

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms ***
*** Topic: Crying out to God * Psalm 22:1-21 * 4/6/25 ***

MAIN POINT

Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm that consists of two major parts. The first part (verses 1-21) prophesizes about Christ's crucifixion. And the second part (verses 22-31) prophesizes about the many blessings that would result from Christ's death and resurrection. This Psalm can also be viewed through David's eyes, showing us the fervency and honesty with which we should pray when going through difficult times.

INTRODUCTION

When you face difficult times, do you naturally tend to draw near to Christ, or try to push Him away?

In Psalm 22, David utters words that will later be uttered even more deeply by Jesus— "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is unclear what events in David's life prompted this Psalm, but it appears to be one of David's darkest hours. David expresses feeling abandoned by God and humiliated before men. He feels his circumstances don't align with God's promises to never leave or forsake him (see Deut. 31:8). This Psalm has much to teach us about praying when we are tempted to lose hope.

UNDERSTANDING

In today's lesson, we will be looking at the first portion of Psalm 22 (We will look at the second half of this Psalm next week). And we will be looking at the first portion of this Psalm from two perspectives:

- 1) The perspective of David having written this Psalm during a very difficult time in his life. We will look for lessons for us while we go through difficult times.
- 2) The perspective of Jesus while on the cross. During this Easter season, we will look to gain a renewed perspective about what Jesus went through in order to make salvation available to us.

1. FROM DAVID'S PERSPECCTIVE

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 22:1-11

How might the way people were currently treating David have presented a challenge to him as far as rejoicing in the LORD goes?

How might David's current circumstances made it difficult for him to trust God?

To David, God felt far off while wicked men felt very close. And they realized David knew God, as seen with their taunt, "He relies on the Lord; let Him rescue him; let the Lord deliver him."

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 22:12-21

What does the emotion David expressed while he prayed teach us about how we should pray?

Some of us may strive for just the right words in our prayers. But God knows us, and He knows our hearts. Like David, we ought to feel free to be totally open and honest with God in prayer.

*"The Psalms give us permission to tell God what we're really thinking and feeling."
Pastor Randy Hahn, Sermon at The Heights Baptist Church, March 9th, 2025*

What is the significance of David’s exclamation at the end of verse 21, “You have rescued me”, and why is this so important for us in our prayers as well?

When David laid out his circumstances in verses 1-18, he wrote in the present tense—these are pressures, trials, and persecutions he is presently experiencing. David had not yet been physically delivered from his enemies or his ailments and yet he could confidently say, “You have rescued me!” David could say this because he had turned his attention away from his circumstances and to the presence of God. “You, O LORD, don’t be far away” (v. 19).

Notice how this trial has affected David physically (vv. 14-15). How might difficult circumstances potentially affect both our physical health and our spiritual health?

God has built a physical response to dangerous circumstances into humans that we call stress. It releases adrenaline into our bodies and motivates us to find and pursue a solution to a problem. It also gives us a better ability to respond with “fight or flight” in a perilous situation. But we are not designed to function in this state of high alert for long periods of time. To do this will result in physical and emotional damage. We’ll now look at some thoughts on how to combat this from the book of Philippians.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8

In Psalm 22:20-21, David prayed that God would deliver him from people and animals that could kill him. Considering what we read in Philippians 4, why is it important to pray specifically for deliverance from things that are causing us anxiety?

So that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

2. FROM JESUS’ PERSPECTIVE

Psalm 22 is known as a “Messianic Psalm”, which means it is prophetic, specifically about the coming Messiah, Jesus. We know this, since it is quoted in the Gospels as it relates to Jesus. It specifically prophesizes about what He went through on the cross. We’ll now re-read the first part of this Psalm, while looking at as a prophecy about Jesus.

“Of course, our blessed Lord is in every syllable (of this Psalm). Indeed, the psalm reads more as history than as prophecy. The divine Sufferer seems to have recited it to himself when on the cross; for it begins with, ‘My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?’ and ends... with the word in the Hebrew meaning, ‘It is finished.’... But through those hours of darkness the Easter day is hastening to break in resplendent glory.” F. B. Meyer, Bible Commentary on Psalm 22

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO RE-READ PSALM 22:1-21

Looking at verses 1-6, how is this a good description of some of the thoughts Jesus may have had as He hung on the cross as He bore God’s judgment for our sins?

2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” And Isaiah 53:10 says, “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and though the LORD makes His life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”

We see in the crucifixion of Jesus the ultimate combination of two of God’s attributes. God is a righteous judge, and He loves us. Jesus didn’t just go through physical suffering on the cross. We can’t conceive of what He went through bearing our sin on the cross and enduring the judgment of God that we deserved.

Looking at verses 12-17, how is this a good description of death by crucifixion?

Condemned criminals hung naked on their crosses, and bled and dehydrated as they hung there, surrounded by Roman soldiers. What a vivid description David gives us of crucifixion in about 1,000 BC; and Rome didn't invent this method of execution until around 700 years later, in about 300 BC.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 27:35-50

What parallels do you see as you compare these gospel accounts and Psalm 22?

- Psalm 22:1 and Matthew 27:45-46: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- Psalm 22:7 and Matthew 27:39-40: "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults..."
- Psalm 22:8 and Matthew 27:41-44: "He trusts in the LORD, let the LORD rescue Him."
- Psalm 22:16 and Matthew 27:35: "They pierce my hands and my feet."
- Psalm 22:18 and Matthew 27:35: "They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ MATTHEW 26:36-39 AND MATTHEW 26:49-56

Some people may think Jesus was a good man who met a tragic end at the hands of bad people. And others might blame the Jews or the Romans from Jesus' day for bringing His life to an end. But what do these verses show us about His death on the cross?

Jesus voluntarily went to the cross for us. He could have called the whole thing off at any time, with twelve legions of angels at the ready to rescue Him, even as he hung on the cross, bearing its pain and its shame, while putting up with the taunting from the crowd. Realize it wasn't the Jews or the Romans who forced Him to go to the cross. He went voluntarily, to provide a means of redemption for us from our sin. We weren't present at the cross, but our sin was.

Great news! The story doesn't end here. We will continue looking at Psalm 22 next week, looking at the good news that follows what at first appeared to be bad news on what is now known as "Good Friday".

APPLICATION

What can I do to draw closer to Jesus during challenging times, so that I find strength and hope in Him, rather than becoming discouraged or resentful?

We need to keep our focus on Jesus rather than circumstances, and we need to spend time with Him in His word and in prayer. And we need the encouragement found in fellowship with other Christians.

How might considering the endurance with which Jesus faced the cross change the way we approach the afflictions and difficulties we might face (Hebrews 12:1-3)?

Hebrews 2:3 asks the question, "How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" **If you are not sure if you have accepted what Jesus has done for you on the cross, and are not sure He is your savior, or how you can have assurance that your sins are forgiven, talk to your class leader, or stop by the "Next Steps" desk in the concourse after class lets out. Taking that step is of vital eternal significance and is the most important decision you will ever make.**

PRAYER

Pray that your group would pray earnestly and passionately. Thank God for sending Jesus to suffer in our place so that we might be saved. Ask God to help us trust in His presence and character so that we will be prepared to face affliction. Pray that we would be able to point those who suffer to Christ.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 22:1-21

22:1-2 This psalm opens with a question about God's rejection, similar to other lament psalms (10:1; 13:1-2). This rejection is represented by the term forsaken. The same idea appears elsewhere in the psalm with God being "far away" (v. 19) and "hiding His face" (v. 24). In his suffering, the psalmist foreshadowed the Messiah; in His suffering, Jesus identified with the psalmist (see Matt. 27:46). When Jesus quoted this first line, He was probably calling attention to the whole psalm, including the theme of victory at the end.

22:3-5 These verses identify the psalmist with the nation of Israel and more specifically with Yahweh's covenant faithfulness to His people as shown by His deliverance of them time and time again (78:53; 107:6). Enthroned on the praises is unusual, picturing Yahweh's dwelling above the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (80:1; 99:1). However, in this instance it is the praise of God's people that is the focus because Yahweh is the praise of Israel (see Deut. 10:21).

22:6-8 Worm expresses humiliation (see Job 25:6; Isa. 41:14), an idea that is further developed with the scorn of the enemies. Shaking their heads was a physical gesture often associated with sneering and mocking (see textual footnote on 44:14; cp. 64:8). This disgrace was in direct contrast to the fact that Yahweh had kept Israel from disgrace (22:5). The thought that Yahweh would not rescue one of His own was a common assumption by Israel's enemies (3:2; 71:11).

22:9-10 The phrase over to You is in the emphatic position in the Hebrew text, emphasizing that Yahweh is the One in whom the psalmist has trusted since birth.

22:12-13 The connection between one's enemies and wild animals, especially lions, is found in other psalms. With bulls the point seems to be strength rather than fierceness.

22:14-15 The terminology in these verses conveys the notion of being drained of strength. A heart like melting wax is similar to the image of "melting hearts" in other contexts where the emotion of fear is so intense that all courage disappears (see Deut. 20:8; Jos. 2:11; 7:5). Dust of death implies the nearness and inevitability of death (see Job 7:21; 10:9) and is sometimes linked with Sheol (see Job 17:16).

22:16 The Hebrew text is difficult, reading literally "like a lion my hands and my feet" for pierced my hands and my feet. Other manuscript traditions read the Hebrew ka'ari ("like the lion") as a verb from the Hebrew root krh, meaning either "to bind" or "to dig." Digging could be synonymous with piercing. Christians have often adopted this reading and seen it as a prophetic allusion to Christ's crucifixion since NT authors quote so much of this psalm in relation to that event (e.g., Matt. 27:46).

22:17-18 Counting bones seems to be related to imagery where a person was so emaciated from suffering or brutality that his bones were visible (see 102:5; Job 19:20; 33:21). Dividing garments is an attested practice in Middle Assyrian laws where a criminal's clothes could be given to the prosecutor or to those carrying out the sentence. It was apparently practiced in other cultures, including Rome in the first century, as evident in the death of Jesus (Matt. 27:35; John 19:23).

22:19-21 The psalmist uses imagery from animals to represent enemies. All are repeated with the exception of the wild oxen instead of bulls. Their horns that gored in an attack are the main focus in that image. Dogs might not seem like a negative image because of their role as pets in modern Western society, but in much of the ancient Near East they were never domesticated and were always wild and ravenous animals.