

Prayer as Expression (17): Christology

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[0 : 00] When does prayer become Christian prayer? Answer, when it is filled with, in the name of, and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

One of the most difficult tasks of ministry is public prayer. It's only right that many hours are spent preparing sermons, preparing the public proclamation of the gospel.

But it's not right when no hours are spent preparing public prayer, preparing to lead God's people into God's presence in prayer.

Three years are spent in theological seminary teaching ministers how to preach in public, but no time is spent teaching us how to pray in public.

And as a result, the standard of our public prayers is often extremely poor, especially with respect to what I'm calling Christian prayer.

[1 : 05] To the heavy responsibility of leading God's people into the throne room of God's grace, in the name and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

How then shall we begin to reverse this trend? Surely by beginning with Jesus himself. Not with a program, but with a person.

Not with a system, but with a saviour. We want to express ourselves in prayer, using the thought world and the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ himself.

St. Augustine called Jesus the singer of psalms. But more than that, Jesus is the inspirer of psalms and the subject of psalms.

This is true of every psalm, but especially of those psalms which speak directly about him. Psalms like Psalm 22. So what better ways are there for us to learn how to pray Christologically than by praying our way through a psalm like Psalm 22?

[2 : 15] What better way to fill our hearts with prayer and to fill our prayers with Christ than to pray in the name of Christ and for the glory of Christ through this psalm?

It seems to me that at its very basic level, Psalm 22 presents a Jesus who is both saviour and sovereign. The suffering saviour, the supreme sovereign.

Perhaps if we want to learn how to pray better, if that's the right turn of phrase, there are few better places to look than Psalm 22. First of all then, we have Jesus the saviour.

Jesus the saviour. This whole section, this whole first section of Psalm 22, concerns the suffering of our Lord. At communion times, we often sing our way through verses 14 through 20, which represent the low point, as it were, of Jesus' sufferings.

He's surrounded by hostile enemies, and like lions, they are tearing and they are roaring. And there he is, having been cruelly beaten and viciously tortured, and he's hanging on a Roman cross.

[3 : 30] I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint, he says in Psalm 22. My heart has turned to wax. It has melted away within me.

How much do the sufferings of our Lord really impact us in prayer? Are we guilty of ignoring the humanity of Jesus? That in his mind and in his emotions and not just his body, he was deeply troubled?

That his heart was turned to wax within him? Men who are acting like dogs are surrounding him, and have only evil intent, and now they're piercing his hands and his feet.

We cannot even begin to imagine the pain of being hung on the cross with the whole weight of one's body, resting on one's outstretched arms, so that our bones would stand proud.

And all those who are surrounding Jesus and watching him die can do is to play games for his clothing. And he's crying out to God for help.

[4 : 36] He's crying out to God for salvation. But we know there's no help for him. And there's no escape for Jesus. The cross will claim his life.

He will die there. So again, I wonder whether we're sometimes guilty in prayer of ignoring the humanity of Jesus, in that it was the totality of his being who was dying on the cross.

And we read about his sufferings in the Bible. And we sing about his sufferings in our hymns and psalms. And we preach about his sufferings in all our sermons.

But do we ever pray his sufferings? It's important that we pray them for at least three reasons. First of all, it emphasizes to us the cost of our salvation.

The sufferings of Christ emphasize to us the cost of our salvation. We're in such a rush to tell God how much pain we're in that we altogether forget how much pain his son went through to save us from our sins.

[5 : 47] This is how much our salvation costs. Whatever personal pain we are bringing to God in prayer multiplied by a million. The cost of our salvation was not the blood of bulls and goats, but the blood of God's own precious son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

He's surrounded by a baneful mob that we might be surrounded by the voice of the angels. He's condemned that we might be justified.

He is forsaken that we might be forgiven. If this is how much it costs God to save us from our sin and our brokenness, then surely at least we may be a little more thankful in our prayers than we probably are.

Surely we can begin to dismiss from our minds those grumbling complaints we often direct in God's direction. Realizing in the words of Romans 8.32, he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not along with him freely give us all things?

Pain. Our praise overwhelms it. Ungrumbling. Our thankfulness overcomes it. In the second instance, we should pray through the sufferings of Christ because they emphasize for us the completion of our salvation, the completion of our salvation.

[7 : 21] Earlier this year, I spent some time back up north in my home village of Golsby. So much rain had fallen that it had formed large standing pools in the fields.

Some pools as large as the pond in Victoria Park in the west end of Glasgow. The ground was super saturated with rainwater. In the same way, the ground of our salvation is super saturated with the blood of Jesus Christ.

There is no sin which cannot be forgiven. There is no transgression which cannot be wiped away. There was enough standing water in those highland pools that a grown man could have swum in them.

There is enough forgiving power in the blood of Jesus Christ that an entire people, the whole elect of God, can wash all their sins away and be utterly assured of their salvation.

Because of the sufferings of Christ here in Psalm 22, we are secured in our salvation. As that wonderful hymn by Townend says, no guilt in life, no fear in death.

[8 : 36] This is the power of Christ in me. Nothing may snatch us from his hand. However badly we've followed up, however far from Christ we've strayed, there's a way back because the ground of our forgiveness is super saturated with the blood of Jesus.

The third reason it's good to pray through the sufferings of Jesus is that they emphasize to us the Christ who saved us.

They emphasize to us the Christ who saved us. Sometimes, just sometimes, when we're going through the mill and life is no fun, we stay away from prayer.

We're either angry at God for letting these things happen to us, or we're not convinced that God could understand how we feel anyway. So rather than pray, we mope.

And all the time, the Christ who knows more about suffering than any of us ever will, waits for us to pray. You think he knows nothing about grief?

[9 : 52] Think again. You think he knows nothing about pain? Think again. He knows. After all, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses.

The words of Psalm 22 were driven home to me many years ago when on his deathbed, a very gracious old saint of this congregation in Glasgow City Free Church said to me, my mouth is always so dry.

My mouth is always so dry. It was an innocent enough comment from him, but it reminded me of the powerful words of the dying Jesus in verse 15.

My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. There is no painful experience that we cannot take to our suffering saviour.

He won't understand or sympathise. Our horizons in prayer are as wide as the experiences of Jesus in Psalm 22 as he hangs there in agony on the cross and cries out to his father for help.

[11:10] Prayer becomes Christian prayer when it's filled with in the name of and for the glory of Jesus Christ. When it's filled with the fruit of the suffering and motivated by the holy joy he took in all these things that our saviour endured all these experiences of which he speaks in Psalm 22 for us and for our salvation.

Jesus, the sufferer. Secondly, in Psalm 22 we have Jesus, the sovereign. Jesus, the sovereign. The whole tenor of Psalm 22 changes in verse 22 from the sufferings of our saviour to the supremacy of our sovereign. Jesus is pictured as no longer hanging on a cross but seated on a throne and from that throne the sovereign Jesus reigns in grace and compassion.

From that throne as we read in verse 24 he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

Jesus Christ who reigns on high all must bow before him in humble reverence all must praise his ever-blessed name our suffering saviour.

[12:42] His is a kingdom where according to verse 26 the poor will eat and be satisfied. The rich who have everything in this world's eyes are those who according to verse 29 cannot keep themselves alive.

They go down to the dust. His is the kingdom of the beatitudes where it's the poor and spirit who are blessed but it's the meek who inherit the earth but it's those who have hungered and thirsted after righteousness who will be filled.

The kingdom of our sovereign Jesus will know no end because we and our children and our children's children will worship and love him.

well just like we can be guilty of forgetting that Jesus really did suffer and allowing his suffering to influence the way we pray so we can also be forgiven we can also forget that Jesus really is sovereign and so we neglect to allow his sovereignty to influence our prayers because we do not live in days of the cross we live in days of the crown do we ever pray the sovereignty of Jesus so as we close let me briefly suggest a couple of ways in which we can pray Christologically through the second part of Psalm 22 the sovereignty of Jesus first of all the sovereignty of Christ means that all things are possible with him all things are possible with him just like we can bring to him the slightest smallest issue which affects us the so-called stones in our shoes we can bring to our king the great issues of our world we can bring to him viral pandemics and international politics the anxieties of social media and the problems of war we can pray for our leaders and we can plead with Christ for their salvation knowing that as the words of the hymn tell us thou art coming to a king with thee great petitions bring second the sovereignty of Christ means that his grace is and will always be sufficient for us the sovereignty of Christ means that his grace is and always will be sufficient for us we are deeply grieved are we not when we encounter children whose poverty is no fault of their own but the fault of abusive parents or parents whose priorities are all wrong parents who buy booze for themselves and not food for their children normal parents do everything they can to provide for their families and Christ the greatest of all kings provides his grace for us the overflowing fountain of his daily faithfulness earlier this year the rain which supersaturated the fields in my home village brought flooding to many parts of southern

Scotland hawk especially was badly affected with the river bursting its banks and rushing torrent like down its course and that's a picture for us of the furious grace of Christ a grace which bursts the banks of our expectations and rushes down into our lives and so day by day we pray for daily bread and for sustaining grace for God's leading and for God's guiding and day by day the river of his grace flows down into our lives we pray for it and the sovereign Christ provides it you know there are so many more applications of how the sovereignty of Jesus can impact our prayers we can talk of the peace we can experience in knowing that the Lord is in charge of all things even the experiences that we face we can talk of how though the darkness rages in our day

[17:09] Jesus the sovereign is our conqueror we can talk and we can talk and we can talk but the point is that prayer becomes Christian prayer when it's filled with in the name of and for the glory of Jesus Christ prayer becomes Christian prayer but it's richly infused with Jesus the saviour Jesus the sovereign public prayer is often the most challenging aspect of public worship I know that many of my public prayers fall very short of the standard you deserve or you need but the path to

improvement I believe lies here in Christology I'm convinced of it in dwelling more and more on Jesus perhaps not just public prayer either perhaps private prayer too perhaps all of life we're going to sing a hymn now father hear the prayer we offer hopefully we're going to sing a hymn here we are father hear the prayer we offer not for ease that prayer shall be but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously thank you read but

Not forever we free martians, through thee are some way to thee, but the sea can run in our way, they tread rejoicing thee.

Not forever, by still mortals, would we hide in rest and stay, but would smite the living mountains from the rocks along the way.

Be our strength in our song weakness, in our walk with thee our guide, through eternal salvation, all the being thou at our sight.

We're going to turn now to items for prayer. It's our great joy, is it not, as a congregation, to pray together.

[20 : 40] We remember Christchurch Edinburgh, its minister is the Reverend David Court, and they are planning to renovate their building, and also Dunanish, which is on the west coast of Skye.

It's perhaps you would know it better than Vagan. And let's pray for their outreach to their community. We want to remember Christian Witness to Israel.

Of course, we always want to remember Christian Witness to Israel. It's one of the groups that we support as a congregation. And for Igal, as he shares the gospel with this homeless Jewish couple in Tel Aviv.

Today is Earth Day, 22nd of April. The scripture, of course, talks about us being stewards of God's creation.

Let's pray that we would, as a church, recognize our saviour as our creator, but also that those groups in our society which claim that the church is an abuser of creation, as opposed to its steward, would see that God is the creator.

[21 : 49] We want to remember the tiny little congregation of Malin Call. We want to remember, of course, our call for 60 new ministries, workers for the free church by 2030.

And, of course, we want to remember the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. And especially in this respect, we want to remember the McDougall family in our own congregation.

Is there anything else that we want to remember this evening? Just put your hand up if you want, and we can accommodate that. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Marvellous. So if I could ask then Colin Duncan and then Helen Morrison to lead us in prayer, please. Colin Duncan and then Helen Morrison.

Okay. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time we can gather together in your name.

[22 : 57] Even though we can't meet together in person, Lord, we thank you for this technology of this video conferencing software that allows us to hear your word and to pray together.

Pray that you grant us opportunities for witness through this medium, that we can invite friends and family to the meetings on Sundays and other times.

And if they can't be with us to pass on to them the copies of the online sermons that they might listen to in their own time.

Lord, we thank you that churches haven't been stopped from worshipping, but worship you in spirit and in truth.

Lord, we pray for that homeless couple in Tel Aviv, that Egal is witnessing to at this time.

[24 : 02] Lord, we pray for that we pray that they would find faith in the Messiah promised of all by the prophets as the Messiah of Israel.

That they would see that who he really is and that he came to redeem your chosen people and came to proclaim to the world the good news of redemption in his name.

Lord, we pray for people who are brothers and sisters across the world who are facing persecution at this time. Lord, we pray for the Chinese house churches that are facing persecution from the state because they don't bow to this pressure to be registered as with the state.

Lord, we pray for the Chinese house churches that are facing persecution in their own local communities. Lord, we pray for Indian Christians who are at this time suffering because of persecution by people in their own local communities just because they name the name of Jesus Christ as their saviour.

Lord, we pray for the Chinese house churches that are facing persecution in their own local communities. Lord, we pray for our brothers and sisters in Somalia who, just because they profess faith in you,