

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 22 – Part II

#### “The Lament – Psalm 22:1-21”

#### Opening Prayer

#### ***Read Psalm 22:1-21***

#### Overview

Here is the overview which I have copied over from the first lesson of Psalm 22:

Psalm 22 is a lament psalm. Yet, it is not just a lament psalm, it is *the* lament psalm. No other psalm or passage of Scripture comes close to the depths of pain and anxiety expressed in this psalm. Its depth is furthered when we consider its messianic tones which will be discussed below in the section, “Jesus and Psalm 22”. Even if the psalm were to stand alone apart from its connection to Good Friday events (which I admit is hardly possible), it is a psalm of deep despair and pain. The very structure of the psalm demonstrates one who is wrestling with their situation and what God can do. The psalmist, presumably David, sets up an alternating pattern within the complaint portion of the psalm that fluctuates between evaluation of his own circumstance and God’s ability to help. The pattern looks like this:

22:1-2; 6-8; 12-18 – are all focused on the laments of the psalmist

22:3-5; 9-11; 19-21 – are all focused on the ability of God to help.

Lying beneath that alternating pattern of lament is the primary difficulty of the psalmist and that is the perceived absence of God in the time of the psalmist’s difficulty. God’s “absence” is brought forward in 22:1, 11, and 19. God has forsaken or is far off from the psalmist when He is needed most!

In addition to this overview you may want to review “Jesus and Psalm 22” from the first lesson.

In today’s lesson we will cover the lament which takes up 2/3 of the Psalm, verses 1-21.

## Outline/Structure

- I. Introduction – Lesson 1
  
- II. The Complaints – Lesson 2
  - a. Complaint against God – 22:1-2
  - b. Reasons for trusting God – 22:3-5
  - c. Complaint against self and others – 22:6-8
  - d. Reasons for trusting God – 22:9-10
  - e. Petition – 22:11
  - f. Complaint against distant enemies – 22:12-15
  - g. Complaint against domestic enemies – 22:16-18
  - h. Petition – 22:19-21
  
- III. The Celebration – Lesson 3
  - a. First call to praise – 22:22-24
  - b. Second call to praise – 22:25-26
  - c. Declarations of worship – 22:27-31

## **The Complaints – Lesson 2**

### Complaint against God – 22:1-2

- :1 - “forsaken” – This verse is of course one of the seven words that Jesus utters from the cross. **Matthew 27:46**. Often people have talked about this as when God turned His back on Jesus or when God abandoned Him to death. However, such assertions pose big theological problems when it comes to the will and purpose of the Trinity which are always united. Instead we will understand Christ’s words from the cross best when we think of them through the “substitutionary atonement.” **Read 2 Corinthians 5:21**  
*What does Corinthians tell us happened to Jesus at the cross?*  
*How does this make His “forsakenness” more understandable?<sup>1</sup>*
- “groaning” – This is a deep sadness that almost feels hopeless. **Read Job 3:24**.  
*What precipitates Job’s groaning?*  
*Do you find this true for yourself?*
- 2: - “but have no rest” – The Hebrew translated literally would be “there is no silence in me”. That is a very apt description of the soul that groans and is

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<sup>1</sup> “The desertion of Christ by God has therefore fitly been described as the feeling of divine wrath on account of the sins of men imputed to Him and so the cry that God has forsaken Him expresses a very real fact and part of his suffering.” Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol 2, page 310-311

weighted down with sorrow. The silence of the night is met and overwhelmed by the overworked and constantly thinking mind.

### Reasons for Trusting God – 22:3-5

:3-5 - Recall the alternating pattern talked about in the overview. This is the first of the other part of that pattern: a focus on God and His ability to help. Proper prayer recognizes who God is and identifies in His character why there should be hope.

#### ***Read Isaiah 57:14-19***

*What are the similarities between this Isaiah passage and Psalm 22?*

*How do these verses from Isaiah describe God?*

*What hope can we find in these verses from Isaiah?*

*What is the end result in us of God helping us?*

- “enthroned on the praises of Israel” (v.3) – Every other religion of ancient time had an icon that was seen to be the embodiment of the god it represented. Thus there were Asherah poles and Baals. Yet the God of Israel commanded no icon or statue to be built representing Him, because God was to be present through words. Thus the praises of Israel “embody” the Lord and “enthroned” Him as they sing of what He has done.

### Complaint Against Self and Others – 22:6-8

:6 - **“worm”** – The comparison that makes the speaker a worm is the comparison to God. We have alternated back to a self-evaluation in the psalm. We see similar language calling man nothing more than a worm in a few other places in Scripture. ***Read Job 25:1-6; Isaiah 41:14***

:7-8 - In the first lesson on Psalm 22 we made the connection between this verse and the way the crowds treated Jesus on the day of His crucifixion.

- “they separate with the lip” or “make mouths at me”. The NIV has “hurl insults” but that is more an interpretation than a translation and it leaves the idiom out. The main idea being that there are those who take pleasure in my embarrassment and difficulty.

*How have you experienced something similar?*

## Reasons for Trusting God – 22:9-10

:9-10 - Once again we have moved to the other side of the pattern and look to God rather than to the complaint of the psalmist.

- “From my mother’s womb” – Our Lord desires a relationship with us before we are born. Indeed, since as **Romans 10** tells us faith comes through hearing, it is possible for the Word of God to begin to work on a baby in the womb. **Read Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:39-45**

*Why does the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leap?*

## Petition – 22:11

:11 - Here we have the prayer for the reversal of the condition expressed in verse 1, that the psalmist was “forsaken”. This petition is repeated in verse 19. The Lord made the promise to be with us and there is no greater gift that we can give someone in their time of need than our presence. **Read Job 2:11-13**

*What did Job’s friends do?*

*How long did they just sit with him?*

*Why did they not speak?*

## Complaint against distant enemies – 22:12-15

:12 - “bulls of Bashan” – Bashan was known as a place where strong cows/bulls were found. It was located on the east side of the Jordan River. **See Amos 4:1; Ezekiel 39:18**

- There is a literary device used involving the animals here in Psalm 22. In these verses(12-16), the order of animals is bulls, lions, dogs. In verses 20-21 the order is reversed to dogs, lions, bulls(wild oxen).

:14 - This verse describes the physical state of one who is emotionally exhausted. Since we tie Psalm 22 so strongly to the crucifixion, we may be tempted to look at this verse and find the physical ailment it is referring to. Yet, the key phrase “my heart is like wax” shows us that while there are physical effects happening, it is an internal difficulty that has brought them about. We have all had the experience of being through an emotional difficulty that has actually made us physically exhausted.

:15 - “You lay me in the dust of death” – the psalmist’s condition leads him to believe that he is close to death and that God has a hand in bringing it about. There is a finality of the death in this line and it leads to the next section of those evildoers and dogs surrounding a dead corpse.

## Complaint against Domestic Enemies – 22:16-18

:16 - “pierced” – There is a textual variant in regard to this Hebrew word.<sup>2</sup> Here the variant would be a choice between “pierced” and “lion”. Contextually pierced makes the most sense and that would fall in line with the messianic character of the psalm. Yet if that were absolutely the right reading one would expect Matthew to make use of this particular verse as fulfilled- in the crucifixion, but there is not mention of it. In the end, the variant doesn’t affect the meaning of the overall passage.

:17-18 - “I can count all my bones” – The psalmist’s agony and emotional turmoil has been so costly to him that he is emaciated. One gets a similar picture to prisoners of war who are finally liberated. To look at them you can almost count their bones.

- “they divide my garments” – This is of course fulfilled as the soldiers cast lots for the clothing of Jesus, not wanting to tear the tunic which was of one solid piece.

## Petition -22:19-21

:19 - Here we have the repeated petition which is the main purpose of the psalm. It is a call for the return into God’s presence.

- “hasten to my help” – This is an almost formulaic expression calling upon God and is found in other psalms. (**40:13; 70:1; 71:12**) It is also a part of the opening versicles of the Order of Matins:

Pastor: Make haste, O God, to deliver me;

People: Make hast to help me, O Lord.

*Why is it important that we note how much of our worship mirrors and continues that which was a part of the prayer and worship of God for all time?*

:20-21- “sword” – Here we have the first clue that David may be speaking of a military moment, although nothing else in the psalm speaks this way.

- “horns of a wild oxen” – The expression is meant to convey the fierceness of the one being compared. **Read Numbers 23:22; 24:8**

*Whose fierceness is depicted in the Numbers passages?*

**Read Deuteronomy 33:17. Who is being depicted here?**

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<sup>2</sup> A textual variant is a place in the Scriptures where the word is uncertain for one reason or another. Often the words are very close in spelling and it is difficult to discern from early manuscripts which word or even letter is clearly meant.

### Summary

Psalm 22:1-21 is the deepest lament found in the Old Testament. It carries with it the sorrow of David, but more than that the sorrow of Good Friday. Its messianic character is undeniable. It brings us to a contemplation of the suffering, both physical and emotional, of our Savior on the cross. The Tenebrae service of Good Friday gives us this time of contemplation leading to the exit in silent darkness.

How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!  
How doth Thy face now languish that once was bright as morn!  
Grim death, with cruel rigor, hath robbed Thee of Thy life;  
Thus thou has lost Thy vigor, Thy strength, in this sad strife.  
(O Sacred Head, Now Wounded – LSB #450, v.2)

Closing Prayer