

THE DEATH OF A KING; PSALM 22

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on
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"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering, which every man must experience, is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Intro

There is no Easter without Good Friday; there is no glory without the humility; there is no crown without the cross. Today we celebrate the glory of the resurrection but in reality, as a believer Easter Sunday is not special, it's routine. I did not say it isn't important, but it should be an everyday reality in the life of those who call Jesus Christ their savior! Paul makes it clear in **1 Corinthians 15** that the resurrection is extremely important to our faith, but it is truly irrelevant without the cross. In our Psalm today we see that this reality is rooted in the story of God; it is not an afterthought, or a rip-off from some other pagan religion. In **Luke 24:27** we see Jesus reminding His disciples that in their scriptures (the Old Testament), they would find Him. The 66 books of the bible are God's narrative about His creation, man's fall, and subsequently God's solution for the pain, injustice and oppression of sin on humanity. Although this Psalm has complete relevancy to our walk with God, it becomes evident that it has a more powerful image in mind. Let's celebrate resurrection Sunday with the Psalmist, and take a look at the brutality of the cross, and the glory of the resurrection!

From the Head...

The Infinite Anguish of the Cross

(Psalm 22:1-5)

Right away we see the Psalmist crying out in anguish. It is obvious that these are the same recorded words of Jesus Christ on the cross (**Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34**). Now, it is certainly significant that Christ uttered these words on the cross, but it has a bigger impact than just the words uttered. The bible was not divided into chapter and verse until many years after Jesus lived, so when Jesus quotes this verse, He is in a sense quoting or claiming that this Psalm is about Him.¹

David certainly had a fair amount of stress in his life, and no doubt felt abandoned at times by God. His words are truly understood by every human that has ever lived on this earth, but in our case it's neither final nor infinite. Jesus' cry on the cross has a greater anguish to it. In the Garden of Gethsemane (**Matthew 26; Mark 14**) Jesus prays with great anxiety to His Father, "Let this cup pass from me." But He also prayed, "Not as I will, but as you will." What's amazing is that, according to **Hebrews 5:7-10** His prayer for deliverance was answered, and that answer was "NO!" It says, "He learned obedience from what He suffered." WOW! The question is why was Jesus so frantic and anxious? David was anxious and vv. 3-5 tell us that He knew God had answered the prayers of his fathers, so he turned to prayer in spite of the feeling of abandonment. But Jesus does not receive the answer He desired. He prayed the hardest prayer on earth, "Not my will, but your will be done!" Scary! Do we trust God with that prayer?? Is He good enough and sovereign enough to handle that load? Jesus' death was a preordained mission in order to justify God in saving humanity from death (cf. **Acts 2:23; 4:28** and **Romans 3:25**). This was Jesus' mission; He knew it, yet in His humanity He became anxious. But for what was he anxious? The physical pain? The rejection of men? It was the **Infinite** nature of His act on the cross. His Infinite Suffering displays the extreme holiness of God, yet this phrase, "My God, My God" shows His infinite faithfulness, displaying His infinite love, and this mission would secure an infinite redemption. His anguish was not physical or even emotional (both of which will end in time), but it was infinite and eternal. The separation that was caused by the weight of sin was a pain that went far beyond the whipping, the thirst, the nails, the spear, and the burial custom.

The Physical Reality of the Cross

(Psalm 22:6-18)

Verses six through eighteen demonstrate a physical and public execution (see **v.14**). Being "poured out" is a metaphor for death (see **Philippians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:6**), which is something David had not yet experienced

¹ The Jew would have referred to the Psalm by its first verse since it had no chapter/verse or name.

(see **1 Kings 2:10-12**). It demonstrates the pain of oppression as Jesus was executed in one of the cruelest methods ever known to humanity. Crucifixion was a practice begun by the Persians in the 5th or 6th century BC that had been adopted by the Roman government, and was reserved for the scum of life. No Jew would participate in it, and no Roman citizen could be executed in this fashion. The process of crucifixion was brutal, and when you tack on a flogging, which was often included and was in the “passion” of Jesus, the physical pain and humiliation were inhuman. Though there are new attempts to deny the historicity of Jesus, most scholars (religious or secular) believe that there was a Jesus and that he was crucified for His “insurrection.” There is a lot of extra-biblical testimony to the methods of crucifixion that corroborate the biblical version. In our passage, we see the author describing crucifixion in gruesome detail, in spite of the fact that it was not practiced at the time of the writing.

The author describes himself as a “worm,” despised by men (v. 6). He is “surrounded” by his enemies who are hurling insults at him (**Matthew 27:27-44**), which reminds us that people will always mock our trust in God. They say our faith just “isn’t practical in the real world!” We see that his body is disjointed and melting away (v. 14).² He is dehydrated and thirsty (v. 15), and we are told, “*They have pierced my hands and feet,*” and “*They can count all of my bones.*” This has interesting significance in that it depicts the piercing of his hands and feet years before crucifixion was in vogue. There is no evidence that David was pierced in any way. It also says that his bones were intact, which coincides with the gospel stories that Jesus’ bones were not broken (**John 19:31-36**). Lastly, since crucifixion included the stripping bare of its victims, we are told, “*They divide my garments among them,*” which coincides with the gospel accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion (**Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; John 19:23**).

The crucifixion was a physical reality, and the events described by David do not appear to have happened to him in any real way. What he describes as how he feels when pain is upon him (and as we sometimes feel), Jesus felt in a real infinite way for our sake. There is no pain – physically, emotionally or spiritually that Jesus hasn’t felt on the cross, and his anguish is infinite for our gain (**Romans 5:8**).

The Glory of the Resurrection

(**Psalm 22:19-24**)

The prayer takes a turn here, and begins to describe God’s deliverance from the anguish. Though it isn’t directly relating to a physical resurrection, it begins to describe God’s faithfulness to those who “*love God and are called according to His purposes.*” The resurrection is the most incredible story known to humanity, and the ultimate answer to our own anguish. It is the supreme “Happy Ending!” Death is the great joy-robber and ultimately the destroyer of any real meaning. We so badly desire for something greater than what this earth can give to us. We have to lie to ourselves in order to create hope in the midst of this reality. These verses remind us that God hears us and delivers us as we trust in Him.

Because the cross has infinite redemptive value, the resurrection is just that much more glorious and infinite. It is with this final act that He is able to bring others into His kingdom. **Hebrews 2:10-12** help us understand the line “*I will tell of your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.*” The Hebrew verses show us that the context is salvation, and remind us that the one who was forsaken and suffered brings “*many sons to glory,*” which He does so He can be praised by the “Congregation” (the church/His people). The resurrection leads to praise. We would love to conquer death and have a “do over,” yet we know that this is not possible in a world where death is king. We can tell ourselves that there is “Better Place” after death, and that our beloved departed are “looking down on us,” but this doesn’t jive with the truth of the word. It is sentimental musings that lead to nowhere! This is why Paul reminds us that without the resurrection our “*faith is in vain*” (**1 Corinthians 15:14-17**). If Christ has physically risen from the dead, then the same is possible for us, and there is great hope in knowing that we will live beyond our physical lives, which gives our physical lives meaning!

The Result of the Resurrection

(**Psalm 22:25-31**)

The result of the resurrection is the praise of the nations that have gone forth since the time of Christ until this day, (**Psalm 67; Philippians 2:8-10**) and the subsequent joy that comes as a result of praising God. This was the promise of the Abrahamic covenant (**Genesis 12:1-4**), and it is the marching orders for the church after Christ’s resurrection (**Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8**). This unfolding of the gospel is seen clearly in the book of Acts, and in the epistles of Paul to the Romans, Galatians and Ephesians.

The resurrection is the culminating story of stories. It completes our greatest fantasies, and brings reality to every fairytale. We are created to live happily ever after; it is sin and death that have destroyed this reality and dashed

² Crucifixion would often pull the victim’s shoulders out of joint

any ultimate hope we would have. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is simply the most important event in human history. It destroyed the sting of death, and has freed humanity to do what we are created to do, which is worship the creator of the universe, having been made righteous by the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

...to the Heart

First, the death, burial and resurrection give us hope for personal transformation. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that resides in us (**Romans 6:1-4; 8:18-39; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58**). **Psalms 22:1** reminds us that God is holy enough to call for the death of His Son, but His love is great enough to allow it to happen. It is this act that is transforming. When we begin to understand Christ's work on the cross and are made aware of our sin and His holiness, we will see the glory of the cross, and fall on our knees in worship! **Second**, many of us have or are experiencing suffering, either physically, emotionally and/or spiritually, yet we are reminded that any suffering we face has been experienced by Christ in infinite ways so that our suffering would be temporal and for our good (See **Romans 8:28-29**). **Lastly**, while we may often feel abandoned, it is a feeling that Jesus knows all too well, and He comforts us with the fact that in the end, He is not far off and He redeems the afflicted and the prosperous, and brings them all into His "Congregation" for His praise!

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