

Psalm 22: The Suffering Shepherd

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 22.

Psalm 22, I want us to look at the whole Psalm, but if we just read again from the beginning. Psalm 22 from the beginning, where Jesus says, of Israel, and so on.

As you know, for many people, Friday always marks the beginning of the weekend. And after a long week at work or a long week in school for our young friends here, everyone usually gets that Friday feeling. Ministers don't usually get the Friday feeling, by the way. But most people get the Friday feeling where they can rest and relax over the weekend. But at this time of year, we hear a lot about a slightly different Friday, a day that we've all come to know as Black Friday, the Black Friday sales. And it's interesting, the term Black Friday, it's derived from the concept that businesses, they usually operate at a financial loss, or what we would call in the red. But during the Friday sales in the run-up to Christmas, many businesses, they make a profit. And it puts them into the black, hence the term Black Friday. Black Friday. But as we come, you know, as we come to Psalm 22, I want us to see that this Psalm, it prophesies, proclaims, and points us forward to the real Black Friday.

The real Black Friday. Because as you know, this Black Friday was a Black Friday for many different reasons. Not only because a transaction took place on that Friday, a transaction which brought sinners out of the poverty of the red into the profit of the black. But also it was the real Black Friday because you'll remember that Calvary was shrouded in darkness on that Black Friday. Calvary was shrouded in darkness as our Savior suffered for our sins. And so I'd like us to consider this Psalm this evening, and I want us to do so just using three headings. Three simple headings. The cry, the count, and the congregation. The cry, the count, and the congregation. So first of all, the cry. The cry. We see that in verse 1, where Jesus says, My God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer. And by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are wholly enthroned on the praises of Israel. And the reason I say Jesus said is because my good friend

J.C. Ryle once said, he said, the book of Psalms, in a word, is a book full of Christ. Christ suffering, as you have in Psalm 22, Christ in humiliation, Christ dying, Christ rising again, Christ coming the second time, and Christ reigning over all. The book of Psalms, says Ryle, is a book full, full of Jesus Christ. And Psalm 22 is no different, because Psalm 22, as you can see, it brings us face to face with the cross of Jesus Christ. But what's remarkable is that Psalm 22 is the first of three Psalms which form a trilogy of shepherd Psalms. A trilogy of shepherd Psalms. Because in Psalm 22, we see the suffering shepherd. Then in Psalm 23, we see the saving shepherd. And then in Psalm 24, we have the sovereign shepherd. And both this evening and God willing tomorrow, I'd like us to consider this trilogy, this trilogy of shepherd Psalms. And as we consider this trilogy of shepherd

[4 : 3 9] Psalms, I want us to ask the simple question, how good is our good shepherd? How good is our good shepherd? And so, this evening we come to Psalm 22, and we see the suffering shepherd.

He's the suffering shepherd, because as we said in Psalm 22, Psalm 22 is a Psalm that's full of Jesus. And it's a Psalm that brings us face to face with the cross of Jesus. And it brings us face to face with the cross, because of course, Psalm 22 is a messianic Psalm. It's a Psalm, as you can see in the title, it's written by David. But it's a Psalm which exhorts us and encourages us to look to the greater than David. Because Psalm 22, all the time, it's prophesying and proclaiming and pointing us forward to the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. But you know, what makes a Psalm a messianic Psalm?

We always need to ask that question. What makes a Psalm a messianic Psalm? A Psalm is a messianic Psalm is if it's quoted in the New Testament in reference to or in relation to Jesus Christ. And that's certainly true of Psalm 22, because from the outset of Psalm 22, from the opening line of Psalm 22, we see that Psalm 22 is quoted by none other than Jesus himself, where Jesus cried from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But as you know, when Jesus quoted Psalm 22 on the cross, that quote from Psalm 22, it's what we've come to know as one of the seven sayings of the cross of Jesus. The first saying, you'll remember, it was the wonderful prayer for his enemies. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. The second saying was to the thief on the cross who turned to Jesus at the eleventh hour and said, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, today you will be with me in paradise. The third saying was a saying of care and compassion towards his mother, where Jesus said to his mother, Mary, woman, behold your son.

And he said to John, son, behold your mother. The fourth saying was this saying from Psalm 22, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The fifth saying was a cry of torment, I thirst. The sixth saying was a shout of victory, it is finished. And the seventh and last saying from the cross of Calvary was a prayer was a prayer to go home, back to be with his father. Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. But you know, I think it's always important to note that this saying here in Psalm 22, it's the center saying from the center cross. It's the center saying from the center cross, because there were three sayings before this saying, and there were three sayings after this saying.

It's the center saying from the center cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It's the center saying cried from the center cross at Calvary. But the thing about Calvary is that when Jesus cried this saying, this center saying from the center cross, when Jesus cried it, the midday sun was meant to be at its highest and at its hottest. And yet when Jesus uttered these words, the place of the skull had been plunged into darkness. It was the real Black Friday, the real Black Friday, because on Good Friday, there was darkness, we're told in the Gospels. Darkness over the whole land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. But you know, the thing about the darkness at Calvary is that it would have been unnerving and unnatural. The darkness at Calvary would have been unnerving for everybody there and unnatural for everyone to see it, because the sun was meant to be at its highest and hottest.

[9 : 06] But the thing about the darkness at Calvary is that it was a symbol of God's judgment. It was a symbol of God's judgment, and that's what was happening. God the Father was judging His Son as the sin-bearer of His people. And as Calvary was shrouded in darkness, there was this great transaction taking place, a transaction that would bring lost, hell-deserving sinners out of the poverty of the red into the profit of the black. It was the real Black Friday. It was Calvary's great transaction, where as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, God the Father made His Son to be sin for us, even though He knew no sin.

Why? All so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. It was Calvary's great transaction. It was the real Black Friday, where as we've said many times before, it was there at Calvary that the worst about me was laid upon Him, and the best about Him was laid upon me. My disobedience was reckoned to Him.

His obedience reckoned to me. My sin and shame transferred to Christ. His salvation and security transferred to me. My ruin credited all to Him. His riches credited to me. My rags of righteousness that were filthy all handed over to Jesus. His robe of righteousness was received. His blood brought us out of the poverty of the red into the profit of the black. It was the real Black Friday.

It was Calvary's great transaction, which left Jesus crying, as it is in the Gospels, Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani, my God, my God, why? Why have you forsaken me?

And you know, throughout the centuries, many Bible commentators, they've tried to explain and expand upon the cry, the cry of the why. They've tried to understand the why from the lips of Jesus, but they've all failed. In fact, it was Martin Luther who was one of the great minds of the Reformation in the 16th century. He spent days trying to understand it, trying to understand the why.

[11 : 55] But in the end, all Luther could say was, God forsaken of God, who can understand it? God forsaken of God, who can understand it? And you know, this is the thing, my friend.

Although we will never be able to fully fathom the depths of the darkness and the dereliction and the death of Jesus, we know that through his cry from Calvary, our salvation was accomplished and our salvation was applied to us. And so we see the cry. Then secondly, the count. The cry and the count.

Now look at verse 14. You know, when Jesus quoted the center saying from the center cross at Calvary, by uttering verse 1 of Psalm 22, Jesus wasn't just drawing our attention to verse 1. He was drawing our attention to the entire psalm. He wants us to go through the whole psalm and see that he is there in every verse. Because Psalm 22, as we said, it prophesies and proclaims and points us forward to Jesus.

And particularly the humiliation of Jesus. The humiliation of Jesus, where Jesus humbled himself from the crown of glory down to the cradle in Bethlehem, all the way down to the cross at Calvary.

Jesus humbled himself down, down, down from the crown to the cradle to the cross. And you know, I don't think we actually appreciate how far down the humiliation of Jesus Christ really went.

[14 : 26] Because, you know, we read in verse 6 there, Jesus speaking, verse 6, but I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

Now, I don't suppose that any of us have ever depicted or described ourselves like a dirty and disgusting worm. It's not something you would say to your family. It's not something you would utter to your friends and say, I'm a worm and not a man. And yet you read this psalm and you see that Jesus said it. And Jesus said it because in his humiliation, in his humiliation, he became the last Adam. He became, as Paul says, off the earth, earthy. He became the last Adam. You know, my friend, the humiliation of Jesus Christ, it was down, down, down, from the crown to the cradle to the cross, from glory to Golgotha to the grave. And you know, my friend, that's how far down Jesus went to save lost sinners like you and I. That's how far down Jesus went. And the thing is, you know, a worm is not only dirty and disgusting. I don't suppose anybody likes worms, unless it's on the end of a hook going out to look for a fish. But you know, none of us describe ourselves like a worm. And yet Jesus describes himself like a worm. But not only a dirty and disgusting worm. The thing about a worm is that a worm dwells in darkness. A worm dwells in darkness. And that's the point of verse 6.

It's bringing us back to the darkness of Calvary, where there's not only this physical darkness at Calvary, with the light of the sun extinguished for three hours. There's also the spiritual darkness of Calvary, where, as it were, hell descends into the soul of Jesus. But there's also the moral darkness of Calvary. There's the moral darkness at Calvary. Because at Calvary, there was darkness in the heart of mankind. And it was all being directed towards the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. And that's what we see Jesus counting. He was counting the crowds of people against him.

And you know, in order to emphasize and explain how fierce and ferocious these crowds were, we're given all these images and all these illustrations of wild animals. We're given the images and illustrations of bulls and dogs and lions and oxen. And we can see that when you follow the flow of the psalm of this suffering shepherd. Because we read that Jesus says that many bulls encompass me. That's verse 12. Strong bulls of Bashan surround me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion. He says later on that dogs encompass me, a company of evildoers. They all encircle me. Which leads Jesus to pray from the cross. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion, you who have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. All these images and illustrations of bulls and dogs and lions and oxen, they're all emphasizing, they're all explaining this moral darkness at Calvary.

The moral darkness. There's the physical, there's the spiritual, but there's the moral of just how fierce and how ferocious the crowds were towards Jesus at the cross. And that's why Jesus confesses in verse 6. He says, I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

[18 : 47] All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me. They wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him. For he delights in him. You can almost just imagine hearing it from Calvary itself. It's as if they were all there. It's just as Isaiah prophesied too.

Jesus would be despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Do you know, my friend, at Calvary, Jesus was counting the crowds against him.

And sad to say, we were part of the crowd. We were part of the crowd. Because, you know, with the crowd, we rejected him and railed at him. We mocked him and maligned him. We falsely accused him and flogged him. We beat him and bruised him. We cursed him and we crucified him. My friend, we're part of the crowd. We're part of the crowd because we're the reason he was there. We're part of the crowd because we are the reason he was at Calvary. But the wonderful thing is that Jesus could not only count the bulls of Bashan surrounding him. He also says that he can count all his bones in his body. He says in verses 16 and 17, they have pierced my hands and feet.

I can count all my bones. And, you know, it's a vivid and visual description of Calvary. But that's what makes Psalm 22 such a remarkable psalm about the suffering shepherd.

Because Psalm 22, the amazing thing is you're here in the Old Testament. You are a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. A thousand years before the crucifixion of Jesus took place. It makes the Psalm 22 as the oldest Old Testament prophecy about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And it's amazing how clear it is. How clear it is. It presents to us the clarity of the cross. But you know what's also amazing about Psalm 22 is that this psalm was written 1000 BC, and it was written long before crucifixion was ever invented by the Romans as a form of capital punishment. This psalm was written when the Romans didn't even exist as an empire. In fact, you know, when it comes to the suffering shepherd, maybe I've said this before, you know, the gospel writers, they don't tell us all about the sufferings of the suffering shepherd. They don't tell us that the gospel writers never tell us that the crucifixion was invented by the Romans as one of the most painful forms of capital punishment.

[21 : 51] And they don't tell us that the cross was used not to make death quick, but to prolong the agony and the anguish of death. The gospel writers, they don't tell us that those who were crucified were sent to die a thousand deaths. You know, we can't enter into that. But the gospel writers, they don't tell us that the crown of thorns that was pushed into the head and into the skull of Jesus, that would have caused a significant amount of blood loss. They don't tell us that the crucifixion was often preceded by flogging or scourging that would physically weaken the condemned criminal.

They don't describe for us the whip or the phlegm that was made of strips of leather that was fastened together. And on the end of the strips of leather, there was broken glass, there was nails and bone and pieces of lead all fastened together to cause the most damage. They don't tell us that that phlegm would rip through flesh, tearing skin and muscle from the body, causing even more blood loss.

You know, the gospel writers, they don't even describe the nails that are mentioned here in verse 16, how they pierced my hands and feet. They don't just tell us that the nails were six inches long and that they weren't hammered through the hand, they were hammered through the wrist so that you were suspended on your wrist bone and hammered through your ankle bones into the side of the cross. And what's more, they don't even tell us that the victim of crucifixion didn't bleed to death.

You never died of the pain. You suffocated with exhaustion. Because, you know, the only way to breathe while hanging on a Roman cross is to press down on the nails in your hands or your wrists, to push down, allowing oxygen to go down your throat. Just to breathe in a...

And the fight, the desire to live, and the prospect of death would go on for hours, sometimes days. But for Jesus, death didn't overcome him. Jesus said that he overcame death.

[24 : 21] He laid down his life. He became obedient unto death, even death, on the cross. You know, my friend, the gospel writers, they don't tell us about the sufferings of the suffering shepherd. And there's a reason for that. Because they want to exhort us and encourage us to remember and to reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd. The salvation of the suffering shepherd.

That's what I want us to consider, lastly and briefly, under the heading, the congregation. So the cry, the count, and the congregation. The congregation. Look at verse 22.

Verse 22. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. 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. For he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. He has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation. My vows I will perform before those who fear him. You know, in these verses, you can immediately notice that there's a change of feeling in the psalm. Because the feeling, you could say, the feeling has changed from persecution to praise. From gloom to glory. From suffering to shouts of joy. But, you know, it's not only the feeling of the psalm that's changed. The focus of the psalm has changed. Because it's moved from Calvary to the congregation. There's been this move from, the focus has moved from Calvary to the congregation. Where the congregation, we're told, are to remember and to reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd on the cross at Calvary.

That's what we read in verse 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. Jesus says, because it's Jesus as we said. Jesus is speaking in this messianic psalm. Jesus says, the good of the congregations and their growth in grace, for their good and for their growth, they will remember and they will reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd.

[26 : 56] But, this is the point. Remembering and reflecting upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd, it will not just be a thing of the past, or even a thing of the present. It will also be for future generations in the congregation.

So, it's not just a thing of the past, or a thing of the present, but it's also a thing of the future. Remembering and reflecting upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd. This is what Jesus is saying. Remembering and reflecting upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd will be threefold. Past, present, and future. Past, present, and future. This is why Psalm 22, it concludes with the words in verse 30 with the words in verse 30. It says, 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. So, Psalm 22, it concludes by emphasizing and explaining to us that just as there have been people in this congregation in the past, who sat here in this same church building and remembered and reflected upon the suffering shepherd at Calvary. And some of them we knew.

Some of them we loved. Some of them were in our own home and in our own family. But they've now passed into glory. That's what the psalmist is saying. There are some from the past.

But there are others who have taken their place from those of the past. There are those in the present, here tonight. And they're now part of this congregation. And the wonder of wonders is that by God's grace, we are part of this congregation. You are here. And I am here.

And I often find that the greatest miracle, that you and I are here. We're part of this congregation. And over this communion season, we gather to remember and to reflect upon the suffering shepherd. But what's remarkable, and this is what I love about Psalm 22, it concludes by asserting and affirming to us that there will be others. There will be others. There were those in the past who have passed into glory. There are those in the present who are here this evening. But there will be others, says Psalm 22. There will be other men. There will be other women. They will be here in the future, maybe even in the generations to come. And like they did in the past, and like we do here in the present, they too. They too will gather just like us to remember and to reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd. And some of them, some of them will be our covenant children.

[30 : 07] Some of them, as Jesus says, who are not of this fold, they will be brought in too. Others, says Jesus, at the end of the psalm, they are yet unborn. They are yet unborn. We might not be alive to see them. We might not enjoy sitting with them at the Lord's table. But the hope of Psalm 22 is the hope of the gospel that in a future generation, or in the future to come, they will be part of this congregation. So that during their communion season, they will remember, and they will reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd. Because whatever generation we're in, whether the past, or the present, or the future, we're all called, and we're all commanded to remember, and to reflect upon the

Lord's death until He comes. Is that not what we're told? Do this in remembrance of me. Do this in remembrance of me? But what are we to remember? What are we to remember? The last four words of this psalm is what we are to remember. He has done it. He has done it. The last four words of Psalm 22 are some of the last words that the suffering shepherd uttered on the cross at Calvary.

And I say that because He has done it as it is there in Psalm 22. It is literally translated as, it is finished. It is finished. My friend, Psalm 22 begins with a saying from the cross.

My God, my God, why? Why have you forsaken me? Psalm 22 ends with a saying from the cross. He has done it. He has done it. It is finished. It's the psalm of the suffering shepherd. It's the psalm of the suffering shepherd. And so, as we come to another communion season, we're called, and we're commanded as a congregation to profess our faith and to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

We're called and commanded to remember and to reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd. Because, as Jesus concluded this psalm, He has done it. It is finished.

[32 : 58] So, God willing, tomorrow we will remember and reflect upon the salvation of the suffering shepherd. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for our suffering shepherd. We thank Thee that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. We give thanks that He is the one who cried from the cross, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? But, Lord, we bless and praise Thee tonight that He has done it, that He has done it, that it is finished, that there is a new and living way, that the curtain has been torn in two, the way to God has been opened up, and that we are to come, we are to come to Him and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

O Lord, bless us together, we ask. Uphold us, we pray, that in all that we say and all that we do, there would be to Thy glory. Watch over us, we pray, and prepare us for Thy day tomorrow, if we are spared to see it, that we would come to the Lord's house, singing like the psalmist, that this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O do us good, and we pray, go before us, cleanse us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for His sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening. We're going to sing again in Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 in the Scottish Psalter, page 228. Psalm 22. We're singing from verse 27 down to the end of the psalm.

[34 : 56] Psalm 22. And verse 27.

All ends of the earth remember shall, and turn the Lord unto, all kindreds of the nations to Him shall homage do, because the kingdom to the Lord doth appertain as His.

Likewise among the nations, the governor He is. And we'll sing down to the end of the psalm. They shall come, and they shall declare His truth and righteousness unto a people yet unborn, and that He hath done this.

So we'll sing these verses of Psalm 22, verse 27, down to the end of the psalm. And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. O hands of earth remember shall, shall and turn the Lord unto all give rest of the nations to him shall all make true because the kingdom to the Lord the power pertain as is likewise among the nations the government he is first but won't see and worship shall all who to dust descend shall do to him not often can his soul from death defend a siege of service due to him unto the

Lord it shall before a generation for a generation reckoned in ages old they shall come out they shall declare declare his truth and righteousness unto a people yet unborn and that he hath done this the grace of the

[39 : 00] Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen