

## **The Spiritual Sufferings of Jesus**

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

**Intro:** Through the years, when we've thought about the crucifixion of Jesus we've focused often on His physical sufferings. Powerful presentations have been given of the great pain that Jesus experienced, even from a medical point of view. One of the songs we sing about Jesus, "Tell me the story of Jesus" has a verse that says, "Tell of the cross where they laid him, writhing in anguish and pain". Surely one cannot minimize the physical suffering of Jesus; but there is another side to the sufferings of Jesus—the spiritual sufferings. Have we considered as we should this side of Jesus' sufferings?

How can we know what it was like? From the cross, Jesus gave us one verse to help us understand what He was going through. One verse in particular in Scripture gives us insight into the spiritual sufferings of Jesus.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

It is as if Jesus gives a single quote to point us to the right place to understand His spiritual suffering of the cross--Psalm 22. Last week we read part of this psalm in our sermon of songs called "Psalms that stir the soul." Let's take a more in-depth look at this amazing psalm.

Psalm 22 is a prophetic picture given by the Spirit through David of the sufferings of a faithful man in the hands of his enemies. Though they are intended to describe in hyperbole the suffering of a righteous man like David, they find their most complete fulfillment in the suffering of David's son, Jesus. In addition to Jesus' physical suffering, He also experienced:

#### **The pain of being "forsaken" by God**

*The first words of the psalmist set the tone for this powerful chapter: My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. (Psalm 22:1)*

*From David's standpoint, who originally spoke these words, they reflect one of the great dilemmas of the faithful: Why does God remain silent and seemingly unresponsive when His people are suffering--why especially when they are suffering innocently at the hands of their enemies?"*

Was it because the sufferer had not asked God for help? No!

O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; and by night, but I have no rest. (Psalm 22:2)

Was it because God had ceased to be who He is?

Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel. (Psalm 22:3)

So why did God not answer? It was a dilemma of faith that was made even more troubling by God's past actions toward the faithful.

In Thee our fathers trusted; They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. To Thee they cried out, and were delivered; In Thee they trusted, and were not disappointed. (Psalm 22:4-5)

Through poetic repetition the psalmist stresses that his circumstances don't seem to fit the pattern of God's previous actions toward the faithful. "Why have you not delivered me when you heard the prayers of other righteous men who called to you in the past?"

In this case, the "deliverance" is "far from" the "words of my groaning" asking for deliverance. Hence the psalmist feels "forsaken". It is the pain of feeling abandoned by God when He is needed most.

All this just adds to the psalmist's spiritual pain.

***When we look at Jesus we see a perfect fulfillment of the psalmist's words, now brought to a new level.***

On the cross Jesus deliberately identified with the thoughts and feelings of the psalmist:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

It is unclear whether those at the foot of the cross misunderstood or deliberately perverted the Lord's cry of anguish.

The words for "my god" and "Elijah" sound very much alike in Hebrew. My God is "Eli". Elijah is "Eli-jah." So it is possible that the murderers of the Lord did not correctly understand His words. If they did, then their response was even crueler; for they turned His cry of anguish into a joke.

*And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." (Matthew 27:47-49)*

What is clear is that the Lord clearly identified with the sufferings of David—the feelings of abandonment and the dilemma of faith that he had expressed.

He too had prayed for deliverance; and yet God had not delivered Him.

He had witnessed God's deliverance of the faithful from the beginning; yet He had been delivered into the hands of His enemies.

What would it feel like to be delivered into the hands of your enemies knowing that God could stop it in a moment? What would it feel like to know that you were totally innocent of all wrong doing; yet be subjected to such cruel punishment!?

What would it be like to know that God was silently watching a perfectly innocent man be executed?

For Jesus, this moment was made even more painful by the perfect love and support He had had from eternity. What was it like to bring to an end that perfect closeness He had felt with the Father from all eternity? Even while on earth, He had been delivered repeatedly from the attacks of His enemies; but this time, it was different.

Such were the spiritual sufferings of Jesus on the cross. Why did it have to be this way? Was there not any other solution?

**The pain of being the object of hatred, ridicule, and scorn.**

***The psalmist expresses his own suffering at the hatred of His enemies.***

From his feelings of abandonment by God, the psalmist turns his attention to the enemies that surround him. They viewed him not as a human being, but the lowliest of creatures.

But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people. (Psalm 22:6)

He was despised by them, and their hatred took the form of scorn and ridicule:

All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, “Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.” (Psalm 22:7-8)

And again this condition is particularly troubling in view of the psalmist’s life of faith in God.

Yet Thou art He who didst bring me forth from the womb; Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon Thee I was cast from birth; Thou hast been my God from my mother’s womb. (Psalm 22:9-10)

By using hyperbole, David is saying something like this: “I’ve trusted in you all my life, as it were, from the day I was born.” Yet for what purpose had he trusted God, if it all resulted in this? Was the God who brought him into this world going to stand by and let the wicked take His life now?

Moreover, the psalmist describes the loneliness and fear of being surrounded by enemies whom he likens to a pack of wild animals (bulls that gored with their horns, wild dogs that bit at his limbs and pull at his clothing) who bite their prey and wait for their victim to bleed to death (Ps. 22:11-18).

Immediately as we read David’s highly poetic and figurative words, we sense that there is a higher and more complete fulfillment of them in the experiences of Christ.

***For what David describes in hyperbole and metaphor in describing his enemies, Jesus experienced actually and literally.***

And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in

three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. “He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (Matthew 27:39-43)

Jesus was viewed as a worm and not a man!

He was surrounded by His enemies with no protector to defend or deliver him.

His enemies vented every mean-spirited and hateful thing they could think to say to Him and about Him.

What the psalmist had described in figurative language, Jesus experienced in reality.

And the pictures of a man surrounded by animals left to die of dehydration and bleeding, have their perfect fulfillment in the crucifixion.

The irony of that is that David’s description came centuries before that instrument of death by crucifixion was invented by the Persians. But even so, his language fits Jesus’ physical experience perfectly.

And so the pain of the cross was not only the excruciating pain of the physical act; it was also the pain of being the object of hatred, ridicule, and scorn even though every action toward others had been motivated by nothing but pure love!

### **But why would the Son of God have to go through this?**

#### ***To provide a way of redemption for us by the shedding of His blood***

*But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)*

Only the death of the innocent Son of God could atone for our sins. Jesus had to experience the spiritual sufferings of the cross in order that we can experience the spiritual blessings of redemption.

#### ***To give us a greater awareness of both His and the Father's love and sacrifice for us***

*“THEREFORE be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” (Ephesians 5:1–2)*

In every moment of Jesus' anguish is displayed the greatness of God's love for us, even as sinners.

***Give us greater assurance of His ability to sympathize with our sufferings as our great high priest.***

Not all pain in life is physical. Sometimes the greatest sufferings take place in our hearts—in the doubts, the questions, the difficulties of reconciling God’s actions with His promises and what we think are our needs and sometimes in the difficulty of having to do what we may not want to do. But we can know that even in this suffering of faith, we have someone who understands our sufferings:

*For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)*

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)*

*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, (Hebrews 5:8-9)*

**Conclusion: Let us not forget what Jesus suffered; and let us show our appreciation for it by giving our bodies as a living sacrifice to him. And when we are hurting, let us not forget that He understands.**

**And finally let us remember that God had not really “forsaken” Jesus. He had just postponed deliverance until after His death! Having allowed Him to die for the sins of the world, He raised Him up again to live forever and to be our Savior.**

**He can be yours too!**