

The Suffering King

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Date: 26 September 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. So, in our overview of Book 1 of the Psalms, we are rushing on to Psalm 22. How did we get here from Psalm 8 last week? Well, we started, didn't we, with God's Word in Psalm 1, and then God's King in Psalm 2. Then we saw the King's tearful confidence in Psalm 6, and the King's cosmic hope in Psalm 8. And then the Psalms that we've moved over, between 9 and 17, we get mainly more Psalms and songs of confidence in the Lord in the face of great enemies. And then like a kind of bookend or a closing bracket of this section, we get Psalm 18, God's King, and Psalm 19, God's Word. I've put together a little slide that kind of depicts that. I find it helpful to see it laid out like this, to see just how carefully the Psalms were put together, the structure of them, these two bookends or brackets on either side and in the middle, this climactic hope of a world that knows the Lord. And we see this kind of structure come through again, looking at the next slide, in the Psalms that we look at this evening. This section of the book is sometimes said, structures tell stories. Well, writers have pointed out a kind of pyramid structure between these Psalms. If Psalms 20 and 21 deal very closely with David's kingship, and Psalms 23 and 24 deal very closely with God's kingship.

Well, between them, we get this kind of poetic peak in Psalm 22, where David's kingship and God's kingship meet together. So what's the story that these Psalms are here to tell? Well, they're Psalms that take us deeper into the relationship between the two kings.

The two crowns, the divine king, God, the Lord, and the human king, David, the Messiah, who wrote this Psalm. And at the peak, at Psalm 22, what we see in that relationship is shocking, because we discover that at the high point, so to speak, of that relationship is the suffering of God's faithful king. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Wouldn't that count as the low point, we wonder, of that partnership? David is so lonely. God is so far away. Can he even hear him?

Why has God left him? Well, what we see unfolding here in this Psalm is something that doesn't come properly into focus until long after the Psalms are written. It's only once he had lived, died, and risen from the dead that our King Jesus could point to the Psalms and say to his followers, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

We heard Jesus himself use these opening words of Psalm 22 from the cross, didn't we? And so here, as David speaks, his words give us a window into the suffering of Christ as he bled and died.

[3 : 3 7] And the big question for us is, what then was the relationship between God and his king, father and son, as Jesus breathed his last? Stretching to think about.

But in the end, we see that our King Jesus trusts in God as he suffered, and his praise of God in his life are what make it possible for us to trust and to praise God ourselves as his people this evening. So firstly then, let's see the dilemma at the heart of the King's suffering. See the dilemma. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? They're heartbreaking questions, aren't they? David feels utterly abandoned.

And it's made worse because of what David calls God. Notice, my God, my God. In verse 2, God is not a God to him somewhere out there. He is his God. From before the day he was born, he says in verse 10, from my mother's womb, you have been my God. His whole life, he's never known a day when he could not say to God, I am yours, you are mine. But on this day, God is nowhere to be found.

Never before has he felt so alone. Why is he so far, so far from hearing his cries? He feels out of God's earshot, out of God's sight. Out of sight, he thinks. Out of mind. Day and night, verse 2, he gets no response.

God must have walked away and shut the door. But then, notice verse 3, David turns. Yet, yet you are enthroned. It's the first of three times that his thoughts kind of pivot in this way. We get it again in verse 6, but. And then again in verse 9, yet. And the impression is kind of his thoughts swinging

back and forth between what he feels to be true in the moment and what he knows is true.

[5 : 56] Between what he's going through right now and the unchanging facts. Because he knows that even in his suffering, God is acting out of character, so to speak. See that in verse 3? 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. That's how the story goes, he says. For generations back, a thousand years, David's ancestors, well they cried out and they got an answer. They trusted and they weren't let down.

They were not put to shame. They were not put to shame. That's what God is like, he says. Ever faithful, quick to deliver, true to his word. We can trust him to the end. He loves to rescue his people when we call out to him. So in his suffering, David still can recognize God as gracious and glorious. You are enthroned as the Holy One who saves, who rescues. And we know how easy it is, don't we, to lose sight of that in our suffering, in our own difficulties, our hardships. They fill up our field of vision. They squeeze the Lord out to the periphery. And so what David does here is good for us to learn from. He doesn't let the way he feels in the moment dictate what he thinks about God.

It's as if his heart is leading him down one track, but before he gets too far, his brain hops into the driving seat and shifts gear. Yet, yet I know what God is like. I know who he is. He thinks back on the history of his people. He brings God's goodness, his character back into focus.

And it's really easy to say, you know, we should do that. Many of us know that's far easier to say than to do. And most of the time when I've seen that work, somebody going down a bad road and kind of shifting gear, it's actually one person doing that for another person, for someone else.

It's the friend who says, yes, but. But remember who God is. Remember his character, his ways.

Let's work through it together. Where you're at right now, well, it's not where God's been forever.

[8 : 39] But even though there are things we can learn from David here, there are different things going on for him. He seems to be in quite a different place because he swivels again. Look, verse six, 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 head. He trusts in the Lord, they say. Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him. See, what he's going through doesn't only feel different. It is different. History teaches us that whenever God's people have trusted him and cried out to him, he has saved and delivered them. But here is David trusting and crying, and the only reply he gets is the insults of his enemies. He trusts the law, if they say. Let him come to the rescue. They point out the gap between his trust and his trouble. Because if he was really trusting, if God really loved him, well, they think, wouldn't God rescue him? That's how the story goes, isn't it? See, David's experience is so out of sync, so against the grain of history that he feels almost subhuman, almost subhuman, a worm, not a man, he says. So what's going on? Why has God forsaken him?

Why is he suffering out of God's sight? Well, he's clearly not suffering with his people, is he? They have been rescued. He is not. No, his suffering is so unique because he is suffering as their king, as their royal representative. He is suffering for his people, on behalf of his people. People through the ages could trust God and be saved because one day their king would call to God and not be saved.

They were not left and forsaken by God because their royal head and representative one day would be. God is so out of character. David's suffering is so out of sync because he is playing here the part of the Messiah, suffering for the sins of his people. And of course, when we hear these words again from the cross, we see that David was only ever the understudy, hoarding the place for the one who came to die for our sins. With nails through his hands and a crown of thorns on his head. My God, he said, my God, why have you forsaken me? Yet despite his suffering for the sins of others, cursed by God, he remains a faithful king. Despite what his enemies say, he is the supreme believer, as one writer puts it, for even without an answer to the dilemma of his suffering, well, he swivels back to God in faith, verse 9. 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. His faith does not skip a beat. He's trusted from his birth, and he still trusts. God has been his God from the womb, and he still is.

[12 : 16] See, God is not being vengeful or vindictive. He has not ultimately forsaken his king. Because in dealing with his people's sins through the suffering of the king, he is proving himself

utterly trustworthy, faithful to his promises to save, to deliver, and rescue. You rethought before about how our trust often is shaken. It goes up and down. It can be in trouble when we suffer.

But our king, Jesus Christ, trusted perfectly in God through his suffering, even to his death. And because he lived and suffered and died as our faithful king, the one whose faith never wavered, we are saved. Because his trust in God never failed, because he sinlessly suffered for our sins, for our failures. He was forsaken so that those who turned to him would never be.

He was not rescued so that whoever calls on his name always will be. See, the dilemma of the king's suffering is that he was suffering for our salvation.

And so he is altogether worthy of our trust. And where this psalm takes us now, really, is even deeper into that truth, into the eye of the storm, so to speak, into the suffering of the sinless one, by inviting us, secondly, to recognize the sufferer.

To recognize the sufferer. Verses 12 to 21 describe, don't they, the incredible suffering of the king. Verse 12, he's encircled by bulls.

[14:13] 13, he's threatened by lions. 16, he's surrounded by dogs. The smell of blood is in the air, and it's brought the predators running. It's terrifying to imagine.

Even worse to think that these are not literal animals, but human beings. The crowd that threw insults at him. What did that feel like?

Raging bulls. Roaring lions. Ravenous dogs, he says. The king is terrified, verse 14. I am poured out like water.

All my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax. It has melted within me. In contrast with the power and ferocity of his enemies, the king is coming undone.

Poured out, melting, drying up. He has no defense against these predators. No strength to keep them at bay. He is at their mercy. But the crowd is not the only ones that he's at the mercy of.

[15:14] See, at the end of verse 15, you lay me in the dust of death. You, my God, who I trust, you send me to my death. The king is utterly alone.

Even God has sent him into the outer darkness. You few, if any of us could say that we have ever been in this position.

So alone. Loneliness can be really hard. I'm sure many of you felt that at some point over the past year and a half, as I did. But none of us has ever been truly alone as Christ was.

His friends and followers who had been with him for years vanished when he was arrested. One of his first followers, Peter, denied him, ever knowing him, not once or twice, but three times.

When he was beaten, there was no one to stop it. As he hung on the cross, he was universally mocked and cursed.

[16:19] But what makes his loneliness deeper than anything we can ever imagine is the darkness that hung over the whole land as he died.

Because the darkness told him that God had turned his back on him. Darkness in the Bible is often a symbol of God's wrath, his anger.

Far worse than having the world against him. It was having his father against him. See, his God did not only forsake him that day, he crushed him.

Truly, he could say, you lay me in the dust of death. One man cried out to God that day and was not heard. One man went to his death that day, completely given up by God and the world.

You fade out the baying crowd, the cursing and shouting and insults. And we hear only his gasping, bleeding, crying, his bones out of joint, his heart melting, his mouth drying up.

[17:30] One man bore the sins of the world on his shoulders that day and died in agony and disgrace. Friends, none of us has ever been so alone as Jesus was on the cross.

How can I tell you that? How can I tell you what Jesus was like on the cross? Because, well, just look at this description at the end of verse 16. See, this is the script written over a thousand years in advance that the gospel writers watched play out on a dusty hill in the early 30s AD outside the city walls.

As we read from Mark's gospel earlier, so many of these verses should jump out to us. They certainly did to those who were there. The way the soldiers shared out his clothes among them.

The way they pierced his hands and feet, crucifying him. The way his bones showed and none of them were broken. The way he thirsted and drank the bitter wine.

The way he was mocked and accused by his enemies. And over his head, the words, the king. The king of the Jews.

[18 : 58] What David writes here goes far beyond anything he himself suffered. But one day a king would come who would suffer just like this. And he would do it as Messiah.

As our king. In my place. In your place. So two things really to say at this point by way of application.

Firstly is this. This psalm tells us that trusting in Jesus doesn't mean that we will never suffer as Christians. In fact, the opposite.

It teaches us if we are following Jesus, we will suffer. For Jesus, there was no crown without the cross. So we also share in his suffering before sharing in his glory.

And so friends, let's not buy into the lie that if we really had faith. Or if God really loved and delighted with us. Then we'd never go through a hard time.

[20 : 05] Because that's what people said to Jesus. He trusts in the Lord, they say. Let the Lord rescue him. But if his suffering was from a lack of faith. Well, how could he have suffered?

Suffering is never good. We should never wish for it. And we may never know why we suffer in the ways that we do. But if we're Christians, then when suffering comes of any kind.

Well, let it bring us closer to the Lord Jesus. We need never be alone in our suffering as he was.

Because we trust in the one who has suffered for us.

But secondly, let's also take heart in that however much we suffer in this life. We will never suffer as he did. In the words of Donald MacLeod, his suffering doesn't only gain us sympathy.

It grants us immunity. We will never be crushed. We will never be crushed. We will never bear his punishment. We will never be crushed.

[21 : 08] We will never be crushed by our father if our trust is in Christ his son. Because he was crushed.

And he did bear the wrath. He went through hell. So we would never have to. And so we can trust in him confidently.

Seeing how willing he was to suffer for our salvation. Christ our King is altogether worthy of our love and worship. And that is where this psalm ends, isn't it?

In the praise of the deliverer. So thirdly, finally, let us praise the deliverer. After the King's prayers, from verse 22, we find him singing.

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.

[22 : 07] Revere him, all you descendants of Israel. For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one. Ultimately, then, the King is heard and is delivered and rescued by God.

He's not forsaken forever indefinitely. And off the back of his deliverance, he calls on his people to praise the God who saves.

It's a call to worship God for the rescue of his King. So what does that mean for us as Christians?

Well, just as David went through a period of lonely suffering before being delivered, so the Lord Jesus suffered the painful and shameful death of the cross before being raised to life again by God.

It's speaking of vindication. The world told him he was right to suffer. He was wrong before God. But God has proved the world wrong and his King right by raising him from the dead.

For Jesus, there was no crown without the cross, but the reverse is also true. David is saying there was never any possibility of the cross without a crown.

[23 : 25] As Peter says of Jesus in Acts chapter 2, God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Death could not hold the faithful King who died to save those who were dead in sin. So God raised him from the dead. And he is seated bodily on the throne in glory this very evening.

And tonight, he declares the deliverer to us. He proclaims him to us. He leads us in the praise of his Father, who has become our Father through him.

What does Jesus say to us this evening? Oh, you who fear the Lord, praise him. Praise him. For he is risen never to die again.

And the result is not only our praise this evening, this family, this body of believers, but global and eternal praise. Look who will praise him. Verse 27, all the ends of the earth, all the families of the nations.

[24 : 36] Verse 29, all the rich of the earth, all who go down to the dust. Verse 30, posterity, future generations, a people yet unborn. See, David never forgets the promise.

That satellite image of the earth from space is hanging on his bedroom wall because God has promised his king a worldwide and forever kingdom.

And the resurrection of Jesus tells us that kingdom is coming. And consider this morning how it has already come and begun.

And so let us join in the worship of the church around the world and down through the ages this evening, all because of the meeting of these two kings, the union of these two crowns.

How do you, God and his king, father and son meet at the cross? Well, behind the wrath, behind the agony, behind the punishment, these kings were one in will and purpose.

[25 : 46] Dominion belongs to the Lord, writes David, and he rules over the nations. But as Jesus went to the cross, crowned with thorns and crucified as king, his father was preparing to put the scepter into the hands of his crucified and risen son.

For it was through his suffering, through his blood, that he ransomed people for God from every tribe, language and people and nation to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.

It was through his death for our sins that God and Christ, father and son, would have a kingdom to rule forever. Remember God's promise to his son in Psalm 2, ask me, ask me, just ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Well, here that promise comes true. The cross is the ultimate union of the crowns, the sharing of one throne, the reign of God and his king, Jesus Christ.

And so it's as we look at the cross and the crown of Jesus this evening that we can say tonight with all the saints that he has done it. He has done it.

[27 : 07] And we are members of his kingdom through his death, by his grace. Praise God, father, son and Holy Spirit, that he has done it for us.

Let's pray together. God, our father, how we thank you that you are faithful to your every word. We thank you that you promised Christ a kingdom to last forever and you have delivered it to him. We thank you, our father, that we can be members of his kingdom, not by our works, not by birth, not by what we bring to you and offer you, but through what he offered up himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

We thank you, our father, that he suffered and died for us, that we might never know the ultimate suffering and the ultimate separation from you.

We thank you, our father, that he stood alone, that we might never stand alone. And so we pray, Lord, that you'd seal these truths on our hearts. Lord, if we feel far from you, draw us to Christ, draw us to him who has rescued us and done it.

[28 : 28] For we pray and ask in his great name. Amen.