
“There Is None to Help”

“Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help” (Psalm 22:11).

“I have trodden the wine trough alone, and from the peoples there was no man with Me” (Isaiah 63:3).

“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

Psalm 22, a well-known lament, may be the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. A sampling of its use in the New Testament is seen in the following verses:

- Verse 1 was appropriated by Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).
- Verse 18 seems to be in the background of Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; and John 19:23, 24.
- Verse 22 was applied to Jesus in Hebrews 2:12.

Because of these prophetic words, the psalm has been referred to as a “Passion Psalm,” one that portrays the rejection and pain of Jesus as He died for our sins. As such, it has long been recognized as one of the great messianic psalms.

The reader’s first impression is that David was writing in figurative language about a siege of persecution that he was undergoing—perhaps as he fled from one of Saul’s attacks. Because of the intensely personal character of this psalm, the reader does not immediately notice the detailed predictions of the sufferings of Christ that it contains. On its first level, the psalm is relating the writer’s deathly struggle in prayer to God. The first-person character of the psalm has led to two questions: “How are we to interpret this psalm?” and “Is the psalm presenting the writer’s experience, the Lord’s, or both?”

The best explanation to this interpretative difficulty apparently is the view that the psalm has its roots in David’s own trial of fire, but its language reaches prophetically beyond his

experiences to the sufferings of Christ. While David may have been writing in exaggerated, poetic language about a bitter experience that he was going through, he was, in fact—on a far higher level, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit—portraying the actual sufferings of Jesus in pictorial prophecy. The writer’s sufferings were recorded by the Holy Spirit in such a way that the descriptions given foreshadow details of the circumstances and sufferings associated with the crucifixion of our Lord.

The psalm is clearly divided into two parts: (1) the prayer to God (vv. 1–21) and (2) the praise of God (vv. 22–31). The first part is a lament, and the second part is thanksgiving, highlighting the resolve that grows out of the contemplation of God’s greatness.

Let us look at the first part of this psalm and allow it to picture the terrible ordeals and the awful sufferings that Jesus experienced on the cross. David’s language, in its elevated form, graphically shows the price that Jesus paid for our sins. One of the key thoughts that runs through these lines is the loneliness of the crucifixion.

Alone, He faced the enemies who had encircled Him. Most of us have at least a few enemies—some we know about and some we do not know about. We have experienced the bitterness and pain that people like this can bring. When we think of these vicious and violent foes of Jesus and imagine Him as He looked out from the confines of this raucous company, we can almost hear Him praying to God, “Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help” (v. 11). He went on to say,

But You, O Lord, be not far off;
O You my help, hasten to my assistance.
Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only life from the power of the dog.
Save me from the lion's mouth;
From the horns of the wild oxen You answer
me (vv. 19–21).

There was no one to deliver Him from this wicked crowd. His journey through the cross necessitated His tasting the venom of hate and evil intentions which were spewed out by the lips of sinful men.

Alone, He dealt with the pain of friends forsaking Him. We have been jilted by those we hold dear. We have been surprised and demoralized by their actions. Such experiences are more cutting and hurtful to us than anything our enemies attempt to do to us. When Jesus looked down from the cross, He saw very few of His friends. A little group had gathered—just some women and John. Almost all of His apostles were noticeably absent. The crowd that had welcomed Him into the city on Sunday, crying, “Hail Him, hail Him!” (see Matthew 21:9) had gone to the other side and had jeered at the trial, “Nail Him, nail Him!” (see Matthew 27:22).

Was this fact painful to Jesus? Indeed, it was. He probably felt the way David did:

But I am a worm, and not a man,
A reproach of men, and despised by the
people.
All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head,
saying,
“Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver
him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in
him” (vv. 6–8).

Later, the psalmist added,

For He has not despised nor abhorred the af-
fliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from him;
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard
(v. 24).

Alone, He suffered the physical pain that devastated and destroyed His body. All of us have gone through some physical calamities—broken limbs, sicknesses, cuts, and bruises. The body has become injured or broken. We have lived in our bodies, and their failures and pains have affected us. We know what pain is. Perhaps,

with our bodies sick or crippled, we have had a hard time controlling our emotions. No doubt, we have found comfort in the encouragement and sympathy extended to us by others. Nothing seems worse than the tragedy of suffering alone.

Jesus intentionally chose to come to the earth, be one of us, and live the way we live. He was born in a body like ours, a body that often sends signals of pain to the brain. Jesus knew that He would experience the worst type of torture that His body could know.

The figurative language of this psalm is not adequate to describe His sufferings:

I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.
I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me (vv. 14–17).

Jesus suffered the worst pain that a body can endure; and what is more, He bore it alone. No one could comprehend His grief and sorrow; no one could understand the extent of it.

Alone, He bore our sins, as He experienced separation from His Father. At the end of His ordeal of crucifixion, He cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46c). His words may well be, rather than a question, an announcement of what He had endured. No human mind can imagine what this suffering was like. We see this agony alluded to in Psalm 22, but it does not come close to portraying the intensity or immensity of it:

My God, my God, why have You forsaken
me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my
groaning.
O my God, I cry by day, but You do not an-
swer;
And by night, but I have no rest.
Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises
of Israel.
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
(vv. 1–5).

But You, O LORD, be not far off;
O You my help, hasten to my assistance.
Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only life from the power of the dog.
Save me from the lion's mouth;
From the horns of the wild oxen You answer
me (vv. 19–21).

We are all under the sentence of death. Unless the Lord comes, our earthly lives will end with our passage through the cessation of life. We can put it out of our minds, but the reality of it eventually must be faced. Jesus also lived with this realization, but His awareness of death must have been far more vivid, far more fearful than any of us have ever contemplated. Above all, He knew that He would die alone—in pain, devastation, and shame—while bearing the sin of the world.

David perhaps did not know much about what God would do with his writings in the future, but we now know that his sufferings as described in Psalm 22 were used to prefigure the sufferings of the Christ. Through the centuries, millions of people have read this psalm and have been directed to the Christ by it. When Jesus prayed that God would allow Him to avoid “the cup” in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:39), He was not seeking to disobey God’s will, as is clearly indicated by His addition of the words “yet not as I will, but as You will.” He knew that God’s will—regardless of what it might cost—was best. God said

“no” to the passing of “the cup”; but He said “yes” to the doing of His will, which resulted in salvation for all those who would receive the gospel.

Eddie Cloer



Who is this who comes from Edom,
With garments of glowing colors from Boz-
rah,
This One who is majestic in His apparel,
Marching in the greatness of His strength?
“It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty
to save.”
Why is Your apparel red,
And Your garments like the one who treads
in the wine press?
“I have trodden the wine trough alone,
And from the peoples there was no man with
Me.
I also trod them in My anger
And trampled them in My wrath;
And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My gar-
ments,
And I stained all My raiment.
For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
And My year of redemption has come.
I looked, and there was no one to help,
And I was astonished and there was no one
to uphold;
So My own arm brought salvation to Me,
And My wrath upheld Me
I trod down the peoples in My anger
And made them drunk in My wrath,
And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth”
(Isaiah 63:1–6).