

Focus on Jesus

Meditations on the Sufferings of the Savior

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This series of meditations is arranged to be used in the weeks prior to the observance of the Lord's resurrection. Five readings are provided each week to focus our attention on Jesus.

It would be advantageous to read these each day, talk about them with your family, and thus prepared, to engage in discussion and worship with the church on Sundays.

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Week One

In this week, we think about some of the things that happened to Jesus on the way to Golgotha, the place of his execution.

His Heavy Cross

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.

Luke 23:26

Part of the Roman sense of justice was compelling the criminal condemned to die by crucifixion to carry the cross piece on their back. Plutarch saw this as part of the consequences of crime and therefore as a deterrent. This 100-pound piece would then be hoisted onto the upright piece which stood ready at the place of execution, probably with the criminal attached by nails as it ascended.

Why then did someone else carry Jesus' heavy cross?

John lets us know that Jesus started carrying his cross to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, but Luke, along with Matthew and Mark, are equally clear that somewhere along the way, the soldiers shifted that burden to a man named Simon (of Cyrene).

Why?

We are not told. We have to use our minds to infer what happened. Jesus had been up all night without sleep. He had been beaten prior to being delivered over to the Roman governor at daybreak. Pilate had him flogged. Even as strong as Jesus was, his body could not stand up to the extra weight in that condition.

Jesus was not a criminal, but he was made to suffer like one. Isaiah put this in perspective for us:

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Isaiah 53:6

Weeping

27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Luke 23:27–31

Luke records over a dozen incidents that none of the other Gospel writers saw fit to mention. He could have selected more given the vastness of the words and deeds of the Teacher. Here he recounts briefly the reaction of the women of Jerusalem and Jesus’ response to them.

The sorrows that Jesus carried were massive, but nothing compared to what was coming upon the people of the city of Jerusalem.

Green wood is hard to burn. The Fire Department did a demonstration of what happens when a Christmas tree is allowed to dry out for a couple of weeks. Dry wood makes a terrible conflagration that in moments has engulfed a room sending smoke roiling. The horror that is coming is terrible.

Jesus had to have help carrying this 100-pound cross piece, but this is happening to only one man. God’s wrath will pour out like fire from the sky igniting everything.

What will people do in those days? Jesus draws from Hosea 10:8 for his description,

The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed.

Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars,

and they shall say to the mountains,

“Cover us,” and to the hills, “Fall on us.”

Hosea 10:8

Hosea was writing about terror that was coming upon Israel when the Assyrians took the city. A similar thing was experienced when the Babylonians took Jerusalem and again when Romans took Jerusalem about forty years after Jesus’ warning.

John wrote after the Roman destruction,

¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Revelation 6:15–17

What can we do to escape the wrath that is coming? Robert Robinson, in the hymn *Come, Thou Fount*, puts the truth this way,

Jesus bought me when a stranger,

Wand’ring from the fold of God;

He, to rescue me from danger,

Interposed His precious blood.

As Jesus was going along the road in Jerusalem, he could see the wailing of these women magnified thousands of time in the days coming. Because of this, he was going on to die so that we don’t ever have to face the terror of God’s wrath to come.

For Criminals

³²Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.³³And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

Luke 23:32–33

Jesus died a criminal's death. His placement between these two testified to all that here was someone who deserved to die in horrible agony under Roman Law.

With him on that hill were two criminals that did deserve to die for the crimes they had committed against others. One of them wouldn't admit it, but the other one did,

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Luke 23:39–40

Mark and Matthew identify them as robbers. Little more than common bandits and "holdup men." They were not great patriots, but instead were willing to beat a man up and leave him half-dead in order to get his wealth (*Luke 10:30*).

The Roman method of crucifixion was cruel, but it was just to put these men to death. It is the terror of the manner of death that helped keep people under control.

Jesus, however, was no robber. He came not to serve, but to serve others and give his life as a ransom for many (*Matthew 20:28*).

He was dying in the place of robbers on behalf of robbers ... you and me.

The hymnist Charles Gabriel wrote,

*He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own,
He bore the burden to Calv'ry,
And suffered and died alone.*

We tend to like the idea of Jesus bearing our sorrows, but sort of skip over our own sins ... *my sins*.

It feels better to look down upon the robber as a sinner as though we are saints. The depravities of another makes our own failings seem trivial ... *to me*.

Turning the corner in Jerusalem and encountering Jesus hanging on the cross is to come face to face with one's own crimes out in the open, exposed for the death dealing things that they are.

Our indulgences are seen to have harmed other people. We understand that they were deliberate, self-serving rebellion against the love of God and opposed to compassion for others.

As we contemplate his death, we stare in the face the almost inconceivable truth that this death was the kind we deserve. Some reject this not realizing that without Jesus worse awaits.

It also points out the true terror is being separated from God and all the goodness that is only found in fellowship with Him. When we indulge in sin, we are leaving not merely God's path, but also His side to walk alone into danger.

So that we wouldn't have to continue to exist under God's anger, so we could be freed from the darkness of loneliness into the glory of fellowship with the Father, Jesus died for our crimes.

Forgiveness Needed

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Luke 23:34

Like the previous saying, this was only recorded for us at this place in the Gospel. Unlike the previous, many early manuscripts and translations do not have this prayer. For this reason, many textual scholars do not believe it was original to Luke. Since only the original text is inspired, this becomes an important issue for faith and practice.

How do we know if it was original or not?

One key question to ask is, "Did someone take it out?" And as a follow up, we ask, "If so, why would they do that?"

One of the earliest complete New Testament copies is the Codex Sinaiticus, named because it was found at a monastery on Mt. Sinai. It originally included this saying, but that someone took it out. We know this because a later editor put it back in.

This indicates that as early as the middle of the fourth century of Christianity (c. 350 AD) scribes disagreed on whether or not it belonged in Luke's Gospel.

Someone might have taken verse 34 out of earlier manuscripts because the destruction of Jerusalem (68-70 AD) was seen by some to imply that God had not answered Jesus' prayer for forgiveness. They hold this in spite of the fact that he predicted this judgment (*Luke 23:28-31*).

Others suggest it has been added and was based on Stephen's prayer recorded in *Acts 7:60*, but although the sentiment is the same, the actual words do not match up. It is much more likely that Luke wrote both to show that Christians followed Christ.

The style fits that of Luke and does not in any way break the flow of thought. It should also be pointed out that this fits what we know of Jesus (*Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25*). It does point out a great need in our lives and the purpose for Jesus coming ... everybody needs forgiveness.

First, we need God's pardon because all of our sins are an affront upon His character. When we sin, we are not bearing His image and likeness to the world around us. This is idolatry ... presenting a false image of who God is.

Second, we need other's forgiveness. Our sinful nature causes us to act with callous disregard for the people who share this planet with us. Only a sociopath would claim that they have never done anything wrong to another human being. This also disrespects the image of God for it abides in each one.

Third, others need our forgiveness. Those who have wronged us are trapped by guilt until released. As long as we do not consider the debt to be paid, we hold on and so put a barrier between ourselves and loving fellowship, mutual support, and the ministry of God through that person.

In praying to the Father, Jesus was expressing that forgiveness, not upon their repentance, but upon their ignorance. He was starting his intercession for sinners on that final day ... the day when all was paid, and true forgiveness could be justly extended.

Among the Mockers

³⁵*And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"*

³⁶*The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*

³⁸*There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."*

Luke 23:35–38

Jesus was mocked while hanging there dying in our place. The rulers of the Jews taunted him with his powerlessness. Their unbelief drips from every word. They had rejected their only hope, their king.

The Roman soldiers mocked him as the King of the Jews. They thought he needed them to save him. A Jew could not be their Savior, only their victim.

Even the governor who surrendered to pressure and had an innocent man killed got his dig in at Jesus ... and the Jews. Literally, it could be translated, "*The king of the Jews ... this one!*" Do you see the sarcasm? The Jews are a weak, conquered nation. *This one* is their kind of king. Rome triumphs!

The people stood by watching. Some in grief at the horror of what was being done to their country, some questioning, *Is he the one?*" Perhaps these were waiting for God to rend the heavens with His angels and rescue the Messiah, if that was who he really was.

They failed to understand that Jesus couldn't save us, if he himself was saved.

Week Two

Blasphemy

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:39

Matthew and Mark report that Jesus was reproached by the robbers as he hung upon the cross. Luke gives us their taunt, for that is what it was, "*Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!*"

In the earliest manuscripts, the dig is subtle, but transparent. They were not concerned about Jesus, but themselves. He should not save himself so as to rule in righteousness, but to get them out of their current difficulty. Most later Greek manuscripts made their sarcasm more apparent by replacing the *not* with the word *if*.

As we think about Jesus hanging there on the cross, we should listen to the words of the robbers ... and identify with what they say. Isn't it true that our concern is about getting out of our own difficulties rather than the kingdom?

We think of Jesus as "Christ" as though that were his last name instead of as his claim to our loyalty. The word comes from a root which meant "to anoint." The ritual for identifying an official whom God had chosen for office. Only priests and later kings were anointed. To be against the Christ, the anointed one, was to be against God. To kill the Christ brought certain death (*2 Samuel 1:14-16*).

To identify Jesus as "*the Christ*" should elicit respect for his authority. It demands righteousness of ourselves. The appropriate response is loyalty, even to the point of self-sacrifice. To use the title in order to get what we want to continue in our selfish ways is blasphemy.

We Justly

40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:40–41

As sinners we have no claim upon the Christ or right to be spared from the consequences or the judgment for our sins. One of the robbers apparently came to his senses hanging there in agony. He ceased to taunt and plead, but instead issued a rebuke.

We don't know if these two robbers were partners in crime, but they knew each other well enough to know that they were common highwaymen concerned only with getting the material things they wanted in life no matter who they had to hurt to get it.

In Jesus, the one man recognized someone different, innocent. Being incarcerated is bad, but it has one benefit ... you eventually come to know who is truly guilty and who is truly innocent. Once in jail ministry, I was approached by a couple of the inmates on behalf of another man who was from another country. He was a kind and gentle soul, an artist, whom they recognized didn't belong. They even confessed to me that they were in for what they had done, but not this man. Could something be done to get him freed?

If one man could have been freed from the cross, it would have been Jesus. He didn't deserve to be there. The other men were dying justly for their crimes, not him.

He was worthy of respect, not reproaches.

Remember Me

And he said,

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Luke 23:42

We don't know exactly when this murderous robber quit hurling insults at Jesus and started defending him, but we do know that he became a believer.

Perhaps it was through close observation of *the way* the man suffered that convinced him. Maybe as he realized with horror the certainty of death and eternity, this Jew recognized his utter helplessness extended beyond his body to his very soul.

Once a person is convinced that Jesus is indeed God's choice to rule the world and establish the kingdom, that belief moves us to express our faith directly to the Savior, *“Jesus, remember me.”*

He had gone from wanting to be saved from his cross to wanting to be with the one who was dying on that cross.

He believed that Jesus was the Christ and would come into his kingdom. What God had declared would be fulfilled and nothing, not even death, could prevent it.

Belief brings an expression of faith, an appeal to the King. No longer to be saved from death, but into the kingdom with Jesus. When Christ's kingdom comes not only will people be blessed, but we will understand that the blessings we have are because we are *with* God.

Today

And he said to him,

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

Sooner or later, we will all *long* to hear those words. For this man, *today* was that day. He was hanging on a cross next to Jesus slowly suffocating in the agonizing death that is crucifixion.

Previously, the primary thought on his brain was relief from this agony by being taken down and allowed to live. Now he is reconciled to his death as punishment for his crimes.

His thought now turns to the one who gives eternal life, the king who would one day come into his kingdom. It took a lot of faith for this man to look on Jesus dying next to him in the same agony and to see the king. From a *realistic* point of view both of them would be dead before nightfall if there was any mercy. He knew that Jesus was going through death and would rise again to rule and reign as the Messiah, the king of Israel.

It was an ancient belief that we can trace with confidence back to Abraham who when confronted with the command to sacrifice his son Isaac, reasoned that God would raise him from the dead. Now this wicked man, repentant for his sins, has turned to Jesus.

The reply, “... today you will be with me in paradise.” These are the words that will one day come true for everyone living who has put their trust in Christ. Unless the Lord returns soon, you may find yourself longing to hear this promise as you lie struggling with the pains of death.

They are true because he is true!

The Torn Veil

⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,⁴⁵while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Luke 23:44–45

On that day, about 3 o'clock in a dark, gloomy afternoon there came an earthquake that split the rocks and tore the massive curtain in the temple in two (*Matthew 27:51*).

What was this curtain? The temple consisted of two main parts, the larger room that the priest entered first was the holy place. At the back was the curtain which separated it from the holy of holies. Into that area, where the presence of a holy God was, the high priest alone was allowed to enter as long as he brought the proper sacrifice of blood. It was death for anyone else, or even the high priest to enter God's presence, at any time except this one day.

We are told that this curtain was about one foot thick. Luke records for us the fact that it was torn, without giving us any indication of the means or the explanation. One can read Matthew's account and reason that it was the earthquake which tore it. He also tells us that it tore from top to bottom, that is, without any human being involved.

It would have seemed obvious to both Luke and Mark that Matthew believed it was God who showed the way was now open into his holy presence. The blood of the perfect sacrifice had been shed. Now there was no penalty for anyone seeing or entering into the holiness of God.

This is what Jesus did on the cross. God testifying that the way is now open for all who will by faith enter in.

Week Three

So Far

¹⁷and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹⁹Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’ ”

²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,²⁴so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.”

This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things, ...

John 19:17–24

The Gospel of John is different from the other three Gospels. Mark, Matthew, and Luke take a similar viewpoint, *synoptic*, of the life of Christ following the same basic outline. Each one tells some unique story or event, but structurally they similar. John isn't.

As we began this week of reading and meditating on Jesus' death, it is good to read John's account of these events *so far*.

Nothing is said of the events of the trip except to note that Jesus made it to the place of a skull, Golgotha. He places Jesus in the middle, but says nothing about the two men's crimes or their taunts.

In fact, the only outrage shown an innocent man being crucified is a squabble between Pilate and the chief priests over the inscription. To paraphrase the Roman governor's response, "We have crucified the King of the Jews so it's over!"

John does point out as an actual eyewitness that they took Jesus' clothes. Since he wasn't going to be needing them, the soldiers divided them amongst themselves as fairly as possible. The tunic was seamless, so to preserve its value they cast lots to see who would get it intact. Their attitude was, "we are in charge of this crucifixion and can do whatever we want!" But they weren't and even their behavior about Jesus' clothing had been scripted long ago by the God who controls even games of chance.

John records the words of prophecy from Psalm 22, a psalm of David where he looked ahead through the Spirit and wrote of this day,

"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

The Lord was in charge of his own crucifixion!

True, the Roman soldiers were acting according to their own character as underpaid warriors occupying a foreign country. They took his clothes because they wanted them without realizing he allowed them to do so and had foretold that they would. They would have laughed at the idea.

The Roman governor and the chief priests squabbled over the exact description of Jesus' crime written and placed over his head. Both arguing selfishly over stating correctly this injustice to put themselves in the most favorable light.

All were unable to change the truth.

God had chosen Jesus as King of the Jews!

The Women

... but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

John 19:25

There were four women standing at the foot of the cross: his mother, her sister, a woman who was married to a man named Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

It is an up-close vigil that they are keeping. Others pass by, some taunt, others look on when at a safe distance, but they are there.

Mary, his mother, has been there from the beginning of his life and now stands here grieving over her son's impending death.

Likely Mary's sister stood by Jesus' manger bed in Bethlehem admiring her nephew with wonder and joy. Now she grieves for both nephew and sister.

Of the other Mary, the wife of Clopas, we know nothing more for certain than what is told. Her husband may have been a brother to Joseph. She could also be an aunt by marriage.

Mary Magdalene, Luke tells us, became a disciple after he cast seven demons out of her (8:2). Having gone from the horrors of demon possession, she sought to serve along with the other women (8:2-3). Death would not stop her work, she determined to put spices in the wrappings around his dead body as soon as possible.

All of were believers. All committed to the Lord and to helping one another. Each of the three, there to comfort Mary, his mother, in her hour of grief.

He wants us to stand together in times of grief.

Mother

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, ...”

John 19:26a

It is impossible to tell the story of Jesus without telling of His mother. She is foretold in prophetic Scripture, Isaiah 7:14,

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The miracle of His birth was prophesied, but not clearly understood until Matthew, looking back with opened eyes, cites Isaiah to explain fulfillment in virgin birth.

Luke tells us that Mary herself questioned how something so impossible would happen. Knowing that it would occur by the power of God, not through man, she believed and accepted His will.

She was richly rewarded for her faith, but it cost her dearly from that moment on. She was blessed and was a blessing to her relative, Elizabeth, who confirmed miraculous birth and the identity of her son (*Luke 1:42-45*).

It is her faith, prior to this confirmation, which is blessed. Believing God would do as He said, even if it was impossible.

Perhaps it was that faith which sustained her through the miserable trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the last weeks of pregnancy. She remembered the words in the agony of child birth.

With a mother's love, she treasured the report of the shepherd's regarding the announcement of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (*Luke 2:19*).

Later in the temple, she receives a prophecy from Simeon that Jesus was salvation. He also warns her that a sword would pierce her own soul (2:35). Now she feels the sword.

Travelling from Bethlehem she was taken by Joseph to Egypt escaping the slaughter of her infant son (*Matthew 2:13-14*). She would return to Nazareth with her husband and son (2:22-23).

It was she who would urge upon him to use his powers to demonstrate who he was before his time (*John 2:3-5*). Gently he would rebuke her and perform a stealth miracle. He knew the timing, she didn't.

Later she would join with his brothers and sisters seeking to remove him, for His own welfare from the crowds (*Mark 3:20-21; 31*). This incident reminds us that faith is more important than family, for it is faith that makes us part of his family. It is not physical birth and kinship, but birth accomplished by the Spirit which is vital to life everlasting.

She stands now nearby the cross upon which the Savior, her miraculous son, is dying in cruel torture.

What of this woman, ... mother?

March 21

Behold your Son

... he said to his mother,

"Woman, behold, your son!"

John 19:26b

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' relationship with his mother begins and ends with this title, *Woman* (see *Genesis 2:23*). In 2:4, he addressed her with honor when she nudged him to do something about the wine failing. Now he uses this title of respect to care for her now.

Half of the blessing is now bestowed. Jesus is blessing his mother by putting her into a familial relationship with his beloved disciple (13:23-25). What was her role?

It was the role of any widow with a grown son, the role of the caregiver of childhood and youth now becoming the cared for by the one she raised. This is evidenced in the statement in the next verse that the disciple took her to his own home. Not to clean it and cook, but to be cared for and loved.

This points also to the compassion of Jesus, who is suffering horribly in the agonies of the cross. One indicator of the struggle to breath so as to sustain life is the ever-increasing shortness of expression as breath is exhaled. In the Greek and English this is but six syllables. The subsequent words to the disciple are but four. In all that pain, Jesus was conscious of his responsibility to his mother and to her suffering. What agony to watch someone in such terrible torment whom she had carried, suffered for in birth, cared for and raised. The sword was piercing her heart (*Luke 2:35*) and Jesus spared her further pain. From that hour she was taken from this spot to a loving home.

March 22

Behold your mother

Then he said to the disciple,

“Behold, your mother!”

And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

John 19:27

Here is the other half of the blessing. The disciple is given the responsibility of Jesus' mother. The time for motherly care was long past, but the time for caring for mother was still upon them.

We find this custom unusual now as it really was then. Keener in the IVP Bible Background Commentary writes,

Dying fathers could exhort sons to take care of surviving mothers (which they normally would do); for a disciple to be accorded a role in his teacher's family was a great honor to the disciple (disciples sometimes called their teachers "father").

This was a great honor to bestow upon a disciple, but it was not without expense and sacrifice. This is ever true in the service of the Lord, but what riches of reward both now and in the kingdom for this beloved disciple.

He is not named. This can be accounted for in the likelihood that it is John, the author of this account and associate of Peter (*13:23-24; 21:7, 20; Acts 3:1; 8:14*).

I think that Jesus' words were intended to remove His mother from the scene to spare her further agony. It certainly was to provide for her the rest of her life which may have stretched on for decades. Jesus would rise from the dead, but He would not be there personally to care for her and to hold her hand as she breathed her last, but the disciple would.

Week Four

Darkness

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

Mark 15:33

We move now from the fourth Gospel to what was probably the first written. Mark tells us of a time of darkness that came over the whole land. Remember that the sixth hour refers to six hours from daybreak or noon. This darkness will last until three o'clock.⁹

It is supernatural in origin and covers at least Jerusalem and as far as one could see from Golgotha. What is the significance of the darkness?

The Bible uses darkness as a warning of judgment to come.

⁹ *“And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.”¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.*

Amos 8:9–10

It would have been impossible with the background of the Hebrew scriptures to see this as other than a day of mourning and judgment (*Joel 2:2; see Mark 13:24*).

But the darkness will give way to light, not through human effort, but because the Lord will work.

² *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.*

Isaiah 60:2

The Cry

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

Matthew 27:45–49

The misunderstanding of Jesus’ words began right there in the crowd surrounding the cross and has continued through the centuries. Let’s clear up *some* of the confusion:

Jesus was not calling for Elijah as the people thought. Matthew’s translation into Greek clears that up definitively. It is not to Elijah that He calls, but to His Father.

I don’t believe God forsook Jesus on the cross, nor do I think that He felt forsaken, although it seemed like He was forsaken. Jesus knew he had to drink the bitter cup. It was not the wine vinegar on a sponge which contained no myrrh to deaden the pain. The cup was this death and He was going through it victoriously.

Jesus was announcing the twenty-second Psalm.

It begins with these words, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* and continues with a prophetic description of these sufferings, but it is not a psalm of despair, but of triumph. He caused these words to be included in 22:24, *“For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy, He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help.”*

Psalms had not been numbered in the days of Jesus. It was customary to refer to a psalm by its first line. This let others know which psalm you were thinking of and would like to sing.

We do the same thing and indexing hymns. If you look in the back of a hymnal at the index, you will be able to find a song by either its title or its first line. For instance, the hymn entitled “*Make Me a Blessing*” can also be found by the words, “*Out in the highways and byways of life,*” its first line.

If all we had of Psalm 22 was the first two verses, we would have to classified as a lament psalm and a very gloomy one. But its true message is not found at the beginning, but at the end.

As we read, study, and meditate on Psalm 22, I want you to remember that Jesus was not crying in despair, but offering us hope and encouragement, even in his intense suffering.

March 27

The Cry

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

*Why are you so far from saving me,
from the words of my groaning?*

*²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

What does it mean to be forsaken by God?

The psalmist expresses this idea as “abandonment” in the words of the second line, “... *you are so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning.*”

He is expressing the *feeling* of abandonment, but the comment, “... *You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!*” (v.21) shows that he has not actually been abandoned.

It is not unusual to feel forsaken when our prayers are not answered as we would like and when we would like, but it never means we have been written off by God.

Was Jesus forsaken by God on the cross? It was certainly the Father's will for Him to die there on our behalf. Jesus did it for the joy of being with us in the Father's presence. That His sufferings were acceptable to God is clearly seen in the Father's raising Jesus from the dead. It is no less than we should expect from the holy God. He will keep His commitments to those He loves.

*³Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
⁴In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
⁵To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

One encouragement when we feel forsaken is to look back at how God had worked in the lives of others who trusted in God. There were times when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had felt abandoned, but God preserved them. Joseph certainly could have given in to despair in Egypt except he knew God planned it for good. As the Lord's anointed, David, fled from King Saul, he eventually had to leave the land to survive, but in God's time, he became king. Even the exile would give way to return to the land. God's plans cannot be stopped.

But will God deliver you?

*⁶But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
⁷All 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!”
*⁹Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts.*
*¹⁰On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.*

Another way to turn the feeling of being forsaken into faith is to look back at how God has worked in your own life, even from birth.

It is this trust which becomes the source of the world’s mocking. Their purpose is to drive us to despair and away from faith. This attack can only be conquered by faith.

*¹¹Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.*

There is nothing wrong with appealing to God for help at any time, but certainly it is imperative when “*there is none to help.*” We should never fear to ask for His help in the struggles

*¹²Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*
*¹³they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*
*¹⁴I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;*
*¹⁵my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

With very descriptive language, he describes the power of the enemies in the danger he felt. The “*bulls of Bashan*” and were well fed, strong and dangerous as anyone who has been in an open field with a large bull can tell you. Their ferocity can rightly be compared to that of hungry lions.

When that happens, fear takes hold of our bodies and produces in us a weakness very similar to what Jesus felt on the cross. It is the process of dying bodily.

*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.

Psalm 22:1–18

We need to stop at this point and look at the description in this Psalm in light of what Jesus went through on the cross. He was mocked by his enemies for his faith as in verse 8. His hands and feet were pierced as in verse 16. The soldiers divided his clothes, even casting lots for his row as in verse 18.

Is it any wonder that the early church thought of Jesus when they were reminded of this Psalm?

When the Lord cried out, he reminded them of the message of this portion of the word of God.

The Call

*19But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
 O you my help, come quickly to my aid!*

*20Deliver my soul from the sword,
 my precious life from the power of the dog!*

*21Save me from the mouth of the lion!
 You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!*

Psalm 22:19–21

This section is full of rich imagery as it describes the dangers as that of the sword, the power of the dog, the mouth of the lion, and the horns of the wild oxen.

The great transformation comes in verse 21. His cry goes from the imperative, “save me,” to the cry of relief, “you have rescued me.” In an instant he has is gone from feeling forsaken to being saved.

This Psalm, by King David, hundreds of years before Jesus came was not written by a man in despair. Instead it was written by one who had passed through despair into certain hope. Nothing in the circumstances changed, but he pressed forward with confidence in God’s deliverance.

Nothing in the circumstances of your life may change when you trust Jesus, but everything changes. You pass from death into life, from sinner to saint.

The Consequence

*22I 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!*

When you are saved, you must tell. Our testimony to the working of God in our lives is an essential part of the plan. Others who may be struggling must know that the Lord God hears the cry of those who trust in Him.

*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.*

Here is the definitive answer to the question, “Did God turn His back on Jesus when He was dying on the cross?”

The answer was not deliverance of the soul, the life from immediate death. It was not postponement, but eternal victory. Jesus showed the way to eternal life.

*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!*

The word needs to get out that God has not despised or hated the afflicted. God did not turn his back on Jesus but delivered him through the grave.

This is great encouragement when we are afflicted.

*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.*
*²⁸For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.*
*²⁹All 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.*
*³⁰Posterity 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.*

Psalm 22:22–31

The message of Jesus, his sufferings and victory, must be told worldwide throughout the generations.

Week Five

The Mission

This week we focus on the humanness of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the one statement, *“I am thirsty.”* This statement found in John 19:28 could not be true of God, unless he had also become a man. Whenever this word is used in the New Testament or by the Greek translators of the Old Testament, it refers to a need that humans have, but not God.

There are two kinds of thirst, *literal* thirst and thirst as a *symbol* for something else. We already have encountered both types in the Gospel of John and Jesus statements in John 4:13 – 14,

¹³Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

In the first instance, Jesus used the word in its *literal sense*, for something that requires *water* to satisfy. This need is very common among human beings. The Samaritan woman was so intrigued by Jesus offer, that she was enticed into inquiring about “living water.”

It was then that Jesus went back to the concept he had introduced in *v.10* of living water which would give *eternal life*. We find later in John 7:39,

³⁹ (When he said “living water,” he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

It was this kind of thirst-quenching water, the real need and longing of mankind that Jesus came to provide. It could only be provided by Jesus entering into “his glory.”

This would only be provided to us through Jesus suffering the pangs of thirst upon the cross.

The Scripture Fulfilled

John tells us that Jesus knew his mission was completed. Next week we will see him stated plainly in the sixth thorn crowned message (19:30). Today we should focus on the second statement in 19:28, “to fulfill Scripture.” Gerald Borchert in the new American commentary on the Gospel of John raises two important questions:

- (1) What Scripture was intended? and
- (2) To what was the fulfillment referring?

There is a Scripture that predicted this exact scenario. Psalm 69:21 says,

*They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.*

This Psalm is certainly a messianic psalm, that is, while it may echo some aspects of the psalmist’s life, it is really speaking prophetically of the coming Messiah (*see also Psalm 22 and 110*). He was “hated without a cause” (69:4; *John 15:25*). His own brothers, disciples, had deserted him (69:8). Jesus certainly had a “passion” for the temple (69:9; *John 2:17*). For this he was reproached by those who were turning the Temple into a place of merchandise. When he asked for something to drink, they gave him sour wine (69:21; *John 19:29*).

The fulfillment of this Scripture was to a large degree out of Jesus’ hands. He could declare his thirst, but that was no guarantee that anyone would offer him anything. The Gospel of Mark seems to indicate that the offer of sour wine was not a humanitarian gesture, a mark of compassion, but more a desire to prolong his suffering in order to satisfy the curiosity of whether Elijah would rescue him or not. Here John seems to present the manner in which it is presented as similar to someone who would give a patient in a hospital the opportunity to suck on a sponge when they could not drink. The action of Jesus calling, “I am thirsty,” and of someone offering him “sour wine” fulfills one of many Scriptures about the Messiah.

Like Us

The physical, bodily sufferings of Jesus remind us the son of God was born as a human being in order to help us.

¹⁴Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.¹⁵Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

Hebrews 2:14–15 (NLT)

Jesus had to be born in order to die in our place and thus free us from the penalty for sin — death. He knew this before the world was created. He knew all his earthly life that he would give his life a sacrifice for sin. He loved us enough to do that. When as the high priest he offered that sacrifice, he took away the penalty for our sins.

Having loved us that much, he is prepared to do everything necessary to help us now when we are suffering, and our faith is being tested.

¹⁷Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.¹⁸Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

Hebrews 2:17–18 (NLT)

What help do you need from the Lord today? Perhaps it is the wisdom to avoid the temptations of sin and overcome the traps of the devil (*James 1:5*). Maybe it is God's grace to endure physical pain that will not go away (*2 Corinthians 12:8 – 9*). If you will ask, He will understand and will help, because He's been there.

Sour Wine

What was it that they offered Jesus on the cross? Actually, He was given something to drink twice in those six horrible hours.

At the beginning of the crucifixion, they offered him a mixture of *wine* (*oinos*) mixed with *myrrh* (*Mark 15:23, Matthew 27:34* describes it as *gall* referring to its bitter taste). This Jesus tasted, but refused to drink. They will not offer this to him again.

Towards the end, either when he calls, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*” or when he says, “*I am thirsty,*” they offer him something different. It also had been offered before (*Luke 23:36*) and been rejected, but now he takes some of it.

What was it? The word *oxos* is translated as “*sour wine*” or “*wine vinegar.*” Both drinks are made from the same substance, grapes. Wine can either be new wine which is a very low alcohol content or the better wine which has a greater natural content up to 12 to 14% alcohol. Wine would be a much more potent sedative that would have tended to cloud Jesus’ mind on the cross.

Over time wine turns to vinegar. In the process, the alcohol and the wine are converted to acetic acid by a naturally occurring bacteria. Depending upon how far the process had gone, the resulting drink was a great thirst quencher. The Roman soldiers gathered around the cross would’ve had this drink available to quench their own thirst. Likely any passerby who was traveling through Jerusalem would have had this drink with them.

When they offered in the last moments of his life, they knew that he would not be able to drink it. Instead they soaked a sponge with it and put it up so that he could suck on it as best he could in order to quench his thirst. Anyone who has ever been in the hospital and unable to drink, perhaps while recovering from surgery, would be familiar with this process and the comfort that it would bring.

Why not take a moment and thank the Lord that he was willing to suffer on our behalf in order to identify with us.

Despised & Rejected

As we close out a week of considering the humanity of Jesus Christ reflected in his statement, “I am thirsty,” I want us to consider a passage from the prophet Isaiah which speaks to what this man who loved us so much went through. I would encourage you to begin reading in *Isaiah 52:13 — 53:12*.

In this reading, we see what happened to Jesus on the last day of his earthly life, the day he went to the cross. His face was disfigured because of the sufferings he endured (*52:14*).

Never beautiful or majestic in his appearance, now on the cross in the midst of sorrows people turn their backs and averted their gaze so as to not look upon the horror that came upon him (*53:2 – 3*).

His hands and feet were pierced, his back was brutally beaten. He did not deserve this punishment, but the truth of Scripture is we did (*53:5 – 6*).

The Gospel accounts are clear that Jesus was innocent of wrongdoing,

¹³ Then Pilate called together the leading priests and other religious leaders, along with the people, ¹⁴ and he announced his verdict. “You brought this man to me, accusing him of leading a revolt. I have examined him thoroughly on this point in your presence and find him innocent. ¹⁵ Herod came to the same conclusion and sent him back to us. Nothing this man has done calls for the death penalty. ¹⁶ So I will have him flogged, and then I will release him.”

Luke 23:13–16 (NLT)

An innocent man, the only really sinless one since Adam was first created, walked among us and died in our place. He died without descendants (*Isaiah 53:8*), but now he has many (*53:10*). As Jesus now looks back on his sufferings, he is satisfied and has made it possible for us to be righteous not by our sufferings, but because we trust Him.

Week Six

Creation Finished

This week we focus upon the sixth message given by Jesus while He was on the cross... Finished! As we work up to this declaration by the Lord, we need to consider that it is in the character of God to finish what He starts.

Our first introduction to God in the Bible comes in the book of Genesis. The Spirit is about the great work of creation and each day begins something that continues on to today: *light and darkness, oceans and sky, dry ground and vegetation, sun and moon, fish and birds, animals and man*. Not only was his work “good,” it was also perfect because having begun it continued. We read this,

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

Genesis 2:2

What God begins he brings it to completion in a way that has ongoing benefit. The world was created to enable mankind to live with a holy God and have fellowship with him. Male and female, man was to represent God upon this earth (1:26-27).

When sin entered the world, man was no longer able to walk in fellowship with God because we were now unholy. This was not and is not the end of the story. Before creation God had a plan to deal with our sin and to bring us once again into fellowship with him.

That plan, devised before the world was created, meant Jesus would have to become a man and die in our place to pay the price so that God could make us holy once again. That plan is finished also and has ongoing benefits to anyone who will believe today.

Temple Finished

Being recipients of the grace of God does not protect us from becoming sinners. Adam and Eve were living in a wonderful place with daily fellowship with the most wonderful being in all the universe. They still sinned.

God rescued his people from Egypt and caused them to build the Tabernacle as a place where he could meet with them even though they were still unholy. It was a place that reminded them through courtyards and curtains that they were separated for a time. Later Solomon built a great Temple on this plan. By rebellion, Israel lost this Temple. After the Babylonian exile, God put it in the hearts of the elders to build another Temple with a veil dividing the Holy Place from the place where God met the high priest, the Most Holy Place. They finished the Temple March 12, 515 BC.

And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Ezra 6:14–15

Through the years, Herod had embellished the same Temple making it more ornate and enlarging the grounds around it, but it was the same Temple they had completed earlier with its veil in place.

It was the veil in this finished Temple which tore from top to bottom when Jesus finished the work of salvation.

Mission Finished

The work which was planned before the world was created, which was necessitated by man's plunge into sin, and foreshadowed in the sacrifices and in the Temple, which had been prophesied through the millennia was near completion.

When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30 (NLT)

As the message we studied last week, this message is again but one word packed with meaning. "It" refers to the work, providing salvation so that man could be restored to fellowship with a holy God. This verb is in the passive voice meaning it did not accomplish itself it was done by another, by Jesus Christ dying on the cross. This one act has ongoing benefit even to today. That is why Jesus spoke it in the perfect tense.

The apostles picked up this theme in their proclamation of a finished work of salvation:

¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

Romans 6:10

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 10:10

For this message, Jesus selected a term common in business. We have found papyri which are receipts for taxes with this word written across them. What does it mean?

PAID IN FULL

Prophecy Finished

Through the centuries, God had given words to holy men, prophets such as Moses, Elijah and Elisha, King David, and Isaiah. They foretold not just what God was going to do in their day, but also what God was going to do for us in our day (*1 Peter 1:10-12*).

The Gospel of John, for instance, has numerous direct quotes from Scripture which are about the Messiah and which are fulfilled in Jesus' life and words. Take a few moments today and look there to see the finishing of these prophecies:

1. Shows the Father's glory 1:14 (Isaiah 60:1-2)
2. Zeal for God's House 2:17 (Psalm 69:9)
3. Crucifixion 3:14 (Numbers 21:9)
4. That Prophet 5:46; 6:14; 7:40 (Deuteronomy 18:15)
5. Riding a Colt 12:14-15 (Zechariah 9:9)
6. Jewish Unbelief 12:38-40 (Isaiah 53:1; 6:10)
7. Betrayer Eats with Him 13:18 (Psalm 41:9)
8. Hated 15:25 (Psalm 69:4)
9. Disciples Scatter 16:32 (Zechariah 13:7)
10. Son of Destruction 17:21 (Psalm 41:9; 109:7-8)
11. Gambling 19:24 (Psalm 22:18)
12. Given Sour Wine 19:28-29 (Psalm 69:21)
13. No Bones Broken 19:36 (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12)
14. Look on Him Pierced 19:37 (Zechariah 12:10)
15. Rise from the Dead 20:9 (Psalm 16:9-10)

Time Finished

⁴Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (Ephesians 1:4–5 *NLT*)

God’s plan was devised before the world was created, finished by Jesus death on the cross, reminds us of the prophetic truth that our time is coming to an end. People are still tempted into the folly of thinking that nothing has changed since time began and nothing will change in the future.

³Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. ⁴They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.” (2 Peter 3:3–4 *NLT*)

We know change is all around us, but we have difficulty grasping the concept that time will come to an end. God will not allow this sinful world to continue forever. That was not the plan.

One of the last things revealed to Daniel was the end of time.

¹“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1–7 *ESV*)

Week Seven

Breath of God

... then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7)

God is the source of life. He literally is the air we breathe as the song says. He created man out of the earthly materials, but it was the breath of life which made us each living creatures (persons). From that one act of creation all of us have come into existence and continue to live.

Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone” (*Luke 4:4*). He was quoting Moses (*Deuteronomy 8:3*). This is one of the lessons from the manna that God provided for Israel in the wilderness. Their food literally came from heaven in order to help them understand that the real reason why they had bread to eat was because God said so and for no other reason.

The world record for holding one’s breath was established in 2012 by Stig Severinsen, a Danish free diver. By saturating his body with pure oxygen for 20 minutes he was able to hold his breath for 22 minutes. This record stood for four years until broken by Aleix Segura who went on an additional two minutes and 3.45 seconds until he drew his next breath.

The reason these men were able to do this is because of intense training, being aided by oxygen, and the fact that God gave them the breath of life. One day both of them will take their last breath.

One day you will take the last breath that God will allow you to have and then you will pass from the realm of the living into death. When will this happen?

Psalm 31:15 says, “*My future is in your hands.*”

Commit

*⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. (Psalm 31:5)*

Written by Jesus' ancestor, King David, Psalm 31 communicates the reasons why we can trust God. We are not sure what peril the king was facing when he wrote this, but we do know that when Jesus quoted it, death was imminent, and trust was vital. He was committing his life and the possibility of rising again to his Father.

David was trusting the Lord for safety and difficult, perhaps life-threatening, circumstances. He knew that God was a *refuge* (4). What is pictured by this word is an impregnable mountain stronghold.

He knew that God had redeemed him from every adversity that he had faced so far (5; see *2 Samuel 4:9; 1 Kings 1:29*). In every circumstance where he had been afflicted, he had the confidence that God had seen it (7; *Exodus 3:7; 4:31*).

Speaking as a shepherd, David says that God has brought him to "*a broad place*." This was a place of safety and supply. He contrasts the plans of the enemy with trust in God's good purposes (8).

He knows that "*calling upon*" the Lord is the solution to his difficulties (17). One of the reasons he knows this is because of his experience. David had been in a besieged city, God had heard his prayer and delivered him (21-22; see *1 Samuel 30*).

Have you found yourself besieged facing the worst disaster of your life? There is a God on whom you can call committing yourself in trust that He will deliver.

Entrust

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23)

Trust is required when people are being unfair to us.

While Jesus was on the cross there was little he could do when he was reviled. He could've responded by hurling words of accusation from his vast knowledge of the sins of all people. He could've threatened them with what was going to happen to them in the judgment. He did none of these things. Instead he kept quiet because he was trusting that God would judge Him justly.

It is because of this example of Jesus the Peter was able to write to fellow believers who were suffering great persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. He encouraged them not to suffer as wrongdoers, but to recognize that when they suffered while doing good, God would reward them.

Suffering is nothing to be ashamed of, but he does not always turn out in physical deliverance. Sometimes our sufferings are to the death. Peter says,

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)

Do you look upon suffering as an opportunity to trust God with your very life knowing that it might be His will to bring glory to his name and to you by letting you die. It was true for Jesus and it was true for the first Christian martyr Stephen who died while a young man, Saul of Tarsus, stood and watched (*Acts 7:58*).

Back

... and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Our spirit, the breath of life, will one day return to God and our body will return to the earth from which it springs. If that is all there is life would seem... unfinished!

There is so much to life, the sunshine on your face, the incredible vastness of the stars in heaven, and the feel of rain upon your skin.

When we are young and vigorous there is so much that we can do with our strength. We can slide into home scoring the winning run or make the tackle turns the tide in a game. With our strength and intelligence we can build things including a satisfying career. We can marry the love of our life and have the fulfillment of loving and raising children.

All of this will be meaningless if we forget that we have come from our Creator and are returning to Him. This is why the Preacher wrote Ecclesiastes starts off with an exhortation,

¹ Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them";

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (ESV)

God has given us the breath of his life, our spirit. It comes from Him and one day will return to Him. Each of us is on our way to a rendezvous with God our Creator. We will stand before him and be judged by him. Jesus came to live and die to make that a good meeting for all who will put their trust in him.

Contrite

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*
(Psalm 51:17)

What have you done to the spirit that God gave you? Each of us has this precious gift of life which we use to sin. King David, the author of this Psalm, had committed adultery with another man's wife. The heading of the Psalm names her as Bathsheba, but in the lineage of Jesus simply calls her "*the wife of Uriah.*"

When confronted about this sin by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12:1 – 18), the king repented and then wrote Psalm 51 to publicly declare what he had hidden in secret, or so he thought. It turns out the only one in the dark was the king who tried to cover up his sexual sin with murder.

Having defiled the spirit that God gave to him, this godly, but sinful man was broken in spirit and contrite heart. It was this inward change that enabled God to answer the prayer,

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.*

Psalm 51:10 (ESV)

Is your heart clean and your spirit right before God?

It is not necessary to go through life with sin an ever-present companion and a spirit askew from the holy purposes of God. Because Jesus died the price for sin has been paid, the way to walk with a holy God has been shown, and God will not despise to walk with our spirit now or in eternity.

Is your trust in him? Is there any sin that you have not confessed before God?