

## **Nine Psalms: Prophetic Psalm 22**

### ***Preface:***

Well, People of God. Let me start with this.

I appreciate your attention. It's a precious thing to offer in a world that wants it, all the time. I don't know if you realize that you're giving a great and increasingly rare gift to God when we gather together. I hope that I can present us with something worth our attention. Let's pray for that, actually.

### ***Prayer:***

### ***Introduction:***

We're continuing our look at a handful of psalms. Each of them represents a typical psalm we see in the Book of Psalms, and looking at them offers us an opportunity to talk about the psalm itself, and what those types of psalms do for us, how they work in our world.

Psalm 22, in its first place, was a Psalm almost certainly written for group worship. It has worship directions in its subtitle, "According to the Deer of the Dawn." You know, the worshipful tune "Deer of the Dawn!" It's attributed to David, and it's a Psalm of Lament, a grief psalm, and as is usual, it points out David's faithfulness, how bad things are, how God has to do something about it, and ends trusting God regardless.

I've titled today's message "Prophetic Psalm 22," which isn't quite right, but at least points us toward the direction I hope we can go, which is that there are quotes from the Book of Psalms all over the pages of the New Testament. Psalm 22

and others like it show up more than once in the Bible.

Many, many psalms were understood by the earliest church to be affirmations of the special relationship God the Father had with Jesus or even stronger, proof that Jesus' life was following God's purposes for it.

### **Affirmations & Proof:**

Affirmations are different than proof, right?

I mean, any of us might read and memorize a particular psalm because it powerfully speaks to a situation we find ourselves in, and in reading it, quoting it in our time of need, we affirm the truth that the particular psalm expresses. Does this make sense? We quote it because it fits, and it fits because there's truth in the psalm that is as relevant for us in the moment as it was for its first author, for David or whoever.

Psalms are often used a different way in the New Testament. A speaker or writer will say that whatever Jesus did was to fulfill "blah blah blah," and the "blah blah blah" will be some quote taken from this or that psalm.

And these psalms are used beyond just affirmation of Jesus' character or some trust or trouble when it comes to living for God. These psalms are presented as promises God made of something to come that didn't arrive until Jesus showed up. They are treated as prophecies of the future that were realized, came true, in Jesus.

### ***Psalm 22 & Good Friday:***

If we remember Good Friday at all, we probably remember

what Matthew records as the last words Jesus' cries. We read in Matthew 27, ***"From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")."***

Jesus' cry here is the first line of today's psalm, Psalm 22.

Matthew goes on to write, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit."

Luke tells us that this last yell is from another psalm, Psalm 31: ***"Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last."***

But if we recall Good Friday, we recall Psalm 22. We just don't realize this.

### ***Psalm 22 & Good Friday:***

Psalm 22 reads:

***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."***

And Matthew writes:

***39 Those who passed by [Jesus] hurled insults at***

**him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.**

Pretty similar!

Psalm 22 Reads:

**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[d] 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[e] 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.**

And Matthew 27 records:

**33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which**

means “the place of the skull”). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the jews.

Again, similar things.

***John:***

Matthew, as he writes about Jesus’ murder as an enemy-of-the-state, never says, “this was done to fulfill what David had written in Psalm 22.”

John does, though. Let me point out some things and then, oh, summarize them. John writes, when describing the soldiers who want Jesus’ nice underwear, cloak thing: Called an ephod, if we care. Basically a slip.

***24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”***

***This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,***

***“They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”[a] So this is what the soldiers did.***

John communicates this fulfillment thing elsewhere. He writes this, about soldiers who go to break the legs of those

who have just died:

***33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."***

This quote about "looking on the one they have pierced" comes from Zechariah, but the quote about bones not being broken comes from a psalm; not 22, but Psalm 34: **"The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken."**

John writes,

**Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty.** Again, the passage of Scripture that is being "fulfilled" here that John has in mind is probably from a psalm, in this case, Psalm 69. **"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."** John may be thinking of Psalm 22 as well, though, and the passage there where David describes his great thirst.

Two things to notice here: John sees these Psalms as prophetic, as passages of Scripture that are "fulfilled" in

Jesus' death, come true there. And, secondly, remember that John is writing for Gentiles, who largely wouldn't have had the experience with the Psalms that Jewish Christians who read Matthew especially would have known. John has to point out what Matthew doesn't have to point out. As soon as Jesus said Psalm 22's opening line, Matthew's people would have seen the way Jesus' death touches on these events in the Psalm. Just like whole songs get stuck in our heads if someone says certain lyrics, that Psalm would have been rolling through their heads as they heard this story being told. It was certainly rolling through Matthew's.

So between Matthew, Luke, and John four different Psalms are leveraged as proof that what's happening in Jesus' life is not capricious, is not meaningless. It's meaningful. And part of the proof of how it's meaningful comes from the fact that what's happening isn't a surprise to God; it was foretold, it was predicted, it was orchestrated by the Father, the Son, the Spirit.

Whenever we read in the New Testament about Scripture being considered prophecy, about passages "being fulfilled," what we're reading about is how God led the early to Church to make sense out of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. It's revelation: The Bible made sense to these Spirit-filled followers of the Messiah in a way it never had before. Jesus made sense of the Old Testament in a new way.

### ***Unfulfilled?***

And, unusually, Psalm 22 reads:

***19 But you, Lord, do not be 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.**

Some people will point out that nothing like this happens on Good Friday, but it happens on Easter, and that Jesus' cry of Psalm 22--"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"-- is not simply a cry of abandonment, but also a cry of trust that God will see Jesus through even his death, because in locating his experience in a Psalm that ends in both God and the psalmist's vindication, Jesus is claiming that vindication for himself, too, even in his sense of abandonment. I'm in this camp, but not everyone is, and I still love those who disagree with me.

Those who disagree with me will point out, rightly so, that not every aspect of a Psalm was lifted up as prophetic.

### ***Jesus' Suffering & Triumph:***

But this points out that when it comes to the Psalms and how they are used in the New Testament as affirmation or proof of God's work in Jesus, they are used largely in two places: Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection. They are used

as support, proof, that God's in Jesus' suffering, and in Jesus' triumph, both.

(Of course, it's suffering that needs the most proof, because it was suffering--the Messiah's suffering--that seems to fit so poorly with glory and power and triumph.)

We've seen some of those that, like Psalm 22, point to his death, but there are those that are lifted up as promises for his resurrection and his triumph in general.

### ***Jesus' Triumph: Hebrews***

The Book of Hebrews, from the first moment we open it, is one long argument built on Psalms, and over and over in its first few chapters the author straightforwardly, matter-of-factly assumes the psalms are talking about Jesus and his triumph.

We can see this in Hebrews' argument about how Jesus is our High Priest--a metaphor that, frankly, doesn't communicate much to us, but is very, very persuasive when you consider Jesus in his Jewish religious context, and how he wasn't just some white dude from Iowa or something. I'm not going to explain Hebrews' basic argument; I did some of that on Sunday, February 7th, 2009. I checked. I'm sure you all remember it. Not the babies, I guess.

An example of the way Hebrews uses the Psalms in it's argument about how triumphant Jesus is:

***5 In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,***

***“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”*** [quoting psalm 2]  
**6 And he says in another place,**

***“You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek.”*** [quoting psalm 110]

**7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...**

Over and over in Hebrews, the author links these bits of Psalms together as proof of Jesus’ identity. He operates with the assumption that what Jesus did and said was anticipated by the Psalms. And the author of Hebrews is smart. He’s writing to a Jewish audience, shaped by the Psalms, and can leverage the Psalms authority in the argument he’s making. These things are considered Scripture, considered holy, and when they help people understand Jesus’ life, then they become meaningful in a new way. Even while making Jesus’ life and death and resurrection meaningful. Really powerful rhetorical stuff here. But it rests on the belief in the Psalms as special writing, holy, set apart. If I argued Jesus’ resurrection from Taylor Swift songs, only a few of us would consider that good enough, and I’d want to talk with those of you about how Scripture is different from other kinds of writing. I’m talking to you Matt Black. (He loves Taylor Swift.)

There’s a place in Hebrews, in fact, at the very peak of the

author's argument about how great a Priest Jesus is, where it doesn't read, "It was said in Scripture about Jesus that," but says this instead:

***5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:***

***"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;***

***6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you were not pleased.***

***7 Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in  
the scroll— I have come to do your will, my God.'"***[a]

The author says that the Psalm itself, written long before Christmas, is the words of Jesus, not David. Hebrews deletes the distance between Jesus' life and the Psalms, and I assume because the Spirit is present in both Jesus and behind David's words, simply says, "Jesus says this." You can't get a more prophetic understanding of the Psalms than to suggest that they are the words of Jesus to begin with. And this section is about suffering and triumph, of course. This "body that God has prepared for Jesus" is his resurrection Body. Hebrews continues with this passage, which is about as triumphant as you can get, and built on this mishmash of Jesus' life and what the Psalms say about his life.

Hebrews couldn't make the arguments that are made, if it didn't rely on the Book of Psalms as proof that what God was doing in Jesus has resulted in resurrection, triumph, power, and new things being realized out of old things, old promises being fulfilled.

If Hebrews says that the words of the Psalms are Jesus' very own, Luke reminds us, after Jesus appears to the disciples, how Jesus himself treats the Psalms. They all think he's a ghost, so he eats some fish to calm them down, and then, Luke writes, **"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."**

### ***Ending on Psalm 22:***

So here's what I want to suggest.

Jesus saw, in the Psalms, things that he knew to be true about himself, both his suffering and his triumph. If we really believe that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one, as Jesus says in John, they are, then it's hard to argue with the author of Hebrews who calls the words of the Psalms Jesus' own words. The authors of the New Testament, inspired by God, saw in the Psalms affirmation and proof that what was happening in the life of Jesus was meaningful, made sense, given who Jesus truly was. And even the truth of who Jesus was, God's Messiah, was supported and proven with psalms.

### ***Conclusion: Fresh Insight***

For us, though, the Psalms do tend to be an unknown class sort of Scripture. We have to have John's notes about how the Psalms are fulfilled in Jesus because without the commentary, we'd read right past all the ways Jesus' death and sorrow are anticipated in Psalm 22 and others. We need the author of Hebrews' Psalm-built argument, because if he didn't quote the way he does, we'd never consider that this songbook, this prayerbook, is sometimes God the Son's own

words about himself. I say this to encourage us, again, to lean into the Psalms, get to know them; if we do, we will discover more depth, more interesting stuff, and more connections in the story of God when we read the New Testament than we do now. I promise.

So this is a first point of application: If you're bored with the New Testament, or something like bored, turn to the Psalms for awhile. You will discover depth in the New Testament that you didn't know was there. It'll be like going back to the house you grew up in years later.

### ***Conclusion: Making Sense***

We could point out that the way the first Christians read Scripture was sometimes different from ours. They saw Jesus everywhere; they had to make sense of what was happening around them, what they had seen and heard, and those prayers and songs and poems that they memorized--the Book of Psalms--was critical to how they made sense of what God was up to.

How do we make sense of what God is up to? I'd ask if the Psalms help at all, but I wonder if the better question is just how often do we lean on Scripture to help us make sense of the stuff of our lives? Part of God's gift to us when we entrust our lives to God is that we get this great big story of what God has done to make our homes in. At best, we think the world is coming to an end because of the price of gas, and jigger that connection with a bad interpretation of Revelation.

But many of us still frame our experiences in economic terms, in political terms, in philosophical terms. We don't

link our experiences to what it means to follow Christ, and instead, see ourselves at the mercy of whatever is getting a lot of press in the news. I think a prayer life shaped by the Book of Psalms can help us make biblical sense of what we've got going on in our lives. How do we make sense of what God is up to?

***Conclusion: Psalm 22:***

And this is particularly true of the suffering and triumph we experience, it's particularly true at the ends of the spectrum.

In the New Testament, Psalm 22 and other like it are used by the authors of the Bible to give voice, provide language, for the suffering and triumph of Christ.

We don't spend enough time thinking about the suffering and triumph of Christ. We think of Christ's sacrifice for us, which is fine. But an attention to Jesus' suffering, and an attention to his triumph, positions us, I think, to grieve well and rejoice well. Does that make sense? If we paid as much attention to Jesus' suffering in his death and triumph in his resurrection, I think we'd be able to better deal with the suffering in our lives--grieve it, own it, expect it--and the triumph in our lives--celebrate it, rejoice in things, take pleasure in God's gifts.

We could probably ask how much we ourselves expect suffering and triumph or how often in our prayers with God we give voice to our own experiences of suffering or triumph. I've met very few Christians who express hopeful sadness or grateful pride well. Psalm 22 and others like it help us do this better than we do now.

In the end, today's Psalm is a psalm that is most important to us in this room because of the way it was understood by the earliest Christians. It was proof for them that what was happening around them wasn't meaningless, but full of meaning. God's hand was in it, and Scripture proved it. Knowing this Psalm and others like it, meant when they saw the death and resurrection of Jesus, they had the tools, the material, they needed to discover God in the middle of a confusing time. We ought not neglect the stuff they found so useful.