

How Jesus Endured the Cross

Psalm 22:1-21

March 20, 2016

In anticipation of our time around the Lord's Table, I thought we could take some time, as I mentioned, to reflect on the cross. And I'd like us to meditate on some themes that we heard in our reading this morning out of Mark's Gospel, which portrayed the depth of Jesus' suffering for our sins. So just by way of introduction, go ahead and turn in your Bibles back to Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, and follow along as we just make some initial observations in the text.

The writer to the Hebrews called us to "look to Jesus, the founder the perfecter of our faith who for," it says, "the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." To see what he endured in enduring the cross, we read, as we did this morning, from the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,

and they tell us what Jesus suffered, what he endured for the sake of our salvation. The cross of Jesus Christ was the greatest trial, the greatest suffering that anyone has ever endured throughout all of history. It wasn't just the cruel death at the hands of brutal men. Others have suffered throughout history similar deaths. Crucifixion was very common in the Roman world, even suffered worse deaths at the hands of cruel, violent men. It wasn't just the ignominious, humiliating aspects of Jesus' suffering, being publicly portrayed and displayed in front of everybody gawking, mocking. Again, others have been shamefully scornfully treated as well. That's not what makes the death of Jesus Christ the greatest trial and suffering that ever happened in human history.

What men did to our Lord was one thing. It's what *God* did. That is another category of suffering altogether because on the cross the holy God poured out the fulness of his anger. He breathed on him the fire of his unmitigated wrath, on his own beloved Son, no less, there on the cross. That is something that's truly unprecedented, something that will never be repeated. It could *never* be repeated. No one has ever endured the suffering that Jesus suffered on the cross because no one

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but Jesus bore the weight of sin like he did. No one but Jesus absorbed the full penalty of divine punishment in his own body, no one but him.

It's amazing when you consider that Jesus knew what was coming well before he ever reached the cross. In and of itself, that is another unimaginable form of suffering, the anticipation of enduring the cross. No one else has ever faced that, either. Take a look at Mark 14:32-41 because that is recorded of Jesus' suffering even before the suffering of the cross. This is what he endured even while he was praying in Gethsemane. "They went to the place called Gethsemane," verse 32. "He said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John. He began to be greatly distressed and troubled, and he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.'" That is not hyperbole. He is so sorrowful. He says, "'Remain here and watch.'"

He longed for his friends to be involved, join him in his suffering through prayer, help him. "Going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour

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might pass from him, and he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.' He came and found them sleeping." So not just the suffering of that hour, but also the disappointment of his own friends not joining him. He found them sleeping. "He said to Peter, 'Simon, why are you asleep? Could you not watch for one hour? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" Even in suffering, even in disappointment, he's teaching, isn't he? He's shepherding. "Again, he went away and prayed, saying the same words, and again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy." Right? "The flesh is weak." They didn't know how to answer him. "He came to them a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.'" "

Listen, as human beings, knowing what Jesus was about to endure because we've read the story, praying to the God who can do the impossible, asking God to find another way on the eve of his suffering, we, as human beings, understand that. We get that. This makes sense to us. Jesus' prayer, here, is not a

request to escape. It's not an expression of cowardice. His prayer expresses a very human aversion to the ordeal itself, to the soul-wrenching pain of abandonment to divine wrath. In fact, if Jesus did not pray this way in Gethsemane, we might well doubt whether he was truly human. Can he really understand? It's precisely because of this; how he endured the trial of the cross, that makes Jesus the most remarkable human being who ever lived, a man worthy of our worship and praise. Jesus remained, here, fixed in his purpose, resolute, standing firm, fully resolved to do his Father's will even in the face of unimaginable suffering. It was in the courage of this faith that Jesus embraced the path of suffering. He said, "The hour is come." "It's time."

How did Jesus do that? How did he endure this radically profound suffering? You say, well, he was fully God. Yes, I know. He was also fully man. How did he as man endure that? Turn ahead a page or two to chapter 15. We need to take a look at the extent of Jesus' resolve. He endured the betrayal. He endured the arrest, the abandonment of his disciples. He endured the mock trials, the perversion of justice. He endured the reversal of the crowds, who once hailed him as king, and now they're

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calling for his crucifixion. He endured the mocking of the soldiers, their mock worship, their faux worship followed by their piercing him with nails, suspending his limbs from the beams of the cross, his body is stretched out like on some kind of a medieval rack, excruciating pain.

But notice in Mark 15:29, it records the taunts of those who witnessed his crucifixion, mockers and scoffers who threw his own words back in his face. Look at Mark 15:29, "Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross! And so also the chief priests," men who ought to be dignified, "scribes," studied men, learned men, "they mocked him to one another, saying, 'He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.'" Such derision! Such unimaginable scorn for a suffering, dying man. Jesus did have the power to remove himself from the cross, didn't he? According to Matthew 26:53, all he had to do was make one simple appeal, one word to his father, and his father would have deployed twelve legions of angels to his rescue. Just remember what one angel did to a 185,000

Assyrian soldiers. Dead in a night. Twelve legions? He wiped out the face of the earth. Yet he remained on the cross.

Continuing the narrative, verse 33, the next section provides us with a clue we need to understand how Jesus endured this suffering of the cross. "When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, 'Behold, he's calling Elijah.' And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink." Saying, "'Wait, let's see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last." Note, there, the strength of Jesus in this final hour even while hanging on the cross; twice Mark tells us that Jesus cried out "with a loud voice." That's called emphasis, there in the text, twice repeated. Crucifixion victims typically didn't have the breath to cry out loudly, if at all. In fact, they died not from blood loss but from an excruciatingly painful level of suffocation. So what little breath that they had in their lungs

they saved. It preserved. Not Jesus, he used his final breath to save. He used his final breath teach.

Mark wants us to see that Jesus was in control of all of this to the very end. Jesus was no victim, here. What he did, he did willingly, he did of his own volition. He chose this from start to finish. John 10:17-18, Jesus said this, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." And just to make it clear, he said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." Such authority, such strong words, such powerful resolve!

And in light of that resolve, how do we understand that final question on the cross? Why did Jesus cry out, verse 34, "in a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" That does not sound like the authoritative triumph of a victor. Sounds like the lament of someone who has suddenly realized he has made a big mistake. He has miscalculated something severe. He's been abandoned by God. Some, they've said those words

indicate that Jesus denied his Father on the cross, as if his question is an expression of doubt. As we're going to see in a moment, that interpretation is exactly the opposite of the truth.

In reality, Jesus Christ, his cry, it was an expression of an unshakeable faith in the midst of the most profound suffering ever known. We only need to point out that Jesus addressed him as my God, my God. He affirmed in his words. He still trusted. Others, faithful Christians, they've recognized how those words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", they understand that those expressed the depth of our Savior's suffering, and that is true. As we've already said, Jesus suffered way beyond the physical pain, crucifixion torture, way beyond the humiliating taunts of the mocking crowd.

But some go too far. They say wrongly that the abandonment of the Son by the Father, that that indicates a separation within the Trinity itself. That is not true. To introduce a break in the relationship among the persons of the Trinity, however temporary, is to introduce a change in the unchangeable

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God, to introduce a change, one change, even a small iota of change, that's to deny immutability; that's to deny the God who says, "I, the Lord, do not change." And that denies the essence of the God that's revealed in Scripture. No, we can't go there. We need to very careful, here. It's easy to fall into a ditch of heterodoxy or error, whether by saying too little or by saying way too much. We're delving into a profound mystery, here. We're looking into things that are beyond our full comprehension. Still, since the Holy Spirit has seen fit to record these things for us, we are encouraged, we're even exhorted to grapple with profound realities, to struggle to understand.

Jesus' cry, listen, it does not affect the nature of the Trinitarian relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit one iota. Something else is going on, here. If we'll trace this out carefully, we have the opportunity, here, to learn to an even greater degree, the significance and the wonder of what Christ actually accomplished on the cross. Today, we're going to learn how Jesus, as a man, how he endured the cross because for him, this was his fiercest trial. This was his greatest battle, and it was a battle he won, get this, it was a battle he won by faith. In addition to increasing your appreciation for your

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Savior this morning, which I hope we do this, in addition to elevating your sense of wonder and awe in your worship of him, we can also learn something from this about how to endure our own trials, if we'll pay attention carefully.

Obviously, our trials are trivial by comparison, but they are very real, nonetheless, and often very painful. Our trials to us being so weak, so small, can be overwhelming at times. By seeing how Jesus endured the cross, by exercising faith in God, we are going to learn how we can do the same in our lives as well. Just two points in our outline for this morning. As you can see from your bulletin, the text is actually from Psalm 22. We're going to do an exposition of Psalm 22, and that's because Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" that comes from the very first words of Psalm 22. So turn back there, Psalm 22 verse 1, and we'll get to the very first point on our outline, which is this: Jesus expected divine protection. Jesus expected divine protection.

As Jesus hung on the cross, did he personally deserve to be there? Yes or no? Okay, you pass. You're right. No. He did not

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deserve to be there. He was sinless, utterly sinless. And being sinless, guiltless, having fulfilled the will of God in every way possible, Jesus had every right to expect God's protection and blessing. He had every right to expect protection from his enemies, and there is a sense in which God should have protected him, should have delivered Jesus from the power of ungodly men.

The fact that God handed Jesus over to them, that he did not deliver him on this occasion, it means one of three things. First, it could mean that God had ceased to be true to his good character. That he ceased to be God. Well, we know that's not true. Second option, God was unable to deliver Jesus from the power of men. Also untrue. Well, that forces us to consider a third option, one that we know is true from reading the Scripture and seeing the character of God, that he's good and he's powerful. So what's going on, here? God had a good and wise purpose in this trial.

In this evil of handing Jesus over to ungodly men, God had a good purpose to fulfill. That's why he didn't deliver Jesus from that dreadful hour. And that's why Jesus cried out, "My

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God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He's calling attention from everybody surrounding him, and now to us because it's recorded in here in Scripture, he's calling attention to the fact that God had a divine purpose in his suffering. Jesus could have prayed that prayer silently, but even in his final minutes of life, with his final breath, he pointed his nation to the true purpose of his death on the cross. He was not dying for his own sins, but for theirs. The quote from Psalm 22 would help them discover the truth about his death on the cross. He died to save his people from their sins.

But Jesus also, he wasn't just teaching. This is a genuine prayer of sorrow. This is a prayer that's coming from the heart, and notice his prayer is Scripture. You want to pray well? Pray the Word of God. Jesus prayed the Word of God from the heart. He was longing, here, for a close fellowship with his father, and this psalm, Psalm 22, it captures his thoughts on the cross. It records what he was thinking and what he was feeling with divine precision. As we read, we find the purest and most profound expression of faith in God. This was an example to the entire nation of Israel, and to us as well, now, of how a genuine

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believer clings to God even in the greatest of trials. He clings by faith.

Let me take a couple minutes to read the entire psalm just so you can see it for yourself. This psalm is going to be the subject of today's sermon and next week's as well. You say, what does this have to do with the resurrection? Well, come next week and find out. Bring a friend. As we read David's psalm, you're going to see three sections, here. One from verses 1-10, we hear his complaint. And then from verses 11-21, we hear his request. And then finally from verses 22-31, we hear his confident praise. So as David works out his worries, his anxieties before God in prayer, he comes from complaint to request to praise. That's how all prayer in the moment of anxiety and trial and worry and pressure that's how it all should flow, right? So follow along as I read.

This is "to the choirmaster, according to the doe of the dawn, a psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by

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night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

"Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

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"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! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the

coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.”

Powerful psalm, isn't it? We don't know the exact circumstances of David's travail, but most commentators place the setting of this psalm as arising out of David's conflicts with King Saul. What, what David expressed in graphic figures of speech, for Christ the language is even more fitting, even more appropriate. So this psalm of David is prophetic, a type of Christ's coming suffering. It's amazingly accurate, too, isn't it? Keep in mind it was written 1,000 years before Jesus hung on that cross, fulfilling all the types and the figures that are recorded here and elsewhere.

As we noted, the first 10 verses, they're about Jesus' right and proper expectation of divine protection. Notice the complaint; it starts in verses 1-2. It says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest." That's actually only one question, there, in the original Hebrew. The

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opening line is a question, but the second line is not a question. Literally, he's saying, "Far from saving me." So the salvation on the one hand, and it's very far from the words of his groaning. There's no connection between his words and his coming salvation. So this isn't a question; it's just a statement of fact. In fact, David had cried out by day, by night, no answer from God, no rest, just constant turmoil. No relief.

Like David, Jesus had also cried day and night, but God had withheld his deliverance. In fact, the cry from his own lips using this language of Psalm 22:1, that cry, remember, came in the ninth hour, right? At the end of a three-hour period of darkness, Jesus had literally cried out to God by day, by night. No answer, no rest, continuing agony as he's abandoned to suffering and torment. But notice how Jesus, just like David before him, how he affirmed the truth that he knew about God even while expressing his complaint, there in verse 3. He continues; he says, "Yet you are holy." Look at that in there. "Enthroned on the praises of Israel." Listen, the pain of this severe trial, it did not diminish the holy character of God in any way at all. God remained, God continued to be holy, *kadosh*,

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set apart. He's distinct; he's separate from all that's common and profane. No matter what we face, God remains God. He is holy, enthroned on the praises of his people. Like David, Jesus knew the history of God's people. He'd read.

Verses 4-5, "In you our fathers trusted. They trusted; you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued. In you they trusted and were not put to shame." That's a summary of the history of Israel, isn't it? God demonstrated his holiness time and time again, and that was the basis of Israel's trust. It was the fountainhead of Israel's praises. David pictures God, there, enthroned, seated upon, enthroned, perched upon the praises of Israel, perched atop those praises because he alone is deserving of all glory and honor due his name.

Listen, this affirmation of the truth about God's nature, that he is holy, that he is faithful, that he is worthy of trust, that he is worthy of all the praise for his deliverance, that might seem to contradict the current silence, right? In fact, the lack of an answer in the face of a very sincere and helpless plea of a suffering believer, that makes the silence

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even more deafening, even more profound, more painful. If God is known and praised for delivering his people, why does he not deliver now, when I most need him? But where else can a suffering believer turn in times of trouble? Is there any other deliverer? Is there anyone else worthy of the sufferer's trust? Money? Power? Legislation?

For David, for Jesus, there's only one place to turn, only one source of deliverance. The silence did not deter him from crying out; it, it only caused him to pray more fervently. "Jesus cried out with a loud cry." Three times David says of his forefathers, "They trusted," "They trusted," "They trusted." So if they trusted then God's rescued, if the testimony of all history points to the trustworthiness of God, and if God is God, never changing, always faithful, then no matter how long he delays, he remains the only hope in times of trouble. We must stay fixed on that truth. David knew that to be true, and so he hoped in God and in God alone. Jesus also knew that to be true, and hoped in God to the very end. That, folks, is how Jesus endured the cross. And that is how all of us endure trials as well, by trusting in God to the trial's very end. We outlast the suffering by continuing in our faith in God.

Listen, the fact that David trusted in God but no deliverance came, the fact that Jesus trusted and God abandoned him to bitter, unimaginable suffering, this leads to an even more concrete expression of complaint, as we see clearly how the self-righteous were tormenting him. Look at verses 6-8. David continues; he says, "I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads. 'He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'" Just a mocking.

It's amazing how the most religious can become the harshest persecutors. They are so self-righteous, so quick to justify themselves that they are absolutely unable to see the inherent contradiction between their own sinful speech and behavior and then the charges that they make. There's Jesus, hanging on the cross, bleeding and dying, the victim of the greatest injustice that's ever been perpetrated on any human being throughout all history. Why? Because he was sinless; because he didn't deserve that. And the religious leaders of Israel, they surround him, they taunt him, they mock him, and they lead others in

condemning him. It's so utterly cruel, so heartless, so evil. And yet they believed themselves to be doing God's work.

By referring to himself as a worm, here, two things about that. A worm: weakness and revulsion, right? Except for my daughter, who likes to play with worms. I don't get it. I'm trying to tell her worms are vile little creature writhing in the mud. But it's also small and powerless. It's utterly debased. So not only people in looking at a worm, naturally inclined to scorn him as a worm, they feel no restraint in scorning him. I mean, what's a worm going to do when he's scorned? Nothing, right? There's no consequence for despising a worm; slimy, vile little worm can't even defend itself and everybody around you shares your same sentiment. In the same way, no one felt any sense of compunction about mocking the dying Christ on the cross. No fear from him. He's hanging there; what can he do? Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised, rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not."

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Without hesitation, with no check of conscience, Jesus' enemies mocked him, they sneered at him, they wagged their heads. "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" As we read earlier, they said, "Save yourself! Come down from the cross. Let the Christ, the king of Israel come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." That's all we want. We just want to believe. We're open-hearted, we're open-minded. Just show us. Such blasphemy! Not even, like I said, not even a common sense of human decency could restrain the hatred.

Jesus didn't resist. He lived out what had been prophesied about him in Isaiah 50 verse 6, "I gave my back to those who strike and my cheeks, to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and suffering, spitting." Jesus endured all of that, and he endured much more. "And when he was reviled, he did not revile in return," right? 1 Peter 2:23. When he suffered, he did not threaten. How did he do that? Most of us can't even endure the slightest offense, the mildest of insults, whether real or perceived. We're so thin-skinned, right? How did he do this? How did he endure such cruelty when he was absolutely righteous in the matter? How did he endure such

hostility from sinners, and without a word? Peter finished that thought in 1 Peter 3:23; he answers our question. "When he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued in trusting himself to him who judges justly." Who's that? Jesus entrusted himself to God, to the one to whom he cried out, "My God!"

Take a look at verses 9-10 of Psalm 22. Jesus is simply living out his constant habit of depending wholly upon God. Though all of mankind scorned him, and though he was despised by all people, mocked and insulted by young and old, rich and poor, great and small, Jesus entrusted himself to God. Yet, verse 9, "You are he who took me from the womb. You made me trust you at my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God."

Look, in truth all of us are that helpless in the world. We are at God's mercy with each and every step, and the way we enter the world, as helpless babies, totally dependent on our mother's tenderness, you know, that lesson ought to instruct us sufficiently our whole lives through. We're always that

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helpless. We just don't often realize it. It's actually the manifestation of our sin nature, from very early on, that as we grow, we become self-sufficient. We become independent, as if by our own strength we can handle life on our own, by our own wisdom, our own ingenuity, our own knowledge, our own learning, our own education, our own accomplishment, our own achievement, our own strength. We can handle it. Very early on we start trusting ourselves, don't we?

Jesus testifies here, and as the only one in all of humanity to be born without a sin nature, he testifies that he had trusted God from his mother's womb onward. "From my mother's womb, you have been my God." It didn't matter what men thought of him. It didn't matter what situation he was in, what station in life, what his circumstances were, whether he was a helpless infant, whether he was a writhing worm, whether he was a dying Christ on the cross, Jesus knew, he trusted that God cared for him, and that was enough. He trusted implicitly and utterly in God.

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And that's where this section of complaint ends, with an affirmation of his trust in God. What prompted the psalmist's prayer, what provoked his cry to God, it is ended with this strong affirmation of trust, and that is how David endured the persecutions of King Saul. That's how Jesus endured the cross, humanity's severest trial, by putting all of his trust in God. And that is how all believers endure all their trials, just as the believing fathers of Israel did. They trusted, they trusted, they trusted. We may not see all things clearly. We may not know how or when the trial is going to end. We may not ever know its purpose. But we trust God wholly.

As Francis Havergal wrote in 1876, "Every joy or trial falleth from above, traced upon our dial by the Son of Love. We may trust him fully all for us to do; they who trust him wholly find him wholly true." Jesus trusted because he looked carefully at God's written Word, and there he found words of promise over and over, some written in Isaiah guaranteeing the final outcome. Isaiah 41:14, "Fear not, you worm of Jacob." Remember, he said, "I am a worm, not a man." "Fear not, you worm of Jacob. I am the one who helps you," declares the Lord. "Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.'" Isaiah 49:7, "Thus says the Lord, the

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redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, 'To one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers, this is what the Lord says: "Kings shall see and arise, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."'"

Look, Jesus trusted God to do what he said. That's what faith is: believing God will do what he said. Jesus trusted him to fulfill all that was written and spoken about the Messiah. He entrusted himself to the care of God. He handed himself over to God's care. Even though everything appeared to be hopeless, even though he's surrounded by mocking enemies, and even as he hoped in God while enduring the suffering of the cross, and his faith was turned into an object of ridicule by those enemies and Jesus remained steadfast.

That's precisely why God should rescue Jesus from the cross. It was fitting, it was appropriate, it was righteous, even, for God to respond to Jesus' cries with deliverance. But God didn't do that. He let him suffer, hanging there for all men to gaze upon him. He became an object of scorn, a sign to be

opposed, "for cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree," Galatians 3:13. It comes from Deuteronomy 21:23, "A hanged man is cursed by God." Why was he cursed? Clearly, for no reason found in himself. The sinless one trusted God. He bore the sin of many, and he was abused for it. That's what Psalm 22 teaches us. That's why Jesus quoted from it on the cross. He wanted people to look here, Psalm 22. He wanted people to see him there and to find salvation by looking there, to him.

Also, as I said, Psalm 22 is a sincere expression of his own grief. It was a deep sorrow of his own predicament. Jesus endured the greatest trial ever on the cross. He fought the greatest fight. He won the greatest victory, and he won it all by faith in God. That becomes an example to us, doesn't it? Whenever we feel sorrow, anxiety, fear; whenever we feel abandoned by God, frightened, discouraged, when we're tempted to despair, we find in Jesus' dying breath a pattern for finding victory in suffering. We must go back to God's Word, affirm the theology that we've learned and remain steadfast in the, in the faith.

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Look, you'll never trust someone you don't know, right? That's why we've got to keep reading, keep studying, keep learning the history of the God who is always faithful. And we need to read about the saints who trusted him and found him to be true even in the darkest of trials. Listen, when the storms hit, when the trials come, when we face the fiery trials of persecution, look, none of the superficial platitudes or the shallow clichés that are so often peddled and passed around throughout evangelicalism today, none of that can anchor our faith. We must cling to truths we know and understand, and when we know him intimately, we will trust him wholly and find him to be wholly true because we draw from a deep well of doctrinal truth, we're going to find written in his Word. That's what Jesus has shown us, here, pointing all of us from the dreadful cross itself that his faith was anchored in the truths of God's Word, Psalm 22, other passages as well. Jesus read. Jesus studied. Jesus believed.

Listen, beloved, even having said that, we're so often reminded that our faith is weak and wanting, aren't we? Aren't we like the disciples, asleep when we ought to be awake praying? What then? Look to Jesus. Look to his triumph of faith. Look at

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how he endured the greatest trial known to mankind and how he succeeded. Listen, his faith in God is unbroken, and therefore it is sufficient for you. If you trust in him, his success becomes your success. His strength upholds you in your weakness. Jesus intercedes for you even now. He's praying to the Father who's at his side, by the way, sitting right next to him. He prays that your faith will endure, that you'll persevere to the end. He's with you in every trial, in every conflict. He's your merciful High Priest who cares deeply for you. He bought you with his own blood. His victory is sufficient to carry you, and his example will continue to teach you.

Even though Jesus expected divine protection, didn't get it. Don't worry, it's all part of the plan, right? God is still God. And that brings us to a second point, here. Jesus may have expected divine protection, didn't receive it in his hour of greatest need, so in faith, Jesus accepted divine retribution. Jesus accepted divine retribution. You could say he embraced divine wrath. He willingly accepted this, but get this, the retribution from God was not against his own sin. The vengeance for violations against divine holiness was not due to anything

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in himself. He endured the suffering of the cross for our sakes. He accepted God's wrath as our substitute.

Using the words of the psalmist, his father David, Jesus had uttered his complaint, verses 1-10. And now, resolute in faith, he makes a simple request, here, a very simple request. Though God was far from him, though he turned his back on his Son's suffering, though he subjected him to the cross, Jesus prayed this simple prayer verse 11, "Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help." He started with "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Now he asks, "Be not far from me." He's all alone, no one to turn to but God. You know what? Sometimes that's the safest place we can be. There's no one to help. His only company are the vicious, those who seek to do him violent harm.

The psalmist pictures his enemies with animal-like qualities: strength and ferocity. And they come in two basic companies, here, the bulls and the dogs. Bulls and the dogs, bulldogs. I just thought of that. But look at the bulls in verse 12. Verses 12-13, "Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of

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Bashan surround me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and a roaring lion." The bulls of Bashan, they were an especially strong variety. They were well-fed in luxurious pasture-land. They had stoneless meadows to roam in, and even the grass surrounded by oak forests. These were healthy bulls, strong bulls, sleek, powerful. And according to the psalmist, they were also numerous. "Many strong bulls of Bashan" surrounded him, hemming him in. I mean, I don't know what it's like to face one bull, but imagine being in the middle and you're surrounded by many bulls, many strong bulls, many strong bulls of Bashan, and allowing no escape. You cannot get through.

The bulls, here, represent those who are strong and in power. These are the more noble of the psalmist's persecutors. In David's case, the bulls represent King Saul, his courtiers, his, those in league with the king's court. In Jesus' case, they're the Jewish leaders, the political, the religious leaders of the time and the corrupt leaders had hemmed him in through their laws and procedures. They used the structures of power and authority to their own advantage. They used their power and authority to abuse him, and Jesus was trapped in the midst of strong, immovable animals. He's encircled, he's held fast, he's

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pinned down, given over to the king of predators, in fact, a ravenous lion. And this lion is hungry. This lion is ready to eat, eager to tear into his flesh with his claws and his teeth.

But the strength of the nobility, it enlists another group to carry out its dirty work. Look at verse 16, this other adversary, "For dogs encompass me; a company of evil-doers encircles me, and they pierce my hands and feet." There's nothing like a hungry pack of howling dogs to turn your blood to ice, right? I don't know if you've ever been chased by a dog, a German shepherd, but man, snarling, growling, bearing their fangs! This pack of wild dogs, it pictures the evil men who surround him, ready to tear him into pieces. This is the rabble, the mob, those without any care for sophistication, no care for principle. They just want to see blood.

Once again, the lion shows up. It's not clear in the English, especially since the last part of the verse is translated, "They pierced my hands and my feet." It's not exactly the right translation. No New Testament writer makes use of this text to refer to the piercing of Christ on the cross,

the crucifixion. And that's because the Hebrew, here, has a different sense. The word, lion, shows up again in this translation, and there's one translation called the New English Translation, you can find it online even, but it renders it best; it says, "Wild dogs surround me, a gang of evil men crowd around me." And here's the translation, "Like a lion they pin my hands and my feet." That's actually more accurate.

Two Old Testament passages do refer to the piercing of the Messiah: Isaiah 53:5, Zechariah 12:10. But here the idea is different. It's that he's stretched out, taut, pulled to the very extremes, ready to be torn to pieces, pinned down. The word, here, refers to something that's spread and extended so fully that there are literally no bends or folds at all. He's literally helpless before these vicious dogs, spread out, vulnerable to attack, this band of evil men, and the dogs tear into him, having pinned him down like a lion pins its victims down, stretching his limbs until they're totally out of joint, again like pulling him apart like a medieval rack.

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Look at the effect on him, verses 14-15 and then also verses 17-18. These are some of the clearest prophetic portrayals of exactly what happened at the crucifixion 1,000 years before they happened. This is what the bulls and the dogs, what the lion, what the evil men did to him. "I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." We read that in Mark's Gospel, didn't we? You can read, compare the other Gospel accounts as well: Matthew, Luke, John. All those details were fulfilled to the very letter. The lack of strength, the bones out of joint, inner vitality melted like wax, dryness and thirst, all of this before this leering, gawking crowd of mockers, all gloating over him.

Since his death is so certain, the soldiers thought nothing of dividing up his garments among themselves, right there in front of him. He wasn't dead, yet. He could see them doing it. But he was dead to them. To them he was just a breathing corpse. Might as well get on with dividing what spoils remain. No

respect. No regard. Utterly despised, given up for dead. Not only that, but he died from all appearances friendless. One of his disciples had betrayed him; the rest had scattered at his arrest. The closest of his inner circle had denied three times that he had known him.

And if the abandonment of men were not enough, he found himself abandoned by God as well. Look at verse 11 again; note carefully the language of that opening line. "Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help." None to help? What, not even God? Why pray to him? Not even God? No, not at this time. Even God had turned on him. In fact, look at the end of verse 15, "You laid me in the dust of death." Who's that? God had done this. God had laid him in the dust of death. As one commentator put it, quote, "The death of the servant of God is spoken of not merely as happening like this, but as decreed; and not merely as permitted by God, but as being in accordance with the divine will," end quote.

Listen, folks, don't ever fall into the trap of trying to absolve God of responsibility for bad things happening. God can

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handle the pressure. He has no problem taking responsibility for decreeing these things, which is crystal clear here in the death of his own Son. As Peter said, he told the crowd in Acts 2:23, "This Jesus was delivered up according to" what? "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Peter didn't try to get God off the hook. What did, delivering up Jesus, involve? Gross injustice, lies, deception, manipulation, the cruelest abuse, the vilest murder. God decreed it. Evil men carried out the evil deeds, and they are responsible for their sins, but it was God who decreed the death of Jesus Christ, a death that involved sin against him.

The Father put his own son on the cross. Why? Not for his own sins. To what purpose, then? The answer is found in Isaiah 53:4-6, "Surely he has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Again, the worst, the most dreadful element in Jesus' suffering wasn't the physical pain of crucifixion. That's why these Jesus movies can never capture the truth of Jesus on the cross in film. They'll always be misleading because they tend toward a superficial understanding of what truly happened. It wasn't just about the blood flowing and the torment and the nails in the hands and the crown of thorns. The Lord laid on the sinless Son of God the iniquity of us all. The purest heart was immersed in a sea of our sin, which is a suffering that we can never comprehend. Our hearts are so dull, so impure. We've emerged from a foul sea of sin, and we only catch imperfect glimpses of the purity of divine holiness.

What suffering he endured just in being and acting as the Sin-Bearer! But then to be stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, all the while expecting favor and protection and blessing, to be pierced for our transgressions, to be crushed for our iniquities, to be chastised by his Father when his Father's tenderness and closeness and kindness was all he had ever known, that's what he endured to secure our peace, to ensure our healing. And that's why Isaiah 53:10 says, it says, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief." Paul repeats that theme in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made

him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

This was God’s dreadful plan all along, to deliver us from our sins and that’s why he refused to come down off that cross. He refused to save himself. He refused to secure his own deliverance. He trusted God to deliver him; refused to rescue himself and entrusted himself to the Father, his only hope. Take a look at verse 19, “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. Save me from the mouth of the lion.”

Stop there, right there in the middle of that verse. I realize it’s mid-verse, but that’s the proper stopping point in the text. We’ve come to back to where we began in verse 11, right? “Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.” This whole section is bracketed with a prayer for the nearness of God, for the close presence of God, for intimacy, for deliverance from trouble. Well, did God deliver him? From his immediate trouble, the answer has to be, No. But

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did God answer his prayer? Oh, yes, he did. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, Hebrews 5:7, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who is able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." How was he heard? How did his deliverance come? It's called resurrection.

We're going to learn more about the joy of that resurrected life when we come together next Sunday and finish this exposition of Psalm 22. For now, let's bow for a word of prayer before we sing a song and enter into our time of communion around the Lord's Table.

Father, we give thanks to you once again for the wonder of what you've displayed in the cross of Jesus Christ. We give thanks with humbled hearts, bowing knee, reverent in our worship and our praise because we are looking upon things that most mortal men will never see. Thank you for bringing us into your very mind, helping us to understand more fully the suffering and the endurance of Jesus our Savior. Thank you for forgiving us in his perfect death on the cross.