

Psalm 22

Suffering IS common to man. Shakespeare said, "Each new morn, the widows howl, new orphans cry, and new sorrows strike heaven on the face."

For the believer in Jesus, every trial of suffering is an opportunity to grow in the faith, to grow in our relationship with the Lord, and to see Him work in our lives in a uniquely personal way that demonstrates His compassion, His comfort, His tender mercies, His loving kindnesses, His grace, and His endless love. Only God knows what each of us needs to experience and learn in order to be "conformed to the image of his Son".-T.A. McMahon

Chuck Swindoll has this to say about suffering, "*While God is not the author of evil and He never prompts or condones sin, nothing occurs without His sovereign oversight. Others may choose to do evil deeds and God's people may suffer in the short term, but He will transform the evil intentions of evil people into opportunities for the enrichment of those in His care.*"

This is the "Psalm of the Cross." It is perhaps the most amazing of all the Psalms. It accurately predicts the events of His crucifixion some 950 years before the crucifixion occurred. It indicates a painful execution, something David did not suffer. The terminology, therefore, is symbolic of David's feelings. But this Psalm is wrapped in prophesy. These very events would be fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross.

Suffering is one of the main themes of the Bible. Jesus was a man of sorrows. The book of Genesis begins with an account of how evil and death came into the world. The book of Exodus recounts Israel's forty years in the wilderness, a time of intense testing and trial. The Old Testament is largely dedicated to the problem of suffering. The book of Psalms provides a prayer for every possible situation in life and so it is striking how it is filled with cries of pain, fear and anger, with blunt questions to God about the seeming randomness and injustice of suffering.

Psalm 22 is titled "The Deer of the Dawn." The first rays of the morning sun, announce its appearance before the light of the sun itself is visible, and the first rays of light are compared to the fork-like antlers of a deer. In other translations, it is called "Doe of the Morning." The words indicate the subject matter, the coming light of Christ Jesus. Psalm 22 is about David crying out to God to save him from the taunts and torments of his enemies. It is filled with the characters, the sufferings, the cries for help, the fear, and a rescue followed by the triumph through enduring faith in God. Yes, David was afraid and panicked, he certainly wasn't holding anything back, but he was crying and calling out to **God** during that time of fear. When immersed in hurt or sorrow, we too have questions and may cry out to the Lord. Or we might withdraw in silence like Job, who endured staggering losses.

Sadly, it is also true that there are people who only *find* God only through affliction and suffering. Their adversity moves them toward God rather than away. Troubled times awaken them out of their sleep of spiritual self-sufficiency, and they fall into a serious search for the divine. Suffering can reveal truth and we finally see not only that we are not in control of our lives but that we never were.

But no matter how we experience anguish, we aren't alone—God enters our pain and wants to comfort us. As we read, we hear David cry out, declare God's past faithfulness, then cry out again, he is trying to calm and compose himself in a time of great distress. In the last ten verses, David is thanking God for rescuing him, illustrating the importance of a thankful heart.

David cries, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Those oh too familiar words of suffering. The words Jesus echoed on the cross. The words indicating pain, suffering, and anguish at a level never experienced by another living being. He suffered for us. He suffered in our place. He said, "No, take Me."

When Jesus spoke, maybe He did so to reference ALL of Psalm 22, from suffering to triumph.

Let us now consider Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

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

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

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

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

All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

"He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.

From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

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

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

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.

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.

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.

All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

*But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.
Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.*

*You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all
you descendants of Israel!
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.
From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will
fulfill my vows.*

*The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts
live forever!
All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.
All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before
him— those who cannot keep themselves alive.*

*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!*

This passage opened with a cry, asking, “Where are you, God?” This cry is seen in other places in the Bible and the result is always the same, God is there, in the middle of the suffering. God is there, He in control and therefore, there is hope. David is desperately trying to soothe and reassure himself, and he goes from despair to expressions of his confidence in God. God has delivered him before, therefore, He is trustworthy.

God’s work in the lives of others is the basis of our trust in His promises. In his most challenging moment, David turns to God. He declares his trust and then goes on to describe the depths of his pain. Like a parent asking a weeping child, “What is wrong?” David pours out his heart. He uses the word “pierced” and it is where we see the prophecy. The prophecy is also seen as he looks ahead to the time when Christ will reign over the earth and all of Israel will be reconciled to God. Jesus’ suffering on the cross ended with an expression of accomplishment and finality.

He has done it!

It is finished.

We will end now in prayer.

Abba, Heavenly Father, Holy God,

Thank You for the gift of Your Son. Thank You for the sacrifice He made for us. You gave us life without end. You wiped out our sin debt. You have prepared a home for us. We are blessed beyond measure.

Father, but this is one of those times when our hearts are heavy, and the enemy is all around us. We are struggling. We need You, so we cry out to You now. Father, in this moment, I will pause, for those who are listening to have a moment to share their pain and fear with You.

Father, please let them feel Your peace settle over their hearts. Give them reassurance that You close the mouths of lions. Please help us find and trust in your mercy and goodness when the trials and the storms of life come our way. If we are prone to doubt, or we worry, grumble, or complain, may the Holy Spirit convict our hearts and remind us to be thankful for your promises and presence. You have given us the gift of eternity. Help us know that when You are silent You are not still. You are always working for us.

May we look beyond our pain for opportunities to comfort those around us who are suffering as well, so we can help hold each other up. We live in a fallen world, and although we cannot escape suffering, we know that You walk into the darkest night holding us by our right hand. We never suffer or cry alone. You are always there, waiting to be invited in to comfort us. This mortal life and the depths of our pain are temporary. We can trust You to do what You said You would do. You have given us heaven as our forever home. In the end, we have the promise of the cross and forever with You.

We can rest assured that the crown of life awaits those who love and believe in You, with You, we can stand firm in the faith, trusting that You are the One who has overcome the world. We are sealed in Your heart and there is no reason to fear. You never forget or lose track of our pain. Carry us through this struggle, Father. Strengthen our faith. Let us wait for Your answer. We give you our praise and fill us with thanksgiving that you will never leave us to walk through suffering alone.

In Jesus' mighty name,

Amen.