
The Righteous Sufferer

“You who fear the LORD, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard” (Psalm 22:23, 24).

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps . . .” (1 Peter 2:21–24).

The writer of Psalm 22 wrote from an intensely personal viewpoint. It is as if he is writing solely about himself and the trial that has brought him to the point of death. However, in its use of this psalm, the New Testament reveals that a pictorial prophecy of the sufferings of Jesus is found throughout its verses. Jesus Himself appropriates verse 1 on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34), as He describes the condition and horror that He has gone through. Verse 18 seems to be in the background of Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, and John 19:23. Verse 22 is clearly applied to Jesus in Hebrews 2:12. On its first level, the writer of Psalm 22 is undoubtedly relating the terrible condition that he was experiencing in prayer to God. On its second level, the pictorial prophecy level, the psalm portrays the sufferings of Christ as He died for our sins. David’s sufferings typified the far greater sufferings that the Christ would bear in His crucifixion.

The psalm falls into two parts: Verses 1 through 21, the agonizing prayer to God, and verses 22 through 31, a beautiful anthem of praise to God. The first part is a lament, a cry for help, and the second part is a hymn of thanksgiving, a depiction of faith and praise in the midst of severe suffering.

In the second part we are allowed to see how Jesus viewed the terrible ordeals and the awful sufferings that He went through on the cross. David’s language, in its elevated form, shows the spirit that Jesus manifested as He suffered the worst pain any human can know. We could well summarize His response to God on the cross as “trusting God in the darkness.”

Jesus may have held this psalm in His mind as He lived through those six terrible hours of His crucifixion.

In His sufferings Jesus looked to God by bringing those harsh and horrible sufferings before His Father in prayer, pleading for help. As these awful experiences fell on Him during the crucifixion, the first words to come from His lips were words of prayer (Luke 23:34). The totality of this psalm conveys the posture of calling upon God in the midst of pain and betrayal. Jesus’ trials were brought to God in a loving, tender act of prayer. Throughout His agony, Jesus continued to pray. Even though He was delivered from His great suffering through His prayers, He continued to pray. He had prayed about His sufferings before He reached the cross (Hebrews 5:7), He prayed during the cross (Luke 23:34; Matthew 27:46), and He prayed in His dying breath as the ordeal of the cross came to a close (Luke 23:46).

In His excruciating pain, Jesus trusted in God. This psalm portrays Him as praying, “You who fear the LORD, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard” (Psalm 22:23, 24).

When we are in the crucible of misery, let us trust God to work out our predicament according to His will. He has a plan that is far greater than ours. In the case of Jesus, God could not say yes to His supplications and say yes to our salvation at the same time. If God says no to us,

let us recognize that He is working out a higher and better plan for the world and us.

In moments of pain, the thought that must come to mind is that God is holy. He is pure and free from evil, and He will not mistreat anyone—certainly not His children. If saying yes to our prayers would go against His righteous nature or His holy will, He will say no to them.

We can look back at what God has done in the past and see His loyalty to His people. We have no reason to question His trustworthiness. This psalm says that God had been faithful to the fathers when they had trusted in Him: “In You our fathers trusted; they trusted, and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; in You they trusted and were not disappointed” (Psalm 22:4, 5). This backward look helps us to conclude that God treats all believers the same way. He will care for us the way He cared for Abraham, the prophets, and other Old Testament worthies.

It would be absolutely contrary to God’s nature to fail to keep His word or to betray a promise He has made to us. God had to turn His face from the cross because Jesus had become sin (see Mark 15:34; 2 Corinthians 5:21). When He does not answer our prayers, some aspect of His plan, or some connection with our growth has prevented Him from doing so.

In His sufferings, Jesus was praising God and relying on His faithfulness. Sometimes, in His infinite wisdom, God chooses not to remove our pain. Even though it breaks His heart to refrain from delivering us, He chooses to let it remain in order that He can walk with us in doing what is right. He will strengthen me to endure the trial that I must face as He lifts up His holiness and truth. I must praise Him for this, and I must teach those around me to praise Him for the same reason. Jesus did this on the cross, and this is what I must do.

Jesus resolved to praise God, knowing that, in accordance with His plan, God would validate the pain. In Jesus’ praise He anticipated

the future. Regardless of how dark the moment was, He trusted that God would do wondrous deeds through His suffering for Him, for His people, and for the world.

When God says no to our prayers, it is not a time to plunge into disbelief and disown Him; it is not a time to say that God does not care or that He is not interested in our frustrations. It is a time to praise Him, reflect on His faithfulness, and trust Him.

Jesus experienced great agony, the greatest known to man. He prayed for help from heaven. In the midst of this darkness, He praised God for all that God had done for him. When one is in the valley of despair and he sees darkness all around him, it is appropriate to praise God. Any time—even in the midst of an indescribable ordeal—is a time to give glory and thanks to God.

In Jesus’ faith in God for the present and for the future, He demonstrated the response we ought to make in any crisis. We should pray about it, praising God for who He is, for what He does, and for what He will do for His people. We should trust Him to do wonderful things today and tomorrow. “When we cannot see what He is doing with the physical eye, we can watch for His gracious providence with the eye of faith.”

Eddie Cloer



“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:21–24).