

This is a very important psalm as we look at the Bible as a whole. This psalm is one example showing that the whole of the Bible, all the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, belong together. They don't make sense separated. You don't get the full picture if you have one without the other. You can't have the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and their story of Jesus, without the history of the people of God in Genesis. You can't have the letters of the apostle Paul, advising and encouraging, explaining and applying the New Covenant, without the laws and demands given in the Old Covenant. They belong together.

I heard someone give this illustration recently – it may have been at the Men's Convention, I can't remember (getting old!) – they said that it's like tearing an Agatha Christie murder story in half, giving someone the first half, and another person the second half – the first person knows Lord Ponsonby-Smythe was strangled in the library, but doesn't know who did it and why; the second person knows the butler did it, but doesn't know **what** it was he did!

The Old and New Testaments are two halves of God's wonderful story of salvation - you can't understand who God is and what he has done if you have one without the other. We need to see God's promises in the Old Testament and the fulfilment of those promises in the New.

I want us to look at this psalm in two ways, because it **has** two applications: firstly what it meant to the man who wrote it – King David; and then why it has deeper significance than David will ever have imagined - what it tells us about King Jesus. Let's read Psalm 22 together then.

Those of us who know Scripture - and especially the account of the crucifixion of Jesus as told in Matthew and Mark's gospels – will immediately recognise some of Jesus' final words here in verse 1, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" [Matthew 27, Mark 15] But I want to talk about that in the second part, in a few moments.

Firstly we have to look at David and what this Psalm meant for **him**, and what it tells us about **his** experience, because when David wrote these words, of course he will have had no idea of the significance of them through history, to that one event that was to happen over 1000 years later. Why is David writing this psalm?

From those first words – “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” we can see straight away that David is not having the best of days!

David writes in Psalm 27, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?*” God is everything to David. He trusts in God, he rests in God, he relies upon the help and strength of God to give him success as the King of God’s own people.

What is he going to do here in the situation he finds himself in in Psalm 22? We see him writhing in agony, as he tries to reconcile his beliefs on the one hand with his experience on the other.

As we read through the psalm, we realise that David is really in an awful situation:

i) How can he go on? He feels that the God he depends on totally for his very **life** has forsaken him. God is just not there for him. He cries out in prayer to God all day and all night (verse 2), but there is no answer from God. He’s gone, God has left him, David is on his own now, and he doesn’t know why.

ii) In verses 6 and 7 we see that David feels hated by those around him, he is despised and insulted. Not only is God not working for him at the moment, those closest to him are actively working against him. They mock him and abuse him so much, that he doesn’t even feel like a man any more – he feels like a worm – not even a strong animal! They laugh at his faith in verse 8 – which makes the problem of his feeling of forsakenness by God even worse.

iii) It gets worse in verses 12 – 18; he describes his attackers as animals encircling him to bring him down and destroy him – bulls encircling him (v.12), lions tearing at the flesh of their prey (v.13), growling dogs surrounding him (v.16), ready to pounce. He describes how he feels physically – poured out like water; his bones out of joint – he can’t move, his body is useless; his heart has turned to wax; his strength is gone, dried up; his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth – fear does that to you. How bad can it get?

His life is shattered, over, people are already dividing up his possession in verse 18. He may as well lie down and die (v.15).

David is at the end spiritually and physically.

But interspersed with these verses and desperate pictures of David’s state of mind, there are words of hope, David does not give up and give in.

Although his experiences at the moment are very real, he also knows that his God is very real – so there is a tension between his faith in God and his experience of life here.

David's God is real and he remembers truths about God, truths that he has experienced in his life so far:

Look at verses 3 – 5: He remembers that God is “*enthroned as the Holy One*”. God is sovereign. He is in control of everything that ever has been and that ever will be. God is the creator of all things and he is ruling.

David remembers that his people have trusted God for deliverance and help in the past, and God has not disappointed their trust. God is powerful to save. He saved David's people in the past – why should it be any different now?

In verses 9 – 11 he then remembers that God has been with him since he was born, God had a purpose for him and provided for him, as he lived and became God's chosen King. And I don't know whether you noticed that word precious in verse 20 – “*deliver ... my **precious** life from the power of the dogs.*” David has an understanding that in some way his life is precious to God.

We do well to note these words and experiences of David here. I want to suggest a couple of applications here: firstly that there is no depth we can experience, that God does not go deeper; and secondly that we find deliverance from our difficult experiences by remembering who God is, and what he has done.

Firstly, there is no depth we can experience, that God does not go deeper.

David himself says in Psalm 40, “*He (God) lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.*” No matter how desperate our situation feels at the moment, God is well able to carry us through and out the other side.

If we are Christians and know God, if we believe that we are his because Jesus died for our sins that we can have a relationship with him, surely we aren't going to think that God got it wrong, he doesn't want us any more. Jesus died for us – was all that in vain? Did he make a mistake? No, God rescued us from sin and death, he is well able to rescue us in any situation, no matter how dire.

Sometimes God allows us to sink so deep, just so that we can see how deep his love and his mercy is for us.

And secondly, we find deliverance from our difficult experiences by remembering who God is, and what he has done.

We're being bombarded at the moment with bad news on every front, aren't we – the economy is in a bad way, food prices, gas and electricity prices, petrol prices all going up. Lots of people are experiencing difficulties at the moment. Haven't we Christians got the message everyone needs to hear – God can give you strength and help you through. No matter how serious the problem, God can rescue, God can save.

Do what David does here – he remembers who his God is and what he has done. Remember that God is all-powerful and that his people have trusted him in the past without disappointment; remember that God has a purpose for you and that he has provided for you; remember that you are precious to God – so precious that he sent his only son Jesus to die for you. Power, purpose, provision, precious.

It has to work for us as a church too. People have left us recently, manpower is low, perhaps finances are a source of concern – look up and to God. Remember those things – God's power, his purpose, his provision and that we are precious to him – our eyes should be on God. His love, grace and mercy are more than sufficient to meet our needs. God says to Paul in the second letter to the Corinthian Christians, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness.”* [2 Corinthians 12:9] Are we weak? He can be strong.

Remembering these things brings a wonderful transformation in our thinking and our attitude to our experiences. Let's return to Psalm 22.

What we read in verses 22 to the end of the Psalm reveals a remarkable transformation in David's mind and heart. Where we saw him in despair in verse 1, we now see him in praise of God in verse 22 – *“in the congregation I will praise you.”* and he encourages all around him to praise God too, to honour him and to revere him (v.23). His vision of his purpose before God – his vows to serve God's people (v.25) – is renewed, and his vision of the future becomes real to him once more in the remaining verses. Verse 27 says, *“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow before him.”*

David has moved from focusing on his desperate and seemingly hopeless situation, through remembering God's character and goodness in provision, to looking up and focusing on praising God for what he has done and what he is going to do. 4

That's where we need to get to – no matter how hopeless our situation seems, no matter how helpless we feel, we can trust God to rescue us. That well-known verse in Romans 8 reminds us, “... *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,*” – God is working it out, we can trust in him.

Let's remember who God is, what he has done, what he is going to do for us as we sing 'The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want'. And let's remind ourselves that because of these things we can trust in him.

We've seen what David himself will have been thinking when he wrote these words originally. But as I said earlier, this Psalm is special because it is loaded with deeper significance than David ever realised.

In the Old Testament there are maybe 15 prophetic messages that is verses or passages about Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross; of those 15, 9 of them are found in the Psalms; and of those 9, 5 are in this one Psalm. There are very clear references to Jesus' death on the cross here.

We in our family enjoy finding out about our ancestors, and have traced strands of our family back to the 1700s. It's really interesting to find out what occupations they had, and in some cases how they lived and died. But imagine one of your ancestors who lived in the 900s, over 1000 years ago, knowing how you were going to die, and actually recording it in writing. That would be a miracle because most of our ancestors could not even write in those days. But if they could, how miraculous that would really be.

Here David is writing words which so clearly refer to the death of his descendant Jesus, some 1000 years later. If that doesn't amaze you, I don't know what will.

We will come to see the echoes of the words in this Psalm when we read Mark's account of the crucifixion in a few moments, but let's just draw out the parallels.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” As David felt that he had been forsaken by God, Jesus was forsaken by his heavenly Father.

He had to experience this as part of suffering the punishment for the sins man has and will commit. He went through total separation from God, his Father, for us – as well as physical separation which he knew as he lived as a man on earth, he now knew spiritual separation as he hung there on the cross.

He experienced silence from God the Father. We find it difficult to take sometimes – as David did – when our prayers aren't answered, when we feel God just isn't listening. How much greater must Jesus' pain have been as he suffered the silence of God. Jesus who came down from glory in heaven to death on a cross, forsaken by God, all alone.

Remember the crucifixion: Jesus hangs on the cross, nails through his hands and feet, we read in verse 16, *“they have pierced my hands and my feet.”* As Jesus hangs there in agony, you will remember that he becomes thirsty – this echoes verse 15, *“my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.”*

What is going on around him?

As people walked by, they hurled insults at him, verse 7 David says, *“All who see me mock me, they hurl insults,”* ; they mocked the psalmist's faith in God, they said in verse 8 *“ ‘He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord deliver him.’ ”* Likewise in Matthew's gospel we read of those around Jesus, *“He [Jesus] trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”* [Matthew 27:42]

The soldiers watching over Jesus cast lots to see who would get his clothing; David here writes in verse 18, *“They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”*

If there was only one reference here that could be matched to events at the cross, then you might say it was only a **coincidence** that there was a similarity. But to have so many verses here that echo what happened and how, surely it can't be passed off as coincidence.

This is God at work. This event was prophesied over 1000 years previously. This was an important event. Jesus' death on the cross as a sacrifice for my and your sins was the most important event in history and it was known in advance that it had to happen, and it would surely happen. The cross and what happened there was anticipated. The deep significance of this Psalm is only surpassed by the events that happened on that first Good Friday.

William Temple said this: “ ‘There cannot be a God of love,’ men say, ‘because if there was, and he looked upon the world, his heart would break.’ The church points to the cross and says, ‘It did.’ ‘It is God who made the world,’ men say, ‘It is he who should bear the load.’ The church points to the cross and says, ‘He did bear it.’

Prayer.

415 Come and see, come and see the King of love.