Remarks on the Twenty-Second Psalm

Articles from The Christian Friend · Psalm 22

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It is not without importance that this psalm is headed “A psalm of David,” because it shows that the writer was moved by the Holy Spirit to give many details concerning the crucifixion, sufferings, and death of the Savior at Calvary about a thousand years before they had their actual fulfilment. Elsewhere David is spoken of as “a prophet,” and our Lord Himself referred to him as having written another psalm “by the Holy Ghost.” Without controversy then, it was the Holy Ghost by David who drew this prophetic picture of the sufferings of Christ as the Sin-bearer on the cross (Acts 2:30; Mark 12:36; 2 Peter 1:21). This psalm also gives us a striking example of the ministry of “the prophets,” who by the Spirit of Christ testified beforehand “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” Thus they looked over the present Church-time entirely. The Church was not revealed in the Old Testament, though there were many allusions to the blessing of God going out to the Gentiles. The Church or Assembly was a mystery. It was “hid in God,” “not made known,” “kept secret since the world began,” till Saul of Tarsus was converted by seeing the Lord in heaven, and hearing Him speak of the saints on earth as one with Himself -- “Why persecutest thou Me?” Whatever figures or types of the Church -- the body and bride of Christ -- we may now be able to trace in Old Testament Scriptures, it is clear that the testimony of the Holy Spirit in old time was largely concerning Jews and Gentiles; while in the New Testament we have divine instruction concerning Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of God. The first words in this psalm could not have been uttered by any one but Christ Jesus the Savior. Nor will they ever be repeated, because His work accomplished on the cross has eternal efficacy. His sacrifice was offered once for all. He could say, “It is finished.” The redemption He accomplished was eternal. Observe, the One so forsaken was at that moment declaring His perfect confidence in God and relationship to Him -- “My God!” and yet He added the bitter cry, “Why hast Thou forsaken Me?” No saint in glory will ever say, “Why hast Thou forsaken me?” but will be presenting everlasting thanksgiving unto God and the Lamb; nor will the wicked, who are banished from God’s presence into outer darkness, be able to say, “My God,” while realizing the bitterness of deserved banishment from His holy presence for ever. It is clear then that this bitterest of all sorrows was known to Jesus as the Sin-bearer on the cross, and He only would, or could, drink the bitter cup. As then our adorable Lord did the perfect will of Him who sent Him, and by His one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, and this dolorous cry will never be heard again throughout God’s vast universe. These very words, we find in the gospels, were actually uttered by our Lord in the closing moments of His sorrow and agony on the cross, when His soul was made an offering for sin. Let us often recall to our minds this scene of unmingled distress, and lay to heart its most solemn import. The blood of the cross not only made peace, but it is able to temper all our joys and give sweetness to all our sorrows.

We cannot grasp the magnitude of the finished work of Christ, because of its infinite character and eternal efficacy. We may, however, have some feeble estimate of its greatness if we consider (1) the glory of the Person who did it; (2) the depth of suffering, and death under the judgment of God for sins, it necessitated; (3) the marvelous results. 1. No one but a divine Person, none less than one having the attributes of Deity, and yet perfect man, was able to accomplish it. Man had sinned, and man must bear the penalty. “By man came death, by Man came also the resurrection from among the dead.” He truly said, “I came down from heaven”; and yet while here could also speak of Himself as “the Son of man which is in heaven,” “Before Abraham was I am”; and His perfect manhood, and the attributes of Deity, are plainly shown in His life and walk. As perfect Man He ate and drank, looked for comforters, wept with the bereaved, endured hunger and thirst, was weary with His journey, and had all the qualities of man, sin apart. No less a Person could bear the penalty due to our sins, or answer the righteous demands of the Majesty on high; no one else could so honor, obey, and vindicate God as to His ways with man, and glorify Him as to bearing our sins, so as to blot them out for ever from His holy eye; and also merit, at the hands of divine righteousness, to be set on the right hand of God, and crowned with glory and honor. 2. The depth of suffering the work of the cross involved is seen in the fact that the anticipation of it caused the holy Sufferer to sweat “as it were great drops of blood falling clown to the ground.” May we ponder this solemn moment, and the love which many waters could not quench! Christ knew all that should come upon Him. The grief and suffering, infinitely beyond all else, was to be forsaken by God, when He was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sins of many. Though dark and sorrowful beyond all thought as it was, yet He could discern at the end light and glory and rest; for we are told that “for the joy that was set before Him” He “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” 3. The results also show the vastness of the work accomplished when God’s own Son poured out His soul unto death. As to the Assembly, the Church, we are told that “Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it . . . that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5). With regard to Israel it was prophesied “that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:50). As to creation, we are assured that “the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Moreover, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth (the infernal regions), every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11). Nor is this all; for it shall finally be manifest that our Lord Jesus has abolished death, and judged him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; taken away the sin of the world, and so

established righteousness, that there will be forever a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

not heard, but “forsaken”; for there He was suffering for our sins, and there “God . . . condemned sin in the flesh.”

In this psalm it is plainly seen that Christ suffered on the cross from man, from Satan, and from God.

Why is He thus abandoned by God? Why is the One who loved, obeyed, and honored God supremely, forsaken in the hour of deepest need? Why did God turn away from the only Man in the universe in whom He always found unchanging delight? There is but one answer, and the Lord gives it Himself; it is this: “Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.” Sin must be judged. The death of the cross was not merely a question of His obedience unto death, but God’s righteous judgment of “sin in the flesh,” and of blotting out our sins for ever. God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. What unutterable grace What a deliverance! Blessed be His name, He appeared once at the consummation of the ages “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). This necessitated God’s forsaking of Christ, God’s condemnation of sin. This is why in deepest agony He cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

1. By man He was hated without a cause; for His love they were His adversaries. Betrayed, denied, forsaken by all, bound, led to Annas, then to Caiaphas, and after that to the judgment-hall, He was condemned by Pilate, who believed Him to be without fault, scourged, mocked, spit upon, compelled to bear His cross, nailed to the tree, degraded to be numbered with the transgressors, was taken by wicked hands, crucified, and slain. 2. Satan no doubt was behind the wicked activity of man, aiding him by his power; for it had been said in the garden, four thousand years before, that the serpent -- the devil -- should bruise the heel of the woman’s Seed. But more than this, Satan had “the power of death,” and doubtless brought the terrors of death, and the dreadful bitterness of the cup, so before the holy Sufferer, that He desired if it were possible that the cup might pass from Him, but in His perfection could only ask it in subjection to the Father’s will; therefore He added, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” 3. But though the perfect Sufferer discerned the power of man and Satan, yet He took the cup directly from the hand of God, so that He said on the same night in which He was betrayed, when almost under the shadow of the cross, “The cup which my Father hath Given me, shall I not drink it?” And when hanging on the tree in unutterable pain and anguish, He took all from God. He could say -- “Thou bast brought me into the dust of death.” This surely was His perfection. Perfect in faith, and love, and devotedness to the will of Him that sent Him, yet was He most sensitive to the hatred and insult which men so cruelly heaped upon Him. We hear Him speaking of being “despised of the people,” whose violence and malignity He could only liken to “strong bulls of Bashan,” as “a ravening and a roaring lion” gaping upon Him, or to “dogs” encompassing Him. Nor was He insensible to their “scorn,” the shaking of the head, and derision in saying, “He trusted on Jehovah that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him.” Keenly did He feel their cruelty when He added, “The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.” All this wickedness of man was no doubt strengthened by “the prince of this world.” But He told out to God what men said and did, and added, “Thou art He that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon Thee from the womb Thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.” (Psa. 22:9-11). We learn from the gospels that the whole weight of the body of the holy Sufferer was suspended on the nails in His hands and His feet from the third to the ninth hour, that darkness covered the whole land for the last three hours, and it was not till then that the bitter cry came forth, “My God,

my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Before this He was always heard, so that He said, "I knew that Thou hearest Me always; "but now it was, "Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." Even in Gethsemane His prayer was to "Abba, Father," so that His perfect communion with the Father was manifest; an angel, too, was sent to strengthen Him. But on the cross His prayer is not heard; He receives no help, He is alone, cry in,, to His God, and

And even then all was perfect. Faith was perfect, and confidence too; for it was still, "My God." Love was perfect; for He fully carried out the Father's will. Obedience was perfect; for it was the Father's commandment. Self-surrender was perfect; for He claimed nothing for Himself. Holiness was perfect; for nothing impure was there, not even a spot or blemish. Hope was perfect; for He could say, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell [hades]; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One [this body] to see corruption. Thou wilt shew Me the path of life [resurrection]: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand [ascension] there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa. 16). All in the death of the cross was perfect; and while all the claims of righteousness, truth, and holiness, were perfectly met, yet how sweetly did the grace of the suffering One shine forth when He prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And again, to the expiring thief, in reply to his dying cry for mercy, He said, "This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Hence the witness of the Spirit concerning this atoning work is: "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," and "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:14, 17). Blessed testimony to the eternal efficacy of that finished work! In the death of the cross Jesus reached the point morally where He could say, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." There, at such a cost, He obeyed, honored, and vindicated God in all His ways with man. The moral glory of the death of the cross was perfect. Faith was perfect, not only when He clave to God in truest love and obedience when men and Satan were against Him, but when God forsook Him. As we have seen it was still, "My God." He was heard, we are told, even from "the horns of the unicorns." God, who alone could estimate the glory and perfection of the death of the cross, in righteousness raised Him up from among the dead. Then the first thing we hear, after this. account of the sufferings of Christ, in reference to the glories which should follow, is, "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren"; and we have only to turn to Gospel by John to see how exactly it was fulfilled. Revealing Himself to Mary as the risen One, but not, yet ascended, He said unto her, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). This she "told the disciples." It was the first time that our Lord spoke of their relationship to Him of