

Summer in the Psalms Psalm 22

Introduction to Royal/Messianic Psalms:

Act One: Suffering (vs. 1-21)

Act Two: Song (vs. 22-31)

How to Pray this Prayer:

love.learn.live.

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West Valley Church
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Summer in the Psalms Psalm 22 – Royal/Messianic¹

If I say, “Melts in your mouth, not in your hands,” what comes to mind? And what else besides M&M’s do you know from that? So one simple phrase made you think of all that chocolaty goodness, right? Conversely, if I say, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” What comes to mind?

My point is that one simple slogan, or even a portion of a sentence, can trigger in all of our collective minds together a lot more information than simply one sentence. *That is exactly* what was happening when Jesus cried out the first line of the first verse of Psalm 22 as he was hanging on the cross:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Or:

“My God, My God, why have You turned Your back on Me?”

(Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34, tvt)

When Jesus cried out that one sentence, there was *enormous* meaning behind it that came to mind, and every Jew who heard it knew exactly what all that meaning was. Many of the Jews who were within shouting distance of Jesus hanging on the cross heard that cry and thought, “So *that’s* what Psalm 22 means! Now it makes sense!!” Let me tell you, there is incredible, powerful, deeply moving meaning to be found in Psalm 22, all of which is symbolized by that cry from Jesus’ lips quoting Psalm 22 verse 1. We’re going to learn some of that today.

But before we do, I want to back up and help you understand what type of psalm this is.

Today we are in the third Sunday of our sermon series called “Summer in the Psalms.”

If you are like most people, you’ve read a few of the Psalms when you were dealing with a particularly difficult issue, or maybe you passed by them on your way reading through the Bible. But many of us have missed the incredible depth and richness of the Psalms. Our goal is that, by the time we are through, you will have a greater

¹ Sources of research:

David Thompson, *Psalms 1-72: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2015)

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Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973)

Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985)

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ps 22

W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (Old Tappan New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973)

ability to pray, in greater depth and authenticity, no matter what you are praying about or what you are going through.

If you remember two weeks ago, I took us through an overview of the entire book of Psalms and how it is organized, and why it is organized that way. If you weren't with us, I encourage you to go to our website or on our church app and find that sermon and listen to it or read it – it will give you a context for this series. We talked about how...

Psalms is a book of prayers to help you obey God's Word and stay faithful to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

That's what it is going to help us do this summer and for the rest of our Christian lives.

But if you were with us you'll remember that we talked about the different types of Psalms – there are different styles or types that we recognize and can group them in. Different scholars have categorized them in all kinds of different ways. But for our series, we are going to look at seven different categories, or types, of Psalms:

One type is "**Praise and Thanksgiving.**" There are a lot of these, and we'll look at three of them by the time we're through with this series.

Another type we'll look at is "**Royal/Messianic**" Psalms. These are specifically about the king and the Messiah (we'll look at this today). Another type that we'll be looking at is the "**Wisdom**" Psalms. These are instructional, much like the book of Proverbs. Another type is the "**Liturgical**" Psalms. These are poems written specifically to be used in worship settings, and we'll use them in similar ways. The fifth type that we will be looking at is the Psalms of "**Lament.**" These are agonizing poems that can be prayed during times when we are really depressed or discouraged or facing dire circumstances. The sixth type we'll look at are called the "**Imprecatory**" Psalms. These are going to be very interesting to look at. These are angry Psalms that call down curses on people. The writers actually pray that their enemies' teeth will be shattered by chewing on rocks, and it gets worse from there. How do we make sense of *that*? Stay tuned!

The last kind we'll look at are the "**Penitential**" Psalms. These are poems of confession to God. They are deep and heartfelt and honest and authentic ways to pray to God and confess and find forgiveness.

The last two weeks we looked at praise and thanksgiving psalms. Today we are going to look at the "Royal/Messianic" Psalms.

There are two different types of Psalms that fall into this category and yet they are closely connected to each other: "royal," and "messianic." By "royal," we mean Psalms that are written about the king, and most of these are written by, or written about, King David. But other Psalms in this category are about the Messiah, King Jesus. In fact, some of the royal psalms have a *dual* role; they describe the King of Israel while foreshadowing the Messiah King.²

² <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1198-study-of-messianic-psalms-a>

So the “royal” psalms are pretty obvious, but how do we know which ones are the “Messianic” psalms? It seems like a simple answer, but here it is: you’ll know them by what’s in them.

Jesus himself talked about them. After Jesus had been crucified and then rose from the dead and before he ascended to heaven, he reminded the disciples about some of the things he had taught them.

“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’” (Luke 24:44, niv)

So Jesus knew that there were Psalms that were written about him.

It’s important that you know or remember that *all* of the Old Testament gives us a progressive revealing of the Messiah, and Psalms is a part of that. Jesus knew this, and all the New Testament writers also understood this to be true.

For example, there are Psalms that talk about the nature or character of Christ, and the New Testament writers recognize that. For example:

Jesus is called the Son of God: “You are my son; today I have become your father.” (Psalm 2:7; Hebrews 1:5, niv)

And because Jesus is God:

Jesus is worthy of worship: “when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” (Psalm 97:7; Hebrews 1:6, niv).

Another example is the theological importance of what is called the “**incarnation**,” or that Jesus became one of us. Two weeks ago we pointed out that Psalm 8 and Hebrews 1 are talking about Jesus being fully human and at the same time fully God. (**Hebrews 1:6-7,9; cf. Psalm 8:4-6**)

Both the Psalms and the New Testament agree on **the work that Christ came to do (Psalm 40:7-8; Hebrews 10:7)**, and how he is a **king and a priest at the same time (Psalm 45:6-7; Hebrews 1:8-9; Psalm 110:1-2; Matthew 22:43-44; Matthew 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 10:12-13; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:17,21)**. By the way, embedded in the sermon manuscript are all of these Scripture references that I’m telling you about, so you don’t have to write them down, and also that way you can verify that what I’m telling you is consistent with the Bible, and so that you can do your own study of it.

Besides these, Messianic Psalms and New Testament passages also write about how **Christ was rejected (Psalm 118:22-23; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:7; Psalm 41:9; John 13:18)**, about **his suffering and death (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Psalm 22:8; Matthew 27:43; Psalm 22:16; John 20:25; Psalm 22:18; Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:24)**, and about **his resurrection (Psalm 16:8-10; Acts 2:29-31)**.

Given how much the Psalms talk about Jesus, it is *impossible* to read through Psalms without hearing the Gospel! Amazingly, the Psalms teach us about Jesus with utter precision, considering that they were written over a period of 600 years, anywhere from 500 to 1,100 years before Christ arrived.

So today we are going to look at Psalm 22, which was read earlier. You are going to see that this is clearly a Messianic Psalm – without a doubt. It’s amazing!

Most of the Messianic Psalms focus on the Kingly nature of Christ, but this one really clarifies his suffering. Psalms 22 and Isaiah 53 are the most famous of the Old Testament that show us how much Jesus would suffer for us.

Psalm 22 is a good example of how the Holy Spirit inspires Scripture. When King David wrote this Psalm he was facing circumstances that were incredibly difficult and deadly, terribly hopeless and harrowing. It is rooted in the life of David *at that time*, and of Israel’s history. But at the very same time, it spoke of a *future* reality that would be realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Does that make sense? That is the case with most all of the prophetic statements of the Old Testament; they spoke to a *present* situation or need, while also pointing out a *future* that would hold the ultimate answer in Christ, and usually the author or the prophet didn’t fully realize that was taking place. They were being inspired by the Spirit to speak of *things* far beyond their knowledge of it *at the time*.

So while we can’t remove this Psalm from the circumstance of David’s life, there is also absolutely no doubt that this Psalm is about Jesus. “No Christian can read this without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion.”³ In fact, no Psalm is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than Psalm 22. The fulfillment of prophecy of specific details from this Psalm in the life of Jesus is absolutely stunning.

This Psalm is not a description of an illness or persecution; this is a description of an *execution*. And even though David wrote it, there is nothing that we know of in David’s life, from the Bible or from Jewish history that would *ever* come close to what is being described here. There is *no question* that this Psalm describes what happened to Jesus – both because Jesus himself quoted it from the cross, and because of the detailed description of a crucifixion. Interestingly, crucifixion was rarely practiced around the time that this Psalm was written, and the odds are that David may not have even known what crucifixion was.

So the Psalm is written in two great parts or two great acts, starting with...

Act One: *Suffering* (vs. 1-21)

In this section of the Psalm, the writer is expressing two things: one is that he is being pursued, persecuted, and tortured by evil people around him. But what is even worse than that, the writer feels like God has completely abandoned him. He thought he was very close to God, but God is nowhere to be found, especially when he feels he needs God the most. He feels hopeless and alone. He jumps back and forth in this section between writing about his own situation (lots of references to I/me) that become increasingly more intense, and at the same time several “You” references as he’s searching for God, each one with increasing urgency and immediate need (“*I am* going through this; where are *You?*”). So the section keeps building as the desperation of his situation increases and the isolation from God increases. Does that make sense?

Have you ever been at a place in your life where you felt all alone; no one was there to help you – in fact, the opposite seemed to be true – people were only there to

³ Kidner, 105

attack you and destroy you? And worse yet, you felt like God was nowhere to be found. God was not helping you. I have to tell you, I'm glad that **we have a Bible that is honest. It doesn't paint a phony picture of life that is always rainbows and unicorns and cotton candy. The Bible is honest about life – even life in relationship with God.** But I'm also very thankful that the God of the Bible knows exactly what that feeling is like; Jesus Christ has experienced this Psalm in relation to us and to his Father, God. He understands and experienced what you feel.

Let me quickly walk us through the verses in this section to show the honesty, and the prophecy, of this passage. It will help you if you have your Bible open to Psalm 22 as I go through this, whether on your phone in an app or in the pages of your Bible or one from the seatback in front of you.

Starting in verse one, the very beginning phrase is a cry that Jesus prayed from the cross: "My God, My God, why have you turned your back on me," or "Why have you forsaken me?" This has been called the "Cry of Dereliction," or "Desolation," or "Desertion." It rings in the ears and reverberates in the soul as one who is totally, completely alone.

It's important to understand though, that this is not a lapse of faith or a broken relationship. You might think that when Jesus prayed this from the cross it meant that his relationship with the Father was severed or he lost the faith to believe that God was there. Not true! It is impossible for God to no longer be present with Himself: the Father is God and Jesus is God. God cannot remove himself from himself. And Christian that means **this** is also true: it is impossible for *you* to be separated from the love of God:

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39, niv)

The reason David wrote this and Jesus prayed it was not a lack of faith; is because he was disoriented: everything he knew about God's power and protection was suddenly different. **Psalm 22 is an honest prayer seeking God, not a confession of a lack of faith.** That's important to know! And you can see that disorientation in the second verse as he cries out night and day.

In the next three verses – verses 3-5, David is trying to reorient himself by remembering what God has done for his ancestors. David – and Jesus – knew all the stories of God's deliverance of his people, told time and again through the Old Testament. This section emphasizes God's silence. David's ancestors cried out to God and were delivered by Him, but David and Jesus get no answer to their cries. God has proven Himself faithful in the *past*, but *now* appears to have forsaken David – and Jesus.⁴

In the next three verses (6-8) he goes into how bad things are. He feels the pain of people's attacks not just physically, but emotionally and socially. That's why he says, "I'm a worm." He's not describing a poor self-esteem or false humility; he's saying, "I'm being treated like a worm that gets stomped underfoot by people. They see me as if I'm worth nothing. I'm lonely and being treated as if I'm unvalued and

⁴ John D. Barry et al., [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ps 22:3-5.

unimportant.” Have you ever felt that way? We all have to some degree, and God recognizes that and doesn’t fault us for it. In fact, Jesus Christ himself experienced it.

I think it’s also important to see the difference in perspectives of God between David and the accusers. They both have a faith in God, but their perspective on who God is, is vastly different. David is longing for relationship that he feels like is absent. He desires to be assured that God is with him. He knows a *present* God who protects and sustains him. The accusers are mocking him because God isn’t there to keep him safe and make him happy. *Their* view of God is this: God is there to make us comfortable and happy. And since God isn’t doing that for David (or Jesus), they are mocking him. See the difference? What is it you seek God for: for his presence, or for him to make you comfortable and happy? Be honest in how you answer that for yourself, but be concerned about what your answer is. The people surrounding Jesus when he was hanging on the cross used these same mocking words.

Having reminded himself and God of the things God had done for the nation of Israel in the past, in the next section, verses 9-11, David thinks about how God has helped in the past in his own life. He remembers that God has been with him even while he was in his mother’s womb. Interestingly, David’s lifelong faith is the anchor for his soul that he needs, but also is the center of his present problem. Because even though David has that faith and experience with God, it *still* seems like God isn’t there; that God isn’t present with him now. His heart tells him one thing about God, but his head tells him a different thing.

The next section, verses 12-18 is a vicious and terrifying scene. His enemies are circling around him like a pack of dogs and lions, mouths wide open, teeth bared, drooling, closing the circle more and more with David – and Jesus – right in the middle of them. Then David describes something that he never experienced himself; this is pure prophecy:

“They pierced my hands and *ripped a hole in my feet*. I count all my bones; people gawk and stare at me. They *make a game out of* dividing my clothes among themselves; they cast lots for the clothes on my back.”
(Psalm 22:16-18, tvt)

There can be ***no other*** understanding of this passage except that it describes in vivid detail *exactly* what Jesus went through – nearly 1,000 years *after* David wrote it.

Finally, in verses 19-21, David (and Jesus) give one last, nearly dying gasp of a prayer for God to come close to him: “stay close; hurry to my side, save me, rescue me.”

Then, suddenly, everything changes: David concludes this section by saying: “you answered me.” (verse 21). This is the climax of the poem and prayer. Up until now he’s asking, “Why won’t you answer me?” Suddenly: “You answered me.” And then the *entire* Psalm shifts. This is a sudden and incredibly dramatic change.

Now comes...

Act Two: *Song* of victory! (vs. 22-33)

Suddenly David is announcing that he plans to sing the praises of God and his character to everyone in his community.

There was a tradition in Jewish worship that when a person had something significant to praise God for, that person would first make an offering to God, then he would gather together their family and friends and also the poor and needy and their servants, and they would have a huge feast that would last as long as two days. Like Thanksgiving – they’d eat, fall asleep, get up and eat some more. And frequently during the two-day feast, the person would tell in detail the way that God had taken care of him. That’s *exactly* the picture that David is describing in the section. And, by the way, that’s also exactly the picture of what Jesus does:

“This is why Jesus was not ashamed to call us His family, saying, in the words of the psalmist, I will speak Your Name to My brothers and sisters when I praise You in the midst of the community.” (Hebrews 12:11-12, tvt)

Jesus gathers us together: family, poor, needy, servants. He pours out extravagantly into our lives and shows us all the wonderful things the Father does for us.

This Psalm invites us to join in the praise. David’s praise overflows the natural banks of his religion that was exclusively for the Jews, and begins to say that *all* the nations of the earth – *all* people everywhere, Jews or non-Jews, Middle-Eastern, Anglos, Mexicans, Latinos, Africans – everyone everywhere – will have the opportunity to know God, to praise God, to Worship God, and to experience God’s deliverance. This was way beyond David’s understanding of the Jewish religion. David is announcing the Good News – the Gospel – of Jesus Christ, that is *now* available to us because of what Jesus went through, as verses 1-21 describe it! *That’s* why Jesus prayed this from the cross!

In fact, to put an exclamation point on the entire passage, David concludes by saying that people from the past and the future will know God:

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

That phrase, “He has done it!” is, in Hebrew language, exactly the same thing Jesus said in Aramaic as his last words before dying on the Cross:

“Jesus said, ***It is finished.***” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30, niv)

David, and Jesus, prayed for *you*, and for me. *Jesus has done it.* We can now experience the presence of God, and be assured of it even when we don’t feel like it. Psalm 22 is a powerful and sweeping prayer that takes us from suffering to song, from Lament to Lord, from Trial to Triumph, from the cross to the Crown. Psalm 22 is the Gospel message of the Great News of God’s love for you, and what he has done for you through his one and only Son. Three thousand years ago he inspired David to write about it, two thousand years ago Jesus did it, and today you can know it and experience it.

As if Psalm 22 weren’t enough, it is the first of three Psalms – a trilogy of Psalms – about Jesus. Most of us have heard about the famous 23rd Psalm that says: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...” and goes on to describe the wonderful ways that the Shepherd Jesus cares for us. Psalm 24 describes the kind of king Jesus is, ending by declaring, “Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty—he is the King of glory.” (Psalm 24:10, niv). This trilogy takes us from suffering savior to

shepherd to sovereign, from the savior's cross to the shepherd's crook to the sovereign's crown.

Have you been able to be able to see Jesus in the Psalm? Then it did its job as a Messianic Psalm.

You can pray from this psalm especially when things are difficult, and it will help you have faith no matter what you are going through. To begin with, maybe you are here and realizing that you have never accepted what Christ has done for you; you are just now realizing the extent to which Christ suffered in your place, for you, so that you could know and experience God's loving presence in your life.

Pray

Now, here's your assignment on how to pray this Psalm:

- Read Psalm 22:1-21. Ask for God's presence to be near you. Don't seek him to make you happy and comfortable; seek his presence alone in your life.
- Read Psalm 22:22-31. Praise God for what Christ has done in your life. Join David in praying that you will tell about Jesus to everyone you know, and ask that all the nations would worship Jesus.