

*I sinned. And straightway, posthaste, Satan flew  
before the presence of the Most High God,  
and made a railing accusation there.  
He said, "This soul, this thing of clay and sod,  
has sinned. 'Tis true that he has named Thy name,  
but I demand his death, for Thou hast said,  
"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."  
Shall not Thy sentence be fulfilled? Is justice dead?  
Send now this wretched sinner to his doom.  
What other thing can Righteous Ruler do?"  
And thus he did accuse me day and night,  
and every word he spoke, O God, was true!*

*Then quickly One rose up from God's right hand,  
before whose glory angels veiled their eyes,  
He spoke, "Each jot and tittle of the Law  
must be fulfilled; the guilty sinner dies!  
But wait--suppose his guilt were all transferred  
to Me, and that I paid his penalty!  
Behold My hands, My side, My feet! One day  
I was made sin for him, and died that he  
might be presented faultless at Thy throne!"  
And Satan fled away. Full well he knew  
that he could not prevail against such love,  
for every word my dear Lord spoke was true!*

This poem, *My Advocate*, by Martha Snell Nicholson (**picture**) captures the profound truth of Christ's atonement. Martha Nicholson was a Christian poet from Washington State. As an adult, she suffered from four illnesses that left her bedridden for nearly forty years. In spite of chronic pain for most of her life, she used her experience to glorify the Lord, touching the lives of others through her inspirational writing. She's remembered for some of the most heartfelt, influential, and beloved Christian devotional poetry of all time.

As we continue our series, *The Gospel in the Old Testament*, we're turning to the book of Psalms, to Hebrew poetry. This particular psalm, Psalm 22 is what's known as a Messianic Psalm. Turn to Psalm 22:1-8 (p. 457). This psalm contains prophecies about Jesus, the coming Messiah and His sacrificial death. It will help us as we prepare for Communion this morning.

On one level, the psalm refers to events in the life of David, probably when he was being pursued by King Saul, fleeing for his life. Yet, there's no situation recorded in Scripture where David went through trials to the degree the psalm describes. David is going far beyond himself, applying things prophetically to Christ. To do justice to the psalm, we must leave David's experience and focus on how it applies to David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It describes death by crucifixion hundreds of years before that mode of execution was known. The details of the psalm were fulfilled by the Son of David, Jesus the Messiah, some 1,000 years after they were written.

This morning we're standing on holy ground. If you've ever wondered what Jesus actually said in the Garden of Gethsemane as He wrestled with bearing our sins (the Gospels only give a brief synopsis), you probably have it here. We see here a glimpse of what our salvation cost the Savior. Though His sufferings go far beyond anything we can ever comprehend, we get a view of the agonies He endured for us. The only proper response is to bow in worship and to submit ourselves afresh to do the will of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. As we prepare for the Lord's Table, we want to examine this **Prophetic Poem of the Coming Savior**. May our gratitude and love for Jesus be rekindled and renewed because He suffered all this for us.

**1. For our sake, Jesus was abandoned by God,** "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?*" If we're going to be authentically human in a real world, and not hide behind nice sounding words, if we're going to live life honestly before God, we must honestly ask the hard questions.

*Why? Why would God allow these things to happen? Where is God at time of our deepest hurts? How do we live with the burden of all that stuff in our lives?*

The “Why” question is one most of us have already asked at one time or another. There are times when we’ve wondered where God was. For some, the occasion may have been a tragedy like 9-11. For others, it’s a personal hurt, large or small: the death of a loved one, a failing marriage, a lost job, a wayward child, a crippling illness, lost dreams, failed ambitions. All of us are susceptible to the pain, anxieties, worries, grief that come by being human. We live in a real world – a real world is a hurtful place.

Unfortunately, we’re deluged today with a multitude of distorted views of God and religion. We’re bombarded from all sides with a feel good religion with little in common with the biblical views of being God’s people in the world. We’re told if we just have enough faith, we can escape the lot of being human. If we just believe enough, read our Bible enough, pray long enough, or praise God in just the right way, or send in enough seed-faith money, then God will take away all the hurts from our lives.

When you’re hurting like David was, like Jesus would ultimately suffer, you need a lot more than just “positive and encouraging.” The Bible always assumes we’ll continue to be human with all the problems that entails even when we’re totally committed to God. Christians are not immune from being human. That includes suffering, grief, hurts, pain, anger, frustration.

Psalm 22 begins with an insistent double invocation, “*My God, my God.*” This opening double invocation is unique in Scripture. It serves as a persistent appeal to the personal relationship that exists between the speaker and God. It’s an audacious act of faith that stands in strong tension with the despairing complaints that follow in verses 1-2. The shrilling cry, “*My God, my God,*” is followed by powerful complaints against God via this cry from the heart. We’ve all cried out to God, “Why?”

The first complaint protests vigorously the fact God has abandoned the poet. *Why have you forsaken me?* The second vents his protest because God’s saving power is so distant: *Why are you so far from saving me?* Despite his frustration with God’s inexplicable indifference to his desperate cry, the petitioner doesn’t renounce God. Instead, he invokes once more the divine name, “*My God,*” which encapsulates his relationship with God and is the sole reason why God should intervene on his behalf.

This is important. The psalmist isn’t expressing *fact* here; he’s expressing *feelings*. He’s articulating his emotions: helplessness, loneliness, futility. What we feel emotionally is not always the same thing as what we really believe or more importantly, what really is. This works both ways. Sometimes our positive emotions are just as deceiving. That’s why it’s not a good idea to base our relationship with God on how we feel, good or bad.

This prayer gives us permission to be honest with God about our pain. We don’t have to respond to the hurts and crises of life with some fake piety, denying our humanity. If we hurt, we can go to God openly with that hurt.

Maybe you’ve been told we should never question God. Yet, here’s the question in the mouth of the Psalmist...and a tough question, at that! To have real questions and never ask them for fear of being irreverent is dishonest.

You and I are surrounded by people who are hurting, suffering their own personal torments. Maybe you’re one of them. They somehow believe that to admit their pain, to raise their doubts and questions, would be to deny God. We must, along with Scripture, give these people, and often ourselves, permission to hurt. I’d like to proclaim as loudly and as passionately as I can that it’s OK before God and the church, to be human. Who are we trying to fool? God? He knows how we feel? The Pastor? Church people? Our neighbors? They all have the same hurts, frustrations, and questions we do.

Yet, notice what the psalmist is doing. At the same time he’s questioning God from the depth of his pain, he’s praying. Why does he address God as “*My God*” at the same time he’s asking Him where He is? Think about this – how can we ask God where He is if He’s not even there to hear the question?

On the Cross, Jesus knew His Father was there, as He cried out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* It’s unfathomable the Son of God could be separated and forsaken by His Father, yet that’s exactly what happened. It wasn’t just a feeling, it was Jesus’ reality. There was a moral separation of the Father and the Son, in the Godhead, in that dark hour on Calvary.

**2. For our sake, Jesus surrendered His humanness,** “*But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people*” (vs. 6). He calls Himself a worm and not a man. A worm (**picture**) is an object of weakness and scorn. Can you imagine a sports team calling themselves the “Worms”? The Green Bay Worms? We have the Giants, Bears, and of course, the Falcons but no “Worms.”

The psalmist is still dealing with his own perceptions, not with how things really are. This verse is sometimes used to support a “worm” theology that says people are worthless, insignificant, creatures whom God simply tolerates. There’s

no doubt the psalmist, in the depths of his despair, feels that way. But they're only feelings, not reality. Everything in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, contradicts "worm theology." Human beings are of infinite worth to God.

How about you? When you're suffering, going through deep waters? Have you ever felt about as significant as a worm? You're in good company with the psalmist here. We may feel worthless in our despair. But we're not! God loves us all, no matter how lowly we feel. There are no worms in God's sight. Just human beings whom He loves, who His Son died to redeem.

The particular worm referred to is the cochineal, which produces a scarlet color used as a dye when it was crushed. It was used in the Hebrew Tabernacle to dye part of the coverings and veils. Jesus was crushed so His blood might cover our sins. But from man's point of view, He was scorned and despised.

**3. For our sake, Jesus was ridiculed by His enemies,** *"All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; 'He trusts in the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, for He delights in him!"* Verses 7-8 describe the exact actions and words used by Jesus' enemies as He's on the cross. We find those same words in Matthew 27:39-43, as His enemies mocked Jesus' claims of trust in God.

Neither God's silence nor his enemies' mocking could shake David's conviction the Lord was still his God. David described the enemies surrounding him as being like strong, ravenous beasts. *"Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion"* (vv. 12-13).

The bulls (**picture**) were from Bashan, an area Jordan known for its fertile pastures well suited for raising powerful animals. There were many of them, he said. They encircled him, so the odds were overwhelming. He was in a vulnerable position. Furthermore they were poised for attack.

Like hungry lions (**picture**) they opened their mouths wide and roared. This context of violence leads one to conclude David is describing both emotional and physical suffering. He's being threatened by evil men who acted like wild beasts. They're described as encircling David threatening him with the sword and attacking him like dogs (v. 20), and threatening to tear him like lions and gore him like wild oxen (v. 21). He clearly expected to die (v. 15).

These dogs (**picture**) weren't like today. They were wild, filthy, scavengers. Much like coyotes, they were looked down on in the ancient world. The picture the psalmist paints emphasizes the cruel, filthy nature of those who surrounded him. But then he drops the figurative language and called his enemies *"a band of evildoers."* This idea of being surrounded is repeated to emphasize the precariousness of his position.

**4. For our sake, Jesus was executed by His enemies,** *"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death....they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."*

These verses are amazing prophecies of Christ's crucifixion. They clearly prove the divine inspiration of Scripture. This was written hundreds of years before crucifixion was even known to man. Crucifixion came about as a means of execution and torture somewhere in the East, perhaps with the Medes and Persians. Alexander the Great seems to have learned it from them and brought it West. The Romans learned it from the Phoenicians through Carthage and perfected it as a means of execution reserved for the worst criminals. It was a brutal, torturous, humiliating means of execution. And it's prophetic. The psalmist's description goes far beyond his own experience:

*"Poured out like water"* (v. 14) points to the excessive perspiration caused by the suffering plus the feeling of weakness as life slowly ebbs away. This was reflected in Jesus' cry, *"I thirst!"* *"Bones out of joint"* perhaps not literally, but the feeling of being stretched out by the arms as He hung on the cross. *"Heart turned to wax and melted"* is the heart struggling to supply blood to the extremities. *"Strength dried up like a potsherd, tongue sticks to roof of mouth"* is weakness as His life seeps out of Him; extreme thirst as His body was dehydrated. *"Dust of death."* He's all but dead. *"Surrounded by evil men"* at the foot of the Cross Jesus' enemies waited for His death. *"Pierced hands and feet."* Here David is describing an execution, but in David's day, executions were by stoning, not crucifixion. David knew nothing of a crucifixion, yet he writes so accurately of it. In Zechariah 12 the prophet speaks of God's own representative who's killed at the hands of His people. At a future point, the people of God will realize whom they have pierced and will mourn for *"the Son"* who died.

Andrew Bonar (**picture**) told of a couple wanting to join his church. When he asked of their conversions, they told how their small son, having heard the story of Christ's death on the cross, had asked them if it was their sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. When they were hesitant to answer him, he clasped his hands and said, *"O Lord Jesus, it must have been my sins that nailed Thee to the cross!"* Their son's prayer had led to their conversions.

“Count all my bones” from being stretched out naked on the cross. “People stare” because it was a public crucifixion. “Divide my garments and cast lots for my clothing” is a specific prophecy of the activity of the soldiers dividing Jesus property at the foot of the Cross.

This is just a glimpse of Christ’s suffering as seen prophetically by David 1,000 years before Christ. Jesus’ great suffering shows us how great our salvation is and how we should respond.

**5. Praise God, it ends in victory,** “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!” (vss. 22-23). While this psalm doesn’t say in black and white Jesus arose from the grave, several things indicate the resurrection took place.

First, the psalm begins with terrible suffering and desolation yet concludes with a powerful note of confidence. Then, in verse 22, the Psalmist says, “I will declare Your name to my brothers.” Jesus never called the disciples His brothers before the resurrection. Immediately after the resurrection, He told Mary Magdalene, “Go to My brothers and tell them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God” (John 20:17).

Add to that, the results described in these verses are things that resulted from Christ’s resurrection. They obviously go far beyond David’s personal experience. *Fellowship*, we’re now His brothers and sisters. *Praise*, if Jesus only suffered and died, how can there be praise? There would be no place for praise. We’d still be in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

But Hallelujah! He’s risen! We can praise Him! *World-wide evangelism* (22:27, 30-31). The good news of the risen Savior will be proclaimed beyond the Jews to the whole world, to all peoples, and to succeeding generations.

But there’s no good news if the Savior is dead, but there’s salvation if He is risen. The message applies to everyone who will acknowledge their need for a Savior. *Kingdom Rule*. Verses 27-28 “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.” This part is still to come. It hasn’t yet been fulfilled, but it will be soon. Jesus is coming back. He’ll return bodily to crush all opposition and to rule the nations with a rod of iron in His coming millennial Kingdom. Every knee will bow before Him. Just as the other prophecies have been fulfilled, so this one will be. You can count on it!

**Conclusion:** How should we respond to Christ’s suffering? First, I must see both the greatness of my own sin and the greatness of Christ’s love. It was my sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. His love made Him willing to go. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The famous Dutch artist, Rembrandt (**picture**), did a painting of the crucifixion. The focus of the painting, of course, is the Savior on the cross. But Rembrandt also painted the crowd gathered around the cross. Standing there in the shadow at the edge of the picture, Rembrandt painted himself! Rembrandt was a participant in the crucifixion!

That’s so accurate and we need to join Rembrandt by putting ourselves there. We must make it personal. It was my sin which put Jesus on the cross!

If you were raised in a Christian home and never did many of the gross outward sins many commit, it’s easy to think you’re not as bad a sinner as others. But the more you grow as a Christian, the more you discover how utterly wicked your heart is.

It’s not popular today to emphasize our sinfulness. We want an upbeat message that glosses over sin. Some hymn books have changed the words of Isaac Watts’s great hymn, so that instead of saying, “Would He devote that sacred Head for such a worm as I?” it reads, “for someone such as I?” We’re too good to call ourselves worms! Isaac Watts took that line in his hymn from Psalm 22. It’s what Jesus called Himself when He bore our sins. Don’t we want to be identified with Him when He did that for us?

We must be careful not to exalt ourselves against the Lord. If you think you’re a pretty good person and God just had to give you a little boost to get you into heaven, you won’t love Jesus very much. “He who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47). If, though, you recognize the truth that you were lost in your rebellion against God and He saved you from hell in spite of your awful sin – forgiven much you will love Him much. This glimpse of the cross should impress upon us the greatness of our own sin along with the greatness of Christ’s love. Let me end with two applications.

**Put the cross at the center of your walk with God.** When I focus daily on the cross, my heart is filled with joy and thankfulness for God’s priceless gift to me. The Cross keeps me aware of my own sinfulness, so I don’t trust myself, but cling to Christ. Focusing on the Cross helps me resist temptation as I remember I was redeemed with nothing less than Jesus’ blood. How can I sin against Him who so loved me? We tend to forget the cross, which is why Jesus ordained that we come often to His table in remembrance of Him.

***Put God's heart for the lost as the bottom line of your walk with God.*** He wants all the ends of the earth to turn to Him and worship Him. That means if I'm not actively focusing on evangelism and world missions, I'm too self-focused. I'm not in tune with God's purpose to be glorified in all the earth.

We have His command to go and His promise that *"all the families of the nations will worship"* the Lord (vs. 27). How can they worship Him if they've never heard? How will they hear if we don't give, send, and go?

Psalm 22:31 says, *"They will come and tell a people yet to be born about His righteousness what He has done."* Throughout this Psalm Christ's sufferings are described. We're to share with others who don't have our hope what Jesus has done for us.

As we read this Psalm, we're reminded that no matter how difficult our struggle even to death, we're not without God. This morning we have a physical reminder of the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus, as we celebrate Communion together.

Placing your faith and trust in Christ is a journey. There will be ups and downs and unexpected turns along the way. Remember the journey with Christ is full and complete in spite of the dark valleys we face.

As we share in Communion, let us remember Christ's victory over our sin and death. We celebrate His gift of grace. As we do, let me invite all Christians present to partake with us because, even if you're not a member of this church...if you are a Christian...if you are His...this is Yours.