

Psalm 22: Suffering Servant



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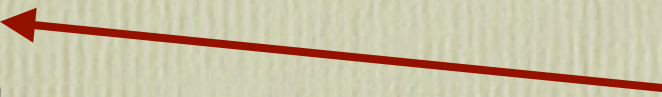
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Psalm 22 (21)

People are mocking the psalmist, who is calling on God but seemingly in vain. He remembers what God did in reply to the cry of his ancestors. He remembers, too, his own earlier experiences of intimacy with God. Desperate, he describes his situation, and pleads with God, promising to acknowledge God's response in the public assembly.

The psalm takes a sudden turn in verse twenty-three which begins a prolonged hymn of thankful praise. Has his prayer been answered? Or is this a profound act of faith that God who hears the cry of the poor has heard his cry and so God's response is certain?

Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 place the opening words on the lips of the dying Jesus, and the Gospel writers borrowed a number of expressions from this psalm in their accounts of Jesus' passion.

Part One. Tightening of the circle of oppression

(Mode 4. 3....4 / 2...171)

My God, my God,
why have you abandoned me?

‘Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’(Mark 15:34)

‘Those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you’(Psalm 9:10).

‘My heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not let your faithful one see the Pit’(Psalm 16:9-10).

‘Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up’(Psalm 27:9-10).

‘The Lord will not forsake his faithful ones’(Psalm 37:28).

‘The Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage’(Psalm 94:14).

God seems far away.

‘Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help’(Psalm 22:11).

‘But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!’(Psalm 22:19)

‘You have seen, O Lord; do not be silent! O Lord, do not be far from me!’(Psalm 35:22).

‘Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, do not be far from me; make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation’(Psalm 38:21-22).

‘They say, “Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver.” O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!(Psalm 78:11-12).

‘Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off?’(Jeremiah 23:23).

‘Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near’(Isaiah 55:6).

How far from saving me,
are the words I groan!

I call all day, my God,
but you do not answer,
all night long I call
and I cannot rest.

‘Do not stand far off. Trouble is near
and I have no one to assist me’(verse 11).

‘But you, Lord, do not stand aside!

O my strength, come quickly to my aid!’ (verse 19).

‘You have seen, Lord; do not be silent!
Lord, do not be far from me!’(Psalm 35:22).

‘Do not forsake me, Lord;
O my God, do not be far from me;
make haste to help me,
Lord, my salvation’(Psalm 38:21-22).

They say, “Pursue and seize that person whom
God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver.”
O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!’(Psalm 78:11-12).

Yet you, dwell in the holy temple,
you, the praise of Israel.
In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you rescued *them*.
To you *they* cried, and *they* escaped;
in you *they* trusted, and never in vain.

‘Consider the generations of old and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Has anyone called upon him and been neglected?’(Sirach 2:10).

But here am I, more worm than human,
scorned and despised.

All who see me deride me,
they toss their heads and sneer:

‘He relied on the Lord, let the Lord save him!

Let God come to his aid if God loves him so much.’

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account’(Isaiah 53:3).

Wisdom 2:13-18

‘He professes to have knowledge of God,
and calls himself a child of the Lord ...

We are considered by him as something base,
and he avoids our ways as unclean;
he calls the last end of the righteous happy,
and boasts that God is his father.

Let us see if his words are true,
and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;
for if the righteous man is God’s child, he will help him,
and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.’

‘Those who passed by derided Jesus, shaking their heads ... ‘He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to’ ... The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way’(Matthew 27:39, 43-44).

‘Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ... “save yourself, and come down from the cross!” ...Those who were crucified with him also taunted him’(Mark 15:32).

‘The leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!”’(Luke 23:35)

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you entrusted me to my mother's breasts.
Placed on your lap from my birth,
from my mother womb you are my God.

אֱלֹהֵי תְהָה אֱלֵי אֶתְהָה

Elijah Come!

'You, Lord, are my hope,
my trust, Lord, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you'(Psalm 71:5-6).

Stay close to me.

Trouble is near and I have no one to help me!

‘My betrayer is at hand’(Matthew 26:46).

A pack of bulls encircle me,
fierce bulls of Bashan close in on me;
for me they open wide their jaws,
like ravenous, roaring lions.

I am poured out like water;
all my bones out of joint.

My heart is like wax,
melting within my breast.

My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaw.

‘I am thirsty’(John 19:28)

You lay me in the dust of death.

In his pain he seems to see God, now close, but in the circle of his enemies, pounding him into the dust of death – the God who brought him forth from the womb (verse 9). This is his most excruciating pain. However, see later where those in the dust praise God (verse 29)!

Dogs hunt me; a gang of villains closes me in.
They tear at my hands and feet,
determined to take my life.

I can count all my bones.
They glare at me and gloat.
They divide up my clothes,
and cast lots for my robe.

‘The soldiers took Jesus’ clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier, leaving aside his tunic ... This was to fulfil what the scripture says: They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my robe they cast lots’(John 19:23-24).

But you, O Lord, do not leave me.

O my strength, come quickly to my aid!

Rescue me from the sword,

my life from the mauling of the dogs!

Save me from the lion's jaws,

from the horns of the wild bulls.

Part Two. The expanding of the circle of praise

I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

quoted Hebrews 2:12

‘I have made your name known to those
whom you gave me’ (John 17:6)

First wave of praise
from the Psalmist and his community

Praise, you who revere the Lord!
Give glory, all you children of Jacob!
Stand in awe,
all you children of Israel!

For the Lord did not despise or scorn
the condition of this wretch.

God's love remained fixed on me,
hearing me when I cried.

You are the theme of my praise
in the great congregation.

My vows I will pay before your faithful.

The poor eat and are satisfied.

Those who seek the Lord utter praise.

May they never lose heart.

- Multiplying loaves (Mark 6:42)

Second wave of praise from all the nations

All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord.
All the families of nations will worship
the Lord who rules over the nations.

‘All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord, and
shall glorify your name’(Psalm 86:9).

‘To him shall bow down, each in its place, all the coasts and islands of the nations’(Zephaniah 2:11).

‘Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For that is your due; among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is no one like you’(Jeremiah 10:7).

‘Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s’(Obadiah 21).

Third wave of praise
from the dead and from future generations

To God, indeed, shall bow down,
all who go down to the dust.

And I, too, with all my being,
if God preserves me.

My descendants will worship;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and will proclaim God's justice
to a people yet unborn:

‘Look what God has done!’

1 Peter 2:19-23

‘It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. **‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth’**[Isaiah 53:9]. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.’

1Peter 4:13-16

‘Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.’