

From Despair to Doxology

Psalm 22

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On the morning of Sunday, October 15, 1871. It had only been 5 days since the flames of the Great Chicago Fire had been extinguished. The scene takes place outside a now-destroyed church building—some sources describe that the ruins were still smoldering.

In the infamous blaze, somewhere around 300 people lost their lives, and more than 100,000 were left homeless. The pastor of the burned church—whose own home had also been destroyed—was tasked with preaching a sermon to those who gathered.

Of all the scriptures he could have chosen to help people process their shock, loss, and grief and to point them toward hope; he chose to quote Psalm 22:1. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Psalm 22 is a deeply emotional psalm written by King David that begins as a cry of intense suffering and abandonment. It ends in a triumphant declaration of God’s faithfulness culminating in global praise. The title of this sermon is an attempt to capture this journey “From Despair to Doxology.” This journey takes place on a cosmic scale and encompasses the last three thousand years of redemptive history and celebrates the power of the gospel.

So with that as our background lets turn to Psalm 22 and stand to our feet as we honor of the reading of the Word of God:

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO THE DOE OF THE DAWN. A PSALM OF DAVID.

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? **2** O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. **3** Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. **4** In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. **5** To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. **6** But I am a worm and not a

man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. **7** All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; **8** “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” **9** Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts. **10** On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God. **11** Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. **12** Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; **13** they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. **14** 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; **15** my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. **16** For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— **17** I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; **18** they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. **19** But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! **20** Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! **21** Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! **22** I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: **23** 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! **24** For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. **25** From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. **26** The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! **27** All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. **28** For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. **29** All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. **30** Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; **31** they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

- Congregation to be seated -

Many of you might recognize that the first verse of this Psalm was quoted by Jesus as he hung on the cross. This Psalm reveals that the suffering Jesus experienced on the cross would usher in unending global praise of the Lord.

Yet, this Psalm was read, memorized, celebrated, sung, and utilized in corporate and private worship by God's chosen people for a thousand years before Christ cried out the first lines of this Psalm.

Illustrated on the screen is a timeline that shows the life of this Psalm as it relates to redemptive history that plays out through the new and old testaments. King David wrote this Psalm 1,000 years before Christ fulfilled many of the prophecies contained within. But there are additional prophecies that are still coming to fruition.

It might come as a surprise to learn that Psalm 22 was not commonly interpreted as a messianic Psalm to most Jews in the centuries prior to Christ. Other Psalms during this time were clearly recognized as containing messianic prophecies ... for example Psalm 2, 72, and 110, but not so much Psalm 22.

Therefore, we need to appreciate that this Psalm has two layers of interpretation.

Here is an overview of the two interpretive layers:

1. King David Layer: The immediate, historical meaning relating to David's lament and deliverance.
2. Jesus Christ Layer: The ultimate, prophetic meaning that is fulfilled by the saving works of Jesus Christ.

This is incredibly powerful as we recognize that King David was a type or foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. David knew very well that one greater than he would come and that God Almighty would establish His kingdom forever. Listen to these covenant words that God speaks to King David:

2 Samuel 7:12-13

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

We will see how the first interpretive layer of King David is magnified by the truer, more perfect David, Jesus Christ. It is Jesus that was prophesied by Samuel and confirmed by the angel Gabriel when he told Mary about the son that she was going to give birth to “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David...and of his kingdom there will be no end.” - Luke 1:32-33.

Interestingly, we aren't provided information that points to the exact circumstances in which David was experiencing such abandonment and despair. This information is often provided in superscriptions which are headings and instructions that appear before a Psalm. For example:

- Psalm 18 *“A Psalm of David ... on the day the Lord rescued him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”*
- Psalm 51 (The Psalm Pastor Chris Preached Last Weekend) *“A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after David had gone into Bathsheba”*

The superscription for Psalm 22 says “To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.”

Notice that this Psalm is a song! It was to be sung by a Choir! This is typical of the Psalms which were often written for corporate worship in the Temple and accompanied by instruments. It is believed that “The Doe of the Dawn” is a referring to specific musical melody or perhaps a specific musical mode. In antiquity, musical modes were a system of musical notes and intervals that gave music a particular emotional character. While the melody of the Doe of the Dawn has been lost to history, I believe that these lost musical elements of the Psalms will be recovered when Jesus returns. I believe we will have the joy of learning and singing the Psalms the way that Jesus sang them when He lived among us. You see, the Psalms were Jesus's hymnbook.

Psalm 22 is divided into two parts

Part I: (vv. 1-21a) Lament, Suffering, and Pleas for Deliverance

Part II: (vv. 21b-31) Declaration of God's Salvation and Future Praise

Psalm 22, Part I (vv. 1-21a):

David feels abandoned. He is wrestling with the tension between his current experience and his faith. He is being humiliated and mocked, yet recalling God's past care from birth. He is overwhelmed by his enemies and experiencing physical agony. He is pleading for rescue.

In this we find hope when we face difficulty and uncertainty. It is healthy to lament with hope as David did. As followers of Christ who live in the now and the not yet reality of Christ's coming kingdom, we desperately need to recover how to lament with hope! Lament is foreign to us, but it is a vital process in our discipleship.

Are you aware that 1/3 of the Psalms contain lament? To biblically lament is a form of prayer that expresses deep sorrow, pain, or grief to God with the purpose of processing our suffering and to draw closer to God and grow in our trust in God.

In our consumeristic culture, what sells is happiness, joy, and all things associated with the good life. Pursuing the good life is embedded into our American ethos: "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The goal in life seems to be to avoid suffering at all costs.

It perplexes me that pharmaceutical companies market directly to consumers through television commercials—you might know what I'm talking about—these commercials introduce us to people who are suffering and they highlight the unhappiness and suffering caused by a medical condition. After this we are quickly introduced to what appears to be a miraculous treatment that will alleviate this person's suffering. The mood of the advertisement completely changes, the color goes from grayscale to vibrant colors, the music shifts from a depressing minor key to a carefree major key, the facial expressions, activities, and even relationships of the person reflects someone living their best life now. I'm

not joking, every time I watch one of these commercials—never mind I don't have their medical condition—I announce to my family “That's it, I need this medication! I want the life that person now has” ... of course this is short-lived when the side effects are rattled off, warning: they sometimes include death! We all want to live our best lives now because: Suffering Bad / Happiness Good!

Yet, God does His best work through suffering.

Let's be honest, there are times in our lives when we feel forsaken. When we face difficulty and it feels that we are stuck in our circumstances. Even though we pray and earnestly ask God to help us out of our despair we are certain that all we hear from heaven is silence and we feel utterly alone—as though God has abandoned us. We can see that David is wrestling with this experience and is trying to reconcile what he is feeling against what he knows to be true.

Right from the start we can take comfort that God welcomes our hearts cry and questioning. Consider Job, when he suffers unimaginable loss he directs his confusion, anger, and grief to God and his honesty is met with compassion from God.

Questioning God is not condemned by scripture, it is modeled for us!

True lament never ends with questions ... as David models for us, he wrestles with what He knows in faith and what is revealed in scripture.

In verse 3 - 5, David reminds himself of God's character and past saving acts. Surely David finds solace in these truths, yet he immediately returns to more intense and personal lament in vv. 6-8. Claiming he is less than human, *I am a worm, scorned and despised, mocked* after this second volley of lament David returns to what he knows is true on an even more deeper and personal level in vv. 9-10: God has been his God from before his birth. Verse 11 makes another request, “be not far from me ...” vv.12-18 continues David's lament, this time we learn that enemies surround him. His enemies are symbolized by beasts: Bulls of Bashan (Pronounced Bayshen), Lions, Dogs, and Wild Oxen.

The commentator Tremper Longman explains the symbolism of these beasts:

The psalmist's enemies are likened to dangerous and powerful animals, bulls and lions. They outnumber him (many) and are vastly more powerful than he is. He is a worm and they are bulls, even bulls of Bashan, a region noted for its impressive cattle (Deut. 32:14; Ezek. 39:18; Amos 4:1). They are lions that rip open their prey, and he is the prey (see comment at 17:12).

First bulls, then lions; now the psalmist compares his enemies to dogs, again dangerous animals. In ancient Israel, the dog was not considered 'man's best friend', but a beast who runs around scavenging what it can, even corpses if they are available.

Longman, Tremper. *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014. Kindle Edition, pp. 130–131.

In Verses 19-21 we find a final plea for God to not be far off and another request for deliverance, this time from his enemies—*“Deliver ... my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion!”*

David knows ... there is only one source of hope for deliverance: God Almighty.

Part I Application:

I can see three points of how to apply these first 21 verses to our lives:

1. We Should Be Honest with God in Our Pain and Questioning
 - God welcomes our raw emotions—our confusion, hurt, and feelings of abandonment
 - Lament isn't a lack of faith; it's an act of trust
2. Remember that Our Suffering Doesn't Define Us

- Pain can make us feel forgotten, but it doesn't erase our identity in God
3. Keep Crying Out—God is Closer than We Think
- Even when God feels distant, He hears and responds in His timing according to His will

Psalm 22, Part II (vv. 21b-31)

And then it happens! In the middle of verse 21 everything changes. *“You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!”* This is where we could declare *“But God.”* (Display *“But God.”* Image On-Screen)

The rest of this Psalm contains one of the most remarkable and far-reaching passages of praise in the entire Bible.

David rejoices after being saved from mortal danger, expressing gratitude and praise to God. He focuses on communal worship in the assembly of Israel, referred to as the congregation, and the offspring of Jacob. His focus of praise is because God is faithful to the afflicted, God has not hidden his face from them. David's praise grows and now extends beyond Israel to the ends of the earth and declaring that the Lord is King over all the nations.

The praise that David has in mind goes beyond the ends of the earth ... it even goes beyond the grave. In Verse 29 we get a picture of David's theological understanding that life extends beyond the grave for the purpose of worship and relationship with God. We also see this in the very next Psalm, Psalm 23, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

Psalm 22 triumphantly concludes with a declaration that God's actions will be proclaimed to future generations, a people yet unborn, that he has done it! David's journey from despair to doxology is truly astonishing.

Part II Application:

I see two ways we can learn from the second part of Psalm 22:

1. God Turns Our Pain into Praise—and Our Story into Testimony
 - When God delivers us, He invites us to declare His goodness, not keep it private.
 - Our personal experience of suffering and redemption become a powerful witness to others.
2. God’s Faithfulness is Bigger Than Us—and Meant to Be Passed On
 - God’s saving work is global and generational—reaching “all the ends of the earth” and “people yet unborn.”
 - We are part of a much larger story that began before us and will continue after us. So live with a legacy mindset.

Ultimately David’s Psalm Points to Something Greater:

In the context for David, the way this Psalm ends begs the question ... Is David really envisioning worldwide and forever praise for his deliverance from his unspecified circumstances found in vv. 1-21? The answer is yes and no. We will see that God, in His wisdom and power, inspired this Psalm to contain remarkable prophecy that points to the greatest saving work of God in history. When the Psalm declares in its final line that “He has done it” the “it” is something that deserves unending and global praise.

For “God promised Abraham that he would bless not only Abraham and his descendants, but all the peoples of the earth.” (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary of Psalms, Tremper Longman)

The moment our Savior uttered verse 1 on the cross, He was not only expressing the emotions and thoughts of Psalm 22 in mere reference, He was claiming and uttering these words as His very own. This reveals to us earth shaking truths about who Jesus is and what He was accomplishing on the cross. By uttering the first line of the Psalm, Jesus was drawing attention to the entire Psalm, not just the first line!

How can we be sure of this? You see, In our culture today we don’t memorize things like they did in ancient Israel. Prior to and in the first

century Jewish culture, when the first line of a Psalm was spoken it was intended for the hearers to recall the entire text of the Psalm.

With Jesus claiming the Psalm as His own words, it unlocks for us a second layer of interpretation this is built on the original Davidic layer.

As we explore this second layer, we discover wonder after wonder that leads us to worship. We only have time to explore three wonders of Psalm 22 that are revealed by Christ.

Wonder #1: Psalm 22 contains an astonishing number of biblical prophecies fulfilled by Christ.

With pinpoint accuracy we can identify these specific items as unfolding during Christ's crucifixion: (The onscreen slide shows these listed with the New Testament fulfillment references)

- Cry of abandonment (v. 1)
- Mocking and Scorn (vv. 6-8)
- Physical Weakness (v. 14)
- Thirst (v. 15)
- Piercing of Hands and Feet (v. 16)
- Public Exposure (v. 17)
- Casting Lots for Clothing (v. 18)

This is incredible because crucifixion wouldn't exist in its developed Roman form until 700 years after Psalm 22 was written by King David. This is mind blowing and provides evidence that God is indeed all knowing. This also speaks to the accuracy and authority of scripture. So accurate and descriptive of Christ's crucifixion and revealing God's saving plan through Christ, that church leaders as early as the medieval era started referring to Psalm 22 as the 5th gospel.

Wonder #2: Psalm 22's use of the original Hebrew in its historical context points to deep truths often missed by modern day readers.

Many Hebrew words in Psalm 22 contain profound and deep meaning. We don't have time to dive into all of them, but we will tackle one that is both mind blowing and faith increasing! Verse 6 *"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people."* ... as words of Jesus this reflects several passages of scripture

- Isaiah 53:3 - He was despised and rejected by man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
- John 1:11 - "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."

So why a worm? If the goal was to communicate the sense of being less than a human, anything could have worked, right? "But I am a _____ (fill in the blank) a cockroach? A leaf? A piece of bark? The use of the word "worm" was no random or arbitrary choice. The Hebrew word for worm that is used is referring to a specific type of worm.

תּוֹלַעַת (tôla'at)
crimson worm

The crimson worm was used in ancient dye production, and its crimson secretions was used to dye the priestly garments used in the Tabernacle. When Jesus reveals that all of Psalm 22 are his words, even claiming He is a worm, He is claiming an association with a priestly role. This crimson worm and priestly garment connection would have been well known in Jesus's time. This connection becomes even more convincing in Isaiah 1:18:

"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

The Hebrew word for the color crimson in this verse uses the same root as "worm" in Psalm 22:6. There is further evidence that Isaiah is using the imagery of the crimson worm itself, because the scarlet dye that the crimson worm secretes leaves a crimson stain that fades to white as it dries-usually in 3 days. The texture of the dried secretion that remains

resembles white wool fibers. Another mind-blowing detail is that this worm literally climbs up a tree prior to secreting the crimson dye.

2 Corinthians 5:21:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1,000 years before Christ the foundation is being laid for the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement: Jesus Christ died in our place, taking the penalty of our sins so that we could be reconciled to God. And in the context of Psalm 22:6 God did this by using one word: “worm.”

The thought occurs to me, concerning the crimson worm and its symbolism, that it wasn't the biblical writers who searched for a unique illustration from nature in order to illustrate truth in Scripture. Rather, I believe it was God who first created the crimson worm and directed how its dye was historically used to point directly to Christ's saving work. Our God is all powerful and creative.

Wonder #3: Psalm 22 reveals the purpose of Christ's suffering, sacrifice, and resurrection is to lead to global and unending worship.

Earlier this year I was grateful for the opportunity to take a much needed sabbatical, during which I was able to take a deep dive into the book of Hebrews. It didn't take long before Hebrews pointed me directly to the significance of Psalm 22. The book of Hebrews wants to make sure we don't overlook the powerful significance of Psalm 22, especially the second half of the Psalm. Its easy to get focused on the first half of this Psalm with those amazing prophecies we see fulfilled in the crucifixion. We mustn't lose track that the second half of this Psalm are the words of Jesus.

Because Hebrews leaves no doubt that the entirety of Psalm 22 are the actual words of Jesus.

Hebrews 2:11-12 (ESV)

“For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will tell of

your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

This passage in Hebrews, quoting Psalm 22:22 reveals two truths about who Christ is:

1. Jesus fully identifies with humanity (brothers)
2. Jesus is the mediator between God and Man which means that Jesus is the true worship leader of His people.

It is Jesus who is telling of God’s great Name to His brothers and singing and praising in the midst of the congregation! Jesus leads our worship every time we gather as a church! Jesus’s worship of the Father is perfect! The heart of Christ, the presence of Christ, and the Voice of Christ in the midst of our corporate worship perfects our imperfect worship!

This means that when we gather for worship, we are not striving or climbing a mountain in order to reach a distant God or prove that our worship is worthy—that would make our corporate worship hopelessly performative.

This also means that worship leaders, worship bands, singers and musicians, even the music itself will never “usher” us into the presence of God! It certainly isn’t going to “usher” God into our presence. That would mean those things are necessary to mediate between God and man ... this thinking is heresy! 1 Timothy 2:5 declares *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*

I’ve been serving in worship ministry for decades! The more I study worship and church history, the more I’m convinced that the Church needs more biblical instruction and clarity about worship. At Edgewood we talk about discipleship. A disciple, biblically speaking, is a worshiper. God is seeking worshipers!

John 4:23

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

This reveals a practical application of Psalm 22: Sing! If Christ is our Savior and Lord, and He sings and praises God, what excuse do we have not to sing our hearts when we worship together?

To help develop us as worshipers, this weekend I'm launching an audio podcast for the Edgewood community that I've called "worship foundations." It aims to equip believers to better understand the role of worship in their personal lives as well as in the life of the gathered church. You can find links to that podcast on our website and mobile app and listen on whatever podcast platform you prefer.

This year, Edgewood is zeroing in on our Go value and this focus also concerns worship. This fall we are hosting Go Con, a strategic missions conference designed to equip and inspire our church family for both local and global missions. Are you aware that local and global missions is also about worship? Consider the provocative claim made by John Piper in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad!* "Missions exists because worship doesn't."

Conclusion

As we head into the final verses of Psalm 22; We've covered a lot of ground and we've touched on a ton of theology. But why? Is it so that we have more insight and knowledge the next time we play Bible Trivia Pursuit? NO! I'm reminded of the teaching of J.I. Packer that the purpose of Theology is Doxology. The more we learn about God, the more it will lead us to worship.

These final verses of Psalm 22 are truly awesome! Listen again to these verses— mind you, these words are not merely aspirational—the truth of these words have been established since the foundations of the earth— these are promises from a God who keeps His promises:

**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.
All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow
all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself
alive. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the**

coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

- Do you see it?

He Has Done It = It is Finished

Jesus last word on the cross: τετέλεσται (tetelestai)

A Greek Word that means:

It is completed

It has been accomplished

Paid in Full

- Do you also see this?

That you are in this story. Those of us who have saving faith in Christ and those that will in the future were once the people yet unborn and thanks to the faithful generations that have come before we learned of God's righteousness. While we are in this story, this story is not about us, because its God's story.

Philippians 2:10-11 echoes Psalm 22:29:

"...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven on on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

According to the whole counsel of scripture, while all who have ever lived will willingly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, some will bow in joyful worship and others will bow in sorrowful regret. You see, on that day not everyone making that confession will have been saved.

The difference is this: Will you confess Him as Lord today, by faith, when mercy is still offered freely? Or will you be forced to acknowledge Him later, when judgment is already final?

David wrote Psalm 22—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—the exact words Christ wanted us to hear from Him as He paid the penalty of our sin on the cross. By doing so He revealed the depths to which He would go to provide a way for our salvation and point us to the true purpose of

mankind—to dwell with Him forever proclaiming the excellencies and praise of God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a picture of biblical, trinitarian worship; and you are invited. If you haven't already done it, choose Christ today while you still can. Join the chorus of the redeemed, to sing praise to our God, and fulfill the purpose for which you were created.