

How Jesus Endured the Cross, Part 3

Psalm 22:1-21

Follow along as I read, this is "to the choirmaster, according to the doe of the dawn, a psalm of David. 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. 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. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

"All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" 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.

"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.

"But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! 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! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

"For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear

him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever!

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. 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. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it."

Take a look at verses 9-10 of Psalm 22. Jesus is simply living out his constant habit of depending wholly upon God. Though all of mankind scorned him, and though he was despised by all people, mocked and insulted by young and old, rich and poor, great and small, Jesus entrusted himself to God. Yet, verse 9, "You are he who took me from the womb. You made me trust you at my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God." It didn't matter what men thought of him. It didn't matter what situation he was in, what station in life, what his circumstances were, whether he was a helpless infant, whether he was a writhing worm, whether he was

a dying Christ on the cross, Jesus knew, he trusted that God cared for him, and that was enough. He trusted implicitly and utterly in God.

And that's where this section of complaint ends, with an affirmation of his trust in God. What prompted the psalmist's prayer, what provoked his cry to God, it is ended with this strong affirmation of trust, and that is how David endured the persecutions of King Saul. That's how Jesus endured the cross, humanity's severest trial, by putting all of his trust in God. And that is how all believers endure all their trials, just as the believing fathers of Israel did. They trusted, they trusted, they trusted. We may not see all things clearly. We may not know how or when the trial is going to end. We may not ever know its purpose. But we trust God wholly.

As Francis Havergal wrote in 1876, "Every joy or trial falleth from above, traced upon our dial by the Son of Love. We may trust him fully all for us to do; they who trust him wholly find him wholly true." Jesus trusted because he looked carefully at God's written Word, and there he found words of promise over and over, some written in Isaiah guaranteeing the final outcome. Isaiah 41:14, "Fear not, you worm of Jacob." Remember, he said, "I am a worm, not a man." "Fear not, you worm of Jacob. I am

the one who helps you,' declares the Lord. 'Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.'" Isaiah 49:7, "Thus says the Lord, the redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, 'To one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers, this is what the Lord says: "Kings shall see and arise, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."'"

Look, Jesus trusted God to do what he said. That's what faith is: believing God will do what he said. Jesus trusted him to fulfill all that was written and spoken about the Messiah. He entrusted himself to the care of God. He handed himself over to God's care. Even though everything appeared to be hopeless, even though he's surrounded by mocking enemies, and even as he hoped in God while enduring the suffering of the cross, and his faith was turned into an object of ridicule by those enemies and Jesus remained steadfast.

That's precisely why God should rescue Jesus from the cross. It was fitting, it was appropriate, it was righteous, even, for God to respond to Jesus' cries with deliverance. But God didn't do that. He let him suffer, hanging there for all men to gaze upon him. He became an object of scorn, a sign to be opposed, "for cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree,"

Galatians 3:13. It comes from Deuteronomy 21:23, "A hanged man is cursed by God." Why was he cursed? Clearly, for no reason found in himself. The sinless one trusted God. He bore the sin of many, and he was abused for it. That's what Psalm 22 teaches us. That's why Jesus quoted from it on the cross. He wanted people to look here, Psalm 22. He wanted people to see him there and to find salvation by looking there, to him.

Also, as I said, Psalm 22 is a sincere expression of his own grief. It was a deep sorrow of his own predicament. Jesus endured the greatest trial ever on the cross. He fought the greatest fight. He won the greatest victory, and he won it all by faith in God. That becomes an example to us, doesn't it? Whenever we feel sorrow, anxiety, fear; whenever we feel abandoned by God, frightened, discouraged, when we're tempted to despair, we find in Jesus' dying breath a pattern for finding victory in suffering. We must go back to God's Word, affirm the theology that we've learned and remain steadfast in the, in the faith.

Look, you'll never trust someone you don't know, right? That's why we've got to keep reading, keep studying, keep learning the history of the God who is always faithful. And we need to read about the saints who trusted him and found him to

be true even in the darkest of trials. Listen, when the storms hit, when the trials come, when we face the fiery trials of persecution, look, none of the superficial platitudes or the shallow clichés that are so often peddled and passed around throughout evangelicalism today, none of that can anchor our faith.

We must cling to truths we know and understand, and when we know him intimately, we will trust him wholly and find him to be wholly true because we draw from a deep well of doctrinal truth, we're going to find written in his Word. That's what Jesus has shown us, here, pointing all of us from the dreadful cross itself that his faith was anchored in the truths of God's Word, Psalm 22, other passages as well. Jesus read. Jesus studied. Jesus believed.

Listen, beloved, even having said that, we're so often reminded that our faith is weak and wanting, aren't we? Aren't we like the disciples, asleep when we ought to be awake praying? What then? Look to Jesus. Look to his triumph of faith. Look at how he endured the greatest trial known to mankind and how he succeeded. Listen, his faith in God is unbroken, and therefore it is sufficient for you. If you trust in him, his success

becomes your success. His strength upholds you in your weakness. Jesus intercedes for you even now.

He's praying to the Father who's at his side, by the way, sitting right next to him. He prays that your faith will endure, that you'll persevere to the end. He's with you in every trial, in every conflict. He's your merciful High Priest who cares deeply for you. He bought you with his own blood. His victory is sufficient to carry you, and his example will continue to teach you.

Even though Jesus expected divine protection, didn't get it. Don't worry, it's all part of the plan, right? God is still God. And that brings us to a second point, here. Jesus may have expected divine protection, didn't receive it in his hour of greatest need, so in faith, Jesus accepted divine retribution. Jesus accepted divine retribution. You could say he embraced divine wrath. He willingly accepted this, but get this, the retribution from God was not against his own sin. The vengeance for violations against divine holiness was not due to anything in himself. He endured the suffering of the cross for our sakes. He accepted God's wrath as our substitute.

Using the words of the psalmist, his father David, Jesus had uttered his complaint, verses 1-10. And now, resolute in



faith, he makes a simple request, here, a very simple request. Though God was far from him, though he turned his back on his Son's suffering, though he subjected him to the cross, Jesus prayed this simple prayer verse 11, "Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help." He started with "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Now he asks, "Be not far from me." He's all alone, no one to turn to but God. You know what? Sometimes that's the safest place we can be. There's no one to help. His only company are the vicious, those who seek to do him violent harm.

The psalmist pictures his enemies with animal-like qualities: strength and ferocity. And they come in two basic companies, here, the bulls and the dogs. Bulls and the dogs, bulldogs. I just thought of that. But look at the bulls in verse 12. Verses 12-13, "Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and a roaring lion." The bulls of Bashan, they were an especially strong variety. They were well-fed in luxurious pasture-land. They had stoneless meadows to roam in, and even the grass surrounded by oak forests. These were healthy bulls, strong bulls, sleek, powerful. And according to the psalmist, they were also numerous.

"Many strong bulls of Bashan" surrounded him, hemming him in. I mean, I don't know what it's like to face one bull, but imagine being in the middle and you're surrounded by many bulls, many strong bulls, many strong bulls of Basham, and allowing no escape. You cannot get through. The bulls, here, represent those who are strong and in power. These are the more noble of the psalmist's persecutors. In David's case, the bulls represent King Saul, his courtiers, his, those in league with the king's court.

In Jesus' case, they're the Jewish leaders, the political, the religious leaders of the time and the corrupt leaders had hemmed him in through their laws and procedures. They used the structures of power and authority to their own advantage. They used their power and authority to abuse him, and Jesus was trapped in the midst of strong, immovable animals. He's encircled, he's held fast, he's pinned down, given over to the king of predators, in fact, a ravenous lion. And this lion is hungry. This lion is ready to eat, eager to tear into his flesh with his claws and his teeth.

But the strength of the nobility, it enlists another group to carry out its dirty work. Look at verse 16, this other adversary, "For dogs encompass me; a company of evil-doers

encircles me, and they pierce my hands and feet.” There’s nothing like a hungry pack of howling dogs to turn your blood to ice, right? I don’t know if you’ve ever been chased by a dog, a German shepherd, but man, snarling, growling, bearing their fangs! This pack of wild dogs, it pictures the evil men who surround him, ready to tear him into pieces. This is the rabble, the mob, those without any care for sophistication, no care for principle. They just want to see blood.

Once again, the lion shows up. It’s not clear in the English, especially since the last part of the verse is translated, “They pierced my hands and my feet.” It’s not exactly the right translation. No New Testament writer makes use of this text to refer to the piercing of Christ on the cross, the crucifixion. And that’s because the Hebrew, here, has a different sense. The word, lion, shows up again in this translation, and there’s one translation called the New English Translation, you can find it online even, but it renders it best; it says, “Wild dogs surround me, a gang of evil men crowd around me.” And here’s the translation, “Like a lion they pin my hands and my feet.” That’s actually more accurate.

Two Old Testament passages do refer to the piercing of the Messiah: Isaiah 53:5, Zechariah 12:10. But here the idea is

different. It's that he's stretched out, taut, pulled to the very extremes, ready to be torn to pieces, pinned down. The word, here, refers to something that's spread and extended so fully that there are literally no bends or folds at all. He's literally helpless before these vicious dogs, spread out, vulnerable to attack, this band of evil men, and the dogs tear into him, having pinned him down like a lion pins its victims down, stretching his limbs until they're totally out of joint, again like pulling him apart like a medieval rack.

Look at the effect on him, verses 14-15 and then also verses 17-18. These are some of the clearest prophetic portrayals of exactly what happened at the crucifixion 1,000 years before they happened. This is what the bulls and the dogs, what the lion, what the evil men did to him. "I am poured out like water. 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. 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."

We read that in Mark's Gospel, didn't we? You can read, compare the other Gospel accounts as well: Matthew, Luke, John.

All those details were fulfilled to the very letter. The lack of strength, the bones out of joint, inner vitality melted like wax, dryness and thirst, all of this before this leering, gawking crowd of mockers, all gloating over him. Since his death is so certain, the soldiers thought nothing of dividing up his garments among themselves, right there in front of him. He wasn't dead, yet. He could see them doing it.

But he was dead to them. To them he was just a breathing corpse. Might as well get on with dividing what spoils remain. No respect. No regard. Utterly despised, given up for dead. Not only that, but he died from all appearances friendless. One of his disciples had betrayed him; the rest had scattered at his arrest. The closest of his inner circle had denied three times that he had known him.

And if the abandonment of men were not enough, he found himself abandoned by God as well. Look at verse 11 again; note carefully the language of that opening line. "Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help." None to help? What, not even God? Why pray to him? Not even God? No, not at this time. Even God had turned on him. In fact, look at the end of verse 15, "You laid me in the dust of death." Who's that? God had done this. God had laid him in the dust of death. As one

commentator put it, quote, "The death of the servant of God is spoken of not merely as happening like this, but as decreed; and not merely as permitted by God, but as being in accordance with the divine will," end quote.

Listen, folks, don't ever fall into the trap of trying to absolve God of responsibility for bad things happening. God can handle the pressure. He has no problem taking responsibility for decreeing these things, which is crystal clear here in the death of his own Son. As Peter said, he told the crowd in Acts 2:23, "This Jesus was delivered up according to" what? "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Peter didn't try to get God off the hook. What did, delivering up Jesus, involve? Gross injustice, lies, deception, manipulation, the cruelest abuse, the vilest murder. God decreed it. Evil men carried out the evil deeds, and they are responsible for their sins, but it was God who decreed the death of Jesus Christ, a death that involved sin against him.

The Father put his own son on the cross. Why? Not for his own sins. To what purpose, then? The answer is found in Isaiah 53:4-6, "Surely he has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our

iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Again, the worst, the most dreadful element in Jesus' suffering wasn't the physical pain of crucifixion. That's why these Jesus movies can never capture the truth of Jesus on the cross in film. They'll always be misleading because they tend toward a superficial understanding of what truly happened. It wasn't just about the blood flowing and the torment and the nails in the hands and the crown of thorns. The Lord laid on the sinless Son of God the iniquity of us all. The purest heart was immersed in a sea of our sin, which is a suffering that we can never comprehend. Our hearts are so dull, so impure. We've emerged from a foul sea of sin, and we only catch imperfect glimpses of the purity of divine holiness.

What suffering he endured just in being and acting as the Sin-Bearer! But then to be stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, all the while expecting favor and protection and blessing, to be pierced for our transgressions, to be crushed for our iniquities, to be chastised by his Father when his Father's tenderness and closeness and kindness was all he had

ever known, that's what he endured to secure our peace, to ensure our healing. And that's why Isaiah 53:10 says, it says, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief." Paul repeats that theme in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

This was God's dreadful plan all along, to deliver us from our sins and that's why he refused to come down off that cross. He refused to save himself. He refused to secure his own deliverance. He trusted God to deliver him; refused to rescue himself and entrusted himself to the Father, his only hope. Take a look at verse 19, "But you, O Lord, do not be far off. O, you my help, come quickly to my aid. Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion."

Stop there, right there in the middle of that verse. I realize it's mid-verse, but that's the proper stopping point in the text. We've come to back to where we began in verse 11, right? "Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help." This whole section is bracketed with a prayer for the nearness of God, for the close presence of God, for intimacy, for deliverance from trouble. Well, did God deliver



him? From his immediate trouble, the answer has to be, No. But did God answer his prayer? Oh, yes, he did. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, Hebrews 5:7, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who is able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." How was he heard? How did his deliverance come? It's called resurrection.