

Christ Suffered

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[0 : 00] Let me wish you a happy day after Canada Day. Now, I do have a question for you, which is, if the day after Christmas Day is Boxing Day, what is the day after Canada Day?

Well, I don't know the answer to that, but after being a permanent resident of Canada for 25 years, yesterday I actually submitted my application to become a citizen.

I know it's 25 years later. I'm from Ohio. We do things pretty slow there, so I thought I'd finally get around to it. So I'm hoping in the next six months I might actually learn what the day after Canada Day is called.

I did run a survey on this, and I asked a few people, and one person really insightfully told me that it's July the 2nd. I noticed that none of you answered that way.

And another person actually said, well, if Boxing Day is the day that follows Christmas Day, then Wrestling Day is the day that follows Canada Day. Well, Psalm 22 is like a wrestling match in a big way.

[1 : 22] When I read through Psalm 22, it actually makes me think of Jacob who wrestled with God. When he wrestled with Him, he came away broken and yet blessed.

It makes me think of Jesus, who was pinned to the cross by nails in His hands and His feet, but was glorified. So when we come to this psalm, we have this sort of wrestling match, I think, that we see in David's life as he prays.

And we see that, too, in Christ's life to which this prayer points. So it raises questions for me and for you, I think, too. Coming right out of the first verse, does it ever seem like God is really distant to you?

Has there been a time when your prayers seem to go unanswered? Are you ever afraid to think that you might be cut off from God? You know, your spiritual life, your prayer life, is a bit like your electronic life.

You form the text. You send it. You see that it's been received and read, but no reply. Today's psalm expresses these thoughts through the petition and the praise of David.

[2 : 38] It also points to the passion and the propitiation of our Lord. You can't help but leap from David's prayer right over to the cross of Christ. The psalm is one of the greatest texts also demonstrating the inspiration of Scripture and the fulfillment of prophecy.

But not only is it prophecy, it's also liturgy. Because while this is David's prayer, it is Israel's prayer. It's also the church's prayer. It is a prayer of intense petition turned really into powerful praise.

And the prayer of David becomes the prayer of Jesus. The temperature of it is painful in the first part, yet the color of it is explosive in the second.

David takes some poetic license in expressing his pain, but our Lord fulfills the prophecy through suffering. And in the end, it leads to celebration.

Luke's gospel points to the connection of suffering to our salvation later on in his gospel when he says this, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, scribes, and killed and on the third day raised.

[3 : 53] So I want to just look at two things in the two parts of this text today. These two dimensions in this psalm are this. First, the trust in God through pain. And the second one is trust in God for praise.

So let's look at the first part, this trust in God through pain. Verses 1 through 21 are a litany, a list of Christ's pain, David's pain too.

There are few texts of the Bible that describe pain in these terms. David is utterly exhausted in his pursuit of God. So exhausted he can't even rest. He is pathetically regarded by people who look at him with mockery.

Foes and maybe even friends have great contempt for his faith. And he is physically threatened and uses the language of bulls and dogs. But also, he's beyond dehydration and a marathon of spiritual mire.

David doesn't hold it all inside. He'd make a really bad stoic. He lists and lets it all out to God. Few of us can make these kinds of complaints.

[5 : 01] Though parables and metaphors are useful to name our condition. But our faith is tested for sure, like a hammer on an anvil, and our work, our family, our society, our friendships, and even church.

The pain of utter alienation and forsakenness is known to us. But our suffering in David's falls short of this. David is telling something way beyond his pay grade.

The poetry of this prayer, though, points to the passion of our Lord, who suffers and dies. Unknowingly and unintentionally, by inspiration, David is always pointing us towards Christ in this.

So when Christ Jesus cries out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Jesus is taking up David's questions, the three of them right from the start.

Jesus is showing us, then, I think, that we first turn to the Lord instead of turning away from God in our suffering, which we're tempted to do.

[6 : 07] But both David and Jesus engage with God through their pain. The suffering servants don't suffer in silence. And our Lord's first words from the cross are not these ones, but however, like David, Jesus isn't ambivalent or accusatory towards God in these opening words.

But he wants to know something. That's what his question's about. And we want to know that, too. And what is it that our Lord wants to know through this suffering? Well, look at verse 3 with me.

If I'm not there in your Bibles, you'll want to turn to page 457. And after the first two verses, David says, Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our fathers trusted, they trusted, and you delivered them. I think what Jesus wants us to know through suffering is that God is holy, and He is trustworthy.

Jesus wants us to know that His suffering and death is about the holiness and the righteousness of God. God's nature or character is in great contrast to all the causes of suffering in this world.

[7 : 21] So this is this litany of pain that we have in this first part of the psalm, verses 1 through 21. But verses 1 through 21 are also a litany of God's presence. The first part of the psalm comes in three groups of two.

Part one of each one of those three is a complaint, but part two is a reminder. And David isn't in denial of his pain and condition, and neither does he forget the Lord's presence in his life through all of this pain.

And this prayer is something of, I think, of a model then, a perspective on suffering, reshaping the way we see it, how it's even used in our life. But look with me first at these three groupings.

First, the one I've been talking about at this point. You know, verse 1, he says, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But you go down to verse 3, Yet you are holy. So there's this struggle going on, right?

This wrestling match, as it were. The second one, verse 6, But I am a worm and not a man. Totally dehumanized, he thinks. He feels. But verse 9, Yet you are the one who took me from my womb.

[8 : 29] Sorry, from the womb. And then the third one, Verses 12 and 16, where he uses the imagery of bulls and dogs. They encompass me, he says. And then dehydration and dislocation, verse 14.

But then 19 through 21, He then names help, deliverance, salvation, rescue. See how it's going back and forth the whole time.

So while the first half of the psalm is a litany of pain, it's also an occasion for the presence of the Lord, right there in the midst of it. And from David's birth to present circumstances, he holds this positive regard of the Lord.

The questions of forsakenness and abandonment isn't an accusation, or it's not atheistic. David remembers the Lord, and he notices, notice this, that it's not just a past history for David.

If that were the case, he would say something like, yet he was holy. But he doesn't say that in verse 3. He says, yet you are holy.

[9 : 36] And so through this, David isn't just kind of jogging his memory of God. He isn't just kind of recounting the Lord's attributes. He's doing all he can to reconcile the absence and the presence of the Lord in his life.

He's remembering in order to kind of close this gap that seems to be his experience between God and himself. And he moves from, why are you so far from me in verse 11?

Sorry, verse 1, to all the way in verse 11 then. Be not far from me. Well, David knows that he can't do for himself what only God can do for him.

His condition, and all ours, requires the presence of God, no matter what the circumstances, especially suffering. And in what way does he do that? Well, look with me at verse 19 and on.

David prays, But you, O Lord, do not be far off. O you, my help, come quickly to my aid. Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog.

[10 : 41] Save me from the mouth of the lion. You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. Friends, this is salvation language.

This points to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is not what David could do for himself, and neither can you and I. And so Jesus' suffering here, this point in two, has eternal, infinite, spiritual significance.

Look at verse 20. Deliver my soul from the sword. The sword, yes, pierced Jesus' side, but not unto death.

Jesus suffered the pain described by David on the cross for judgment, for the sake of the whole world, for salvation's sake. And so Christianity is mostly, it's a turning, it is a remembering, it is a trusting in the deliverance of Jesus.

All that he says here in 19 to 20. Be not far off. You are my help. You're my deliverer. You're my rescuer. You're the one who saves me. But Jesus' suffering, it's important to note, ends in our salvation, which isn't actually like our suffering, is it?

[11 : 53] Think about your own suffering. Think about our suffering, the suffering of others. We tend towards a kind of a fatalism, a heroism, and a stoicism sometime. A fatalism, right? Which I think, it's a kind of, well, it is what it is.

C'est la vie. Or a kind of a heroism. We'll all show them, what doesn't kill me, well, it'll make me stronger. And we all know about stoicism.

You know, it's not supposed to draw attention to the stoic, right? Just Brennan Barrett. But in the end, everyone knows the person's suffering, and it draws more attention to the person. Well, this is then the litany of pain and praise together.

But the psalm doesn't stop there, right? It doesn't end with verse 22. Sorry, 21. It picks up with 22. You might think that this is actually enough, because it's a pretty good place to stop when talking about salvation.

But it's not a kind of, David doesn't take an approach of, well, let's just wait and see what happens next. If the conditions change, then we'll know how to proceed. But aren't you glad that David's relationship with the Lord isn't conditional?

[13 : 07] And neither is ours. He doesn't measure the metrics of God's action to plot out some kind of plan. He wouldn't kind of, and how could you actually calculate the grace and the mercy of our Lord?

There's just no end to his greatness. There's no end to his kindness and his saving ways in our life. So, the trust that David's fathers before him put into the Lord back in verse 4 is now the same trust that David's going to put in God.

Although David doesn't call it trust. Because what goes in as trust then comes out as praise. In fact, this trust in God is for praise.

And this is part 2 of David's prayer. Let's look at verses 22 through 31. We're just 4 short questions. Here they are. 4 short answers to, What do we do in light of this great salvation?

The second one, Why on earth would we do this? Third, Who is it all about anyway? And the fourth one, How long is this for? So the first one, What do we do with this salvation?

[14 : 20] Look at David's response to this situation in verses 22. After his complaint and admission of the difficulty, David exercises a choice, his freedom. He makes a decision how to respond in the situation.

He is a victim, no doubt, but he doesn't play a form of victimism. Even though it seemed like he was forsaken, cut off and ignored, he knows that's not true.

God doesn't despise or hide. But he hears and even gives the grace to David so that he can pray and praise him in the first place. So David praises the Lord to the people of God in verse 22.

It's a kind of liturgy. What do we do with this great salvation? Well, David's showing us that it is in service and praise of God with the congregation and God's people.

Listen to this prayer from the prayer book from the ministry to a sick person. People are suffering and people are ill in terms of what do we do actually when God answers our prayer and he restores us to some kind of health if he grants us that grace.

[15 : 28] The prayer then runs like this after addressing who God is. It says, By your mercy, he or she may be restored to health of body and mind and then show forth his thankfulness, her thankfulness in love of you and service to his fellow men.

That's what we do with this great salvation. When God is rescuing us, delivering us, drawing us into his life, when we're suffering, giving us relief from that.

What is that for? It's for the praise of God. This is a prayer that's actually prayed before the person is restored or even if the person is restored to health. Praise of God and service to one another.

That's the first question. Second question, Why on earth does David do this? David continues his act of praise in verses 25 and 26. In verse 26 he asserts, Those who seek him shall praise him.

This is just a litany of praise from 22 to 31, up and down, backwards and forward. The explanation for it comes before it though, and that is, The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied.

- [16 : 37] So David anticipates the satisfaction of his heart's desire. Think about something you long for and anticipating that with satisfaction when it comes.

All things we know that take effort hold out some kind of satisfaction in the future. But maybe it was, maybe for us, when we think about what it is that we're longing for, something we want, maybe things like, I don't know, a completion of graduation, or a project, or childbirth, or seeing someone finish a life well.

Maybe something like running a marathon. At the end of this, is satisfaction. And this is what David is actually calling the church to through this prayer.

Why are we praising God? Is it for our satisfaction? No, it's not for satisfaction. David is actually pointing us to something beyond the satisfaction that we get, and that is actually the Lord's satisfaction.

And this satisfaction rests ultimately in Jesus Christ. We find satisfaction in him first, and for whatever else he then gives.

- [17 : 49] Jesus gives us reason to praise the Lord, because he completely satisfies the Father's requirement for the penalty of sin. Jesus is the Father's and our satisfaction.

Third question, who's this all about? Which leads to this logically. David makes an astonishing assertion. Assertion, verses 27 to 28. He exhorts the people to remember, and then turn to the Lord.

Not just Israel, but all the nations. The king deserves the worship, but here's the interesting thing here. David doesn't actually have himself in mind when he's talking about the king.

He has the Lord in mind. And it's imperative that when we think things are going the wrong way, and that's the problem with suffering, isn't it? We think something's out of order. Something's just wrong about this.

It's unjust. Often, that is true, especially when the innocent suffer. But the psalm reminds us that the king, in our suffering, has not abdicated his authority.

- [18 : 55] David praises the Lord saying this, kingship belongs to the Lord. Little did David know that one day, suffering and kingship would come together for salvation.

Just remember the sign above the cross of Christ. The king of the Jews. Christ crucified, ruling, glorified.

When all seems out of order and suffering, just remind yourself of that sign over the cross of Christ. He's ruling. Last question. This is about proclamation.

How long? How long is this going to last? Praise is the way to go when we're faced with suffering. The last three verses end not only in praise, but in promise or blessing.

It's the customary way of half of the psalms. The psalm not only has this global perspective, though, with a king ruling over all the nations, it also has an eternal perspective.

- [19 : 59] The praise will reach successive generations. One of our pains as parents, isn't it, grandparents, is will our children follow Jesus?

We're thankful for the children and the youth ministry here at St. John's. We're thankful for parents as well. Things are going really well in those terms. What's really important is that we serve, minister in that capacity because of this promise of God that in successive generations, even the unborn, are going to have the gospel.

They're going to have the righteousness of Christ proclaimed to them. Those who we don't even know yet. So the promise here is that we have a story to be told because Jesus died and then rose again.

Jesus suffering, dying, rising, convinces and compels us to proclaim Christ's righteousness to this generation, but successive generations who will turn and then proclaim it to the generations that follow.

And here's a sobering thought, but also a celebratory thought. For the most part, future generations, two or three down the line, won't know our names.

[21 : 20] I'm kind of thankful for that, but it's sobering, isn't it? I think I can tell you my great-grandparents' names but that's about as far back as I can go.

But here's the thing for God's people. They will know Christ's name. This is the promise that he delivers here through David's prayer. And it then ends with this.

Last verse, last line, that he has done it. doesn't sound a lot like it is finished.

It all comes down to who Christ is and for eternity. Let me close with this. One other thing about this psalm is that we're given a glimpse of the mind of Christ.

You find it encouraging that we get a picture of what Jesus is thinking when he's on the cross. It reshapes our view of suffering. It's okay to ask why and other questions as well.

[22 : 25] One of the things that I do in pastoral care when I visit you and some of you will know this, maybe you remember it, maybe you don't, when I come to see you and David and others and even those who don't think that you're actually in pastoral care but I think we're all actually in pastoral care and caring for one another is just to ask the question, what's on your mind?

Right? Everyone's thinking something when they're suffering. People are in pain. You don't stop thinking. Sometimes it accelerates our thinking.

Something is on your mind. And in this psalm, we get a glimpse into what's on Jesus' mind when he's suffering, when he's in pain.

Your suffering makes a difference to Jesus. He wants to know and wants you to know that he knows what's actually on your mind.

And so what Jesus does is he lifts up himself and gives us a shape, gives us even a script, I think, that when we're suffering of what it is that we can be thinking.

[23 : 34] Not afraid of some of the things that come into our mind but how that suffering can be redeemed because of his death on the cross and gives us a way to suffer that's a great contrast of the world in which we live in.

And may that be the shape. May that be the redemption. May that be the purpose of what God does with suffering as he reconciles himself to us and reconciles us to him.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.