

Psalm 22: The Godforsaken Innocent

Introduction

Psalm 22 is quite different to the psalms around it:

- the Psalms around it (Ps 19-21; 23-4) are well-known and memorable psalms of praise to God
- Psalm 22 (at least at first) is an agonising, shocking groan of someone pouring out their despair and pain.

Our thoughts about this Psalm probably start with remembering that Jesus quotes the first verse on the cross.

- This psalm is a prophesy for and about Jesus
- This is an amazing window into the suffering and heart of Jesus on the cross. Which is a pretty awe-inspiring thought!

We may be surprised to find the second part of the Psalm is a hymn of praise.

- How can the one who has experienced this appalling undeserved suffering, who has been forsaken by God, be calling everyone to praise him?

Psalm 22 is the key to the praise of God in all these psalms:

- **it is through the suffering of the innocent one forsaken by God that we are saved to praise Him.**

Overview

Structure

v1-2:	The despairing cry of the god-forsaken
v3-5:	Recalling God's greatness and past goodness
v6-18:	The unfiltered cry of pain and despair
v19-21:	Calling on God the Saviour
v22-30:	Praising the powerful and gracious God who listens and saves, <i>including</i>
v24:	<i>God saves in response to (though / by) his suffering servant</i>
v31b:	<i>The job is done</i>

Who is this about?

This is all about Jesus!

This is not (or only tangentially) about David, or indeed about us (although we can learn from it and apply it), but a prophesy about the Greater David, who really was forsaken by God ("cut off" Isaiah 53:8) and had to endure the unendurable suffering.

It points to the truth that by so doing Jesus has finished the work of salvation for all who turn to him, from all the families of the nations, all the ends of the earth -> which is where we come in.

Hard bits?

How could God the Father forsake God the Son?

- There is mystery here. The Bible is clear this was necessary for us. Ps 22 hints at the awfulness that, and at the Father's faithfulness and the Son's faith through it.
- This could only happen through the incarnation. It is because God the Son *became human* that he could be forsaken by God and die. Indeed, that's why he became human!
- Remember v24: "he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him..."

Why does remembering God's past faithfulness, and his great attributes (holiness, strength, power, goodness, etc.) not make the psalmist stop despairing?

- This is honest reality. Sometimes remembering what God has done for us – or for others – in the past, maybe in similar or parallel situations, can be helpful to turn us from despair to praise. It's wonderful when it does. However we need to avoid naivety here – sometimes our head knowledge, and our past feelings, are not enough to overcome our current feelings. It's reassuring to have examples of this in the psalms to remind us this does not mean our faith is failing.
- We can use the honest cries of v11 ("Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help") and v19 ("Lord, do not be far from me.... come quickly to help me.")
- The psalmist is eventually turned to praise – but only after enduring the unendurable. Sadly this is the reality sometimes for God's people. However, we who trust in him are never truly forsaken (see *Heb 12:5 quoting Deut. 31:6*)

Further reading

Isaiah 53 – another prophesy about Jesus on the cross. The parallels are striking, but it is told from **our** perspective, while Psalm 22 is told from Jesus' perspective.

Mark 15:27-39 / Matt 27:45-54: the death of Jesus where he quotes this Psalm. Perhaps see also John 19:28-37: "It is finished" – he has done it!

Hebrews 2:10-18 / 1 Peter 2:23-25: what Jesus' suffering – into which we have this glimpse in Psalm 22 – has achieved for us.

Suggested Questions for Study

- Is suffering a result of our sin and of a lack of faith on our part?
- Should we put a brave face on our suffering, or be honest with God (and one another)? How do we balance openness with encouraging ourselves to trust?
- Will God always answer our prayers for release from suffering? How do we reconcile Psalm 23 with Psalm 22?
- Does remembering God's past help, his sovereignty and our own faith always help us out of suffering and despair? Why not? What can we still pray, even when we feel like all other prayers have not been answered (see e.g. v11)?
- Are we ever truly forsaken by God? See *Heb 12:5 (with Dt 31:6)*, *Rom 8:35-39*, also *Jer 15:6*
- How does realising that this psalm is prophesying Jesus' suffering on the cross help us to understand what he has done for us there? What response does this bring from us?
- What about the second half of the psalm – how does this apply to Jesus? How can the forsaken one praise God so lavishly? And how about us?