

Psalm 22 – A Prophetic Portrait of the Cross

Text: Psalm 22:1–31 (NKJV)

Psalm 22 stands out as one of the most vivid and powerful Messianic psalms in the entire Bible. Written by King David, it prophetically describes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in remarkable detail—centuries before crucifixion was even practiced as a form of execution. In David's day, the typical method of capital punishment was stoning. Yet here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David writes of a kind of suffering that perfectly matches the Roman practice of crucifixion introduced nearly 1,000 years later. That in itself is a testament to the supernatural inspiration of Scripture.

Forsaken for Our Sake (vv. 1–2)

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent." (Psalm 22:1–2, NKJV)

These opening words were quoted by Jesus as He hung on the cross (see Matthew 27:46). They reveal the spiritual agony He experienced. This was not merely physical pain—though that was intense—it was the dreadful reality of being forsaken by the Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, *"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me"* (Matthew 26:39). That "cup" was the separation from God as He bore the sin of the world.

The question is, why was Jesus forsaken? The answer is found in verse 3.

The Reason for the Separation (v. 3)

"But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel." (Psalm 22:3, NKJV)

God is perfectly holy, and holiness cannot have fellowship with sin. When Jesus bore the sin of the world on Himself, He stood in our place under the judgment of God. That separation, that forsaking, was not due to any fault in Christ, but because He voluntarily took our guilt upon Himself. He was temporarily forsaken so that we would never have to be.

Sin and Separation

Scripture teaches that sin always results in separation from God. Adam was warned, *"In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Genesis 2:17). Though Adam did not immediately die physically that day, he died spiritually—cut off from fellowship with God.

The apostle Paul wrote, *"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins"* (Ephesians 2:1, NKJV). Spiritual death means being physically alive but spiritually separated from God—the very source of life. To be cut off from Him is to be cut off from life itself. On the cross, Jesus willingly entered that state of separation on our behalf so that, through Him, we could be made alive and restored to fellowship with God.

Isaiah echoes this truth: *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God"* (Isaiah 59:2). That's why Jesus cried out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*—because He was bearing the full weight of our sin.

Mocked and Despised (vv. 6–8)

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'" (Psalm 22:6–8, NKJV)

These verses perfectly describe the mocking Jesus endured. As He hung on the cross, the religious leaders sneered, *"He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him"* (Matthew 27:43). Every word was a fulfillment of this psalm.

Born for This (vv. 9–10)

"But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God." (Psalm 22:9–10, NKJV)

Jesus' trust in the Father began from birth. Even before He could speak, He was in relationship with God. This affirms both the divine nature of Christ and the sacredness of life from the womb. It also speaks to the consciousness and trust that Christ demonstrated, even as an infant—trust that carried Him through the darkest hour.

Surrounded and Suffering (vv. 11–18)

"They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." (Psalm 22:16–18, NKJV)

Here we find some of the clearest prophetic language describing the crucifixion. The nails through the hands and feet, the visible bones due to Roman whipping He experienced and the stretching and strain of the cross, and even the gambling over His clothing—every detail is fulfilled in the Gospel accounts (see John 19:23–24).

Crucifixion was designed to inflict maximum pain. As the victim hung, muscles would fatigue, joints would dislocate, and breathing would become torturous. Jesus endured all of this—willingly—for us.

The Cry for Deliverance (vv. 19–21)

"But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!" (Psalm 22:19, NKJV)

Here the psalm shifts. The suffering servant cries out for help, and God hears. This anticipates the resurrection—God did not leave His Son in the grave.

The Declaration of Victory (vv. 22–24)

"I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You." (Psalm 22:22, NKJV)

This verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:12 and speaks of Jesus' resurrection. After the cross came the empty tomb. And now, Jesus continues to declare the Father's name to us, His brethren.

God did not abandon Christ forever. He heard His cry. And because of that, we too can be assured that when we cry out to Him in faith, He will hear us.

The Gospel to All Nations (vv. 25–31)

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You." (Psalm 22:27, NKJV)

The cross was not the end—it was the turning point for the whole world. From this moment, salvation went out beyond Israel to the nations. All who believe—Jew or Gentile—can be reconciled to God.

"A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this." (Psalm 22:30–31, NKJV)

This final verse rings with resurrection hope. *"He has done this."* In other words, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30). The work of salvation is complete. And now, generation after generation proclaims His righteousness—just as we are doing today.

Personal Application

Psalm 22 reminds us that the cross was not an accident—it was the plan of God from before the foundation of the world. Jesus didn't just suffer for humanity; He suffered for you and me. He took our sin, our shame, our separation—and made a way back to the Father.

Have you placed your trust in Him? Not just intellectually, but personally—have you embraced the Savior who cried, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* so that you would never have to?

If so, then praise Him boldly:

"I will declare Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You."

If you have not yet trusted in Christ, then this psalm invites you to seriously consider both the weight of your sin and the depth of His love. As Jesus hung on the cross, your sins—and mine—were placed upon Him, adding to the burden of His suffering. He endured the full measure of God's righteous judgment so that you could be forgiven, reconciled, and live forever in fellowship with the God who made you and loves you.

"That He has done this." Past tense, it is finished.