

Meditation on Psalm 22

by Timothy Keller

Psalm 22:1–8

1 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.

3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.

4 In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.

5 To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

7 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.”

Jesus answered every one of Satan’s assaults with passages from Deuteronomy. As he was carrying the cross he cited the prophet Hosea, and as he was dying in agony he quoted both Psalm 22:1 and Psalm 31:5. Jesus was so saturated in the Word of God that it spontaneously came to his mind, enabling him to interpret and face every challenge. There are modern imitations of what Jesus had—relaxation techniques, stress management, positive thinking, mystical forms of contemplation. But nothing can duplicate it. God’s Word was what sustained God’s incarnate Word when he lived and when he died. Accept no substitutes.

Psalm 22:9–18

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.

12 Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

13 Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

14 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.

David poses a puzzle. The speaker’s hands and feet are pierced (v. 16), his bony frame exposed (v. 17) as he experiences fatal dehydration (v. 15). This is not

describing illness or persecution but rather an execution. Nothing like this ever happened to David, and the usual cries for justice are absent. It's as if this were a punishment that, though not deserved, must be submitted to. Jesus understood this psalm to be about his death. Here, then, we have something remarkable—a look into the horror and agony of his heart, described by Jesus Himself. Reading the Psalm is like standing on holy ground.

***“O wondrous love! to bleed and die,
to bear the cross and shame;
That guilty sinners, such as I,
might plead Thy gracious name.”***

John Newton, “Approach, My Soul, the Mercy Seat.”

Psalm 22:19–26

19 But you, LORD, be not far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

20 Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.

21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

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

23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!

Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

24 For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

26 The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever!

All becomes praise in verse 22. God has not despised the affliction of the suffering one—and in light of the cross this means that God accepts His Son's sacrifice (verses 22–24). The delivered servant now begins a new mission—telling the good news of God's salvation to others. Christians know that this is the mission of the resurrected Christ (Matthew 28:28–30). But the principle applies to us. Abraham was saved and blessed by God, but only so he could be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1–3). God never calls us in to love and change us without then sending us out to reach and serve others. We are blessed to bless.

Keller, Timothy. The Songs of Jesus (pp.37-40). Penguin Publishing Group.