds us of the prophecy recorded in Amos where God states:

Amos 8:9 *"It will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight.'*

k. John W. Lawrence, a pastor and graduate of Dallas theological seminary wrote an article called 'The death of death' in which were these interesting and contrasting points of Jesus' time on the cross:

'During the first three hours the sufferings of Christ on the cross were at the hands of men. During the last three hours, He suffered at the hands of a righteous and holy God. From 9 a.m. until noon, man was at the cross pouring out his worst - mocking, reviling, deriding - while during the very same time God was offering up for man His very best. From noon until 3 p.m., man was offering up his best - the only sinless one who had ever lived - while at the same time God was pouring out His worst. During the first three hours our Lord was the 'sinless' Son of God (Heb. 7:26); during the last three hours He was 'made sin' (2 Cor. 5:21), and He became the accursed thing. Because God cannot look on sin, neither did He allow man to look on the Lord during this time. God, for the only time in eternity past or future, was separated from the Son, and a veil was hung over the light of the sun in order that man might realize the gravity of the moment. During the first three hours, Calvary was only a hill outside the city of Jerusalem where the Son of Man was crucified; during the final three hours, Calvary became the brazen altar of God where the Son of God was slain for our sins. During the light, Christ bore the weight of His own body on the cross; during the last three hours He bore the sins of the whole world.

l. Before the Psalms were numbered, a particular psalm would be referred to by its first line. In speaking the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus pointed not to just the first verse, but to the whole psalm. By quoting the first line Jesus points us towards the whole psalm.

Psalm 22:3 *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.*

m. The keyword to understand clearly is "enthroned". God is everywhere; there is nowhere we can go where he is not (Psalm 139:7-10). By our praise, we declare him King, exalt him, and thus "enthrone" him before us. The psalmist is declaring no matter how forsaken we feel God is there. As Jesus cried out those first verses of Psalm 22 He was also affirming that His Father was with Him.

3. The wrath of man – verbal/mental

Psalm 22:7-11 *All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. [8] "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." [9] Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. [10] From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. [11] Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.*

a. Verses 7-8 record basically word for word what is later stated in the Gospels concerning the mocking and taunts from mankind when Jesus was on the cross. Here is how Mathew records it:

Matthew 27:39-44 *[39] Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads [40] and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" [41] In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. [42] "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. [43] He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" [44] In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.*

b. When we look at the group mocking Him we see first the general masses; the average Israelite passing by and wanting to have a gawk at the latest crucifixion. They're shaking their heads at him as if they are His superior and have a go.

c. Then you've got the religious hierarchy: The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders. They still remember the day when Jesus rightfully pointed out, in public, that they were 'the blind leading the blind', 'whitewashed tombs' and 'snakes and a brood of vipers'... They're there enjoying this moment.

d. And then you've got the criminals- the thieves. There was one crucified on each side of Jesus and both of them, at least at the beginning, are hurling insults at Jesus. Thankfully one turned.

e. But we see in this passage exactly how Jesus responded. In the face of the insults. He reminds Himself of how the Father has been there for Him since He was in the womb. He has trusted in God since being on His mother's breast. God was always His rock and strength.

1 Peter 2:22-23 *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." [23] When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

4. The wrath of man - Physical Wrath: Crucifixion.

Psalm 22:14-19 *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. [15] My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. [16] Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. [17] All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over*

me. [18] They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. [19] But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

a. Remember, this is describing crucifixion in detail 500 years before it would be invented, 900 years before the Romans began using it and 1000 years before Jesus would be crucified. This was not a Jewish method of capital punishment - that was stoning. The psalmist is describing something entirely foreign to the Jews in this prophetic Psalm. In view of this, let's examine the description of crucifixion given here:

   i **I am poured out like water:** Jesus is at the point of complete and utter exhaustion! He has nothing left. His life has been poured out through the hot beating sun and the agony of continually trying to lift Himself up to breathe.

   ii **All my bones are out of joint:** Ever had a dislocated bone or joint? The ligaments hold our bones in joint. They are like strong rubber bands but when they are stretched too far or break, the bone is forced out of its joint. You can only imagine the intense pressure on the bones and joints and ligaments as the victim hung from the cross which is being described here.

   iii **My heart has turned to wax:** The heart, under immense shock and sustained pressure as described above, is giving way.

   iv **My strength is dried up like a potsherd, my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth:** Extreme dehydration is setting in. He compares Himself to a piece of broken pottery. A broken clay vessel completely dried out by the furnace of God - Physically and spiritually. It was at this point that Jesus spoke from the cross saying 'I thirst'.

   v **They have pierced my hands and my feet:** That of course is exactly what a crucifixion does. The nails to hold the victim to the cross are driven through the wrist area normally and through the feet. This word 'pierced' is important. This is the first of three highly significant prophetic scriptures using it. This one in Psalm 22 describes the actual physical act of crucifixion: They pierced my hands and my feet. The second describes the reason why:

Isaiah 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

The third prophetic passage is in Zechariah and describes a coming day when the nation of Israel's eyes will be opened and they will see what they did:

Zechariah 12:10 ...*They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.*

   vi **I can count all my bones:** Like most victims crucified by Rome, it is likely that Jesus was naked. All His bones were visible and, as his bones were out of joint, they would have been prominent. But in fulfilment of another Psalm (34:20) none of his bones were broken. Thus when the soldiers came to break the legs of the victims to bring about a quicker death (as the victim wasn't then able to push themselves up to breath) they found that Jesus had already died and didn't break His legs. And all the while that this happened, houses around Israel prepared their Passover lamb in strict adherence to the Biblical command that, among other things, the lamb should not have any bones broken. (Ex 12:46) And yet they were blind to the fact that the real Passover Lamb was being sacrificed at that same time upon a cross.

vii Finally; **They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.** This is exactly what the Roman soldiers did. All four gospel writers record this act. John writes:

John 19:23-24 *When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.* ***24*** *"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." So this is what the soldiers did.*

5. It is finished!

a. Everything changes from verse 21 in this Psalm from the moment we read 'You answer me'. We had earlier seen that Jesus had said that He was crying out but there was no answer. This led to the question 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?' But here we see that the answer did come. And I believe this answer came to Jesus before He died as evident by the two last sentences Jesus said from the cross - 'It is Finished!' and 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit!'

b. Jesus knew again why He was there and that it was now finished - paid in full! Also His relationship with His Father was restored so that He could confidently commit His spirit into the hands of His Father once again.

Psalm 22:22 *I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.*

c. The one who was crucified is now shown to be alive and in the midst of his people – our resurrected Messiah. The only begotten Son of God is going to have brothers! There is going to be other 'sons and daughters of God'!

Isa 53:10 *But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.*

d. Like the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying, if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He would not remain alone! Having paid the price for their sins, He could then give others the right to become God's children.

Psalm 22:23 *You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!*

e. The sphere of His favour here is widened in verse 23 to include the descendants of Israel. God has a grand plan for the church but don't forget that He also has a special plan for the nation of Israel. Not according to their goodness or righteousness but simply according to His promises made to that people.

Psalm 22:27 *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him*

f. Things will not always be as they are now. The earth is the Lords and He is coming to reclaim His inheritance. In the Messianic Kingdom, which these verses speak of, all the nations will live in the blessing of God with the curse removed. And all nations shall go to Jerusalem to meet with the King!

Psalm 22:25-26 *From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfil my vows.* ***26*** *The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him— may your hearts live forever!*

g. Jesus will fulfil His vows! He will fulfil His word. Jesus has promised, made covenants with, both the church and Israel. The home that He is preparing for us, the conditions of peace and righteousness on this earth, then a new Heaven and a new earth. It will all be fulfilled. I will fulfil my vows He says.

h. The poor and the meek will inherit the earth as He spoke in the sermon on the mount. This will all be fulfilled. His promises, His vows, His word - it will be fulfilled and all will be the result of what happened because of that day 2000 years ago on Calvary.

Psalm 22:30-31 *Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. [31] They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!*

i. One generation after another will be told of the Lord. Here we are, 2000 years on and we are still talking about Him! We are proclaiming His righteousness and declaring that He has done it just as this Psalm said we would.

6. Conclusion

a. What a glorious psalm. It begins with one phrase Jesus said on the cross 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' and ends with one of the very last things Jesus said on the cross - 'It is finished!'

b. From the physical and spiritual darkness of the cross right through to the dawning of a new day when He shall reign and all the ends of the earth will talk about Him who did it all this psalm lays out the detail of what was needed for our salvation and our eternal hope.

c. From David's lips comes a cry of despair and hope which foreshadowed the events some 1000 years later and the hope of that which is still to come. So we cry out together:

Maranatha...come Lord Jesus!