

When He Cried unto Him, He Heard

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? . . . All things must be fulfilled, in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me"— Luke 24:26, 44

A STUDY OF PSALM 22

WE KNOW that David was truly a type of The Christ, and that Christ is the Head of the Body which is the Ecclesia of the Living God. As Christ has suffered, so also the Body must suffer until these are all filled up; and then will come the glory promised; as with Christ, so also with the Body.

But all the faithful, as with Christ and David, must look above and beyond sufferings, to the glories which shall soon be revealed. As we reflect upon God's Word we must ever keep this important truth in mind—looking beyond suffering, which is temporal, to the soon-coming eternal glories.

Psalm 22 is replete with the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. In enduring the cross Jesus was offered vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. "This potion," we are told, "was stupefying, and given to criminals just before execution, to deaden the sense of pain." But of Jesus it is recorded (Matt. 27:34)—

"When he had tasted thereof, he would not drink."

He knew, as no one else knew, that he should drink to the full the cup his Father would not pass from him.

The title of this Psalm, we note from our margins, is "The Hind of the Morning," or, as some render it, "The Deer of the Dawn"—a very appropriate title to the Spirit of Christ in David in this 22nd Psalm.

The hind, under the Law, was a clean animal; chewing the cud and cloven-footed. The hind cloven-footed not only depicted surefooted walk, but surefootedness, coupled with agility and speed. Thus the hind was stable and sure in his steps, but also active, spirited and earnest. We find David saying—

"It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hind's feet, and setteth me upon my high places" (Psa. 18:32-33).

And in Gen. 49:21 we read—

"Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words."

This surefootedness and spirited energy of the hind, then, is especially fitting to represent the faithful of God meditating on the things of the Spirit and earnestly directing their steps therein.

This is so full of truth that we find David, as a shepherd of the field and lover of peaceful, quiet streams, likening himself unto the hind in Psalm 42—

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so also panteth my soul after thee, O God.

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the Living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

* * *

THE opening verse of Psalm 22 is most familiar, having been quoted by Christ on the cross:

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

In what way did God forsake His Anointed? Jesus' words may be better understood by the rendering, "My strength, my strength, why hast thou forsaken me," meaning God's Spirit Power was withdrawn from him. Our brother John Thomas so interprets these words in Eur. I, p. 13—

to "Messiah the Prince, or High Priest, was 'cast off,' or covenanted, as the Spirit had revealed Daniel. But before he died, he cried with a loud voice, in the words of Psalm 22:1, saying, 'My strength, my strength, why hast thou forsaken me?'"

"Before he had uttered this exclamation, the Holy Spirit, which had descended upon him from the Habitation of Light and Power, in the form of a dove, and rested upon him, from the time of his immersion in the Jordan, had been withdrawn.

"The Father-Spirit had evacuated the Son of David's daughter, who is styled, in the Songs of Zion, 'The Handmaid of Jehovah' (Psa. 116:16). The Son was, therefore, left without strength or power, and consequently without God."

Continuing verse 1—

"Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the voice of my roaring?"

God is not far from any one of us, but is an ever present Help in the time of need. So certainly He was not far from His obedient Son dying on the cross.

But God was far from helping him, in the sense of delivering him from the cross and thereby preventing his sacrificial death.

God's love would be manifested according to His Righteousness, which Jesus knew, yet his roarings, like Job's, continued to pour out like waters. These roarings are further expressed in v. 2—

"O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

He is not quiet any time, day or night. So long as deliverance does not come, his roarings are sustained. He does not become discouraged by what appears to be long delay. He does not let up for a moment, let alone cease altogether. There is neither rest nor relief day or night.

If Jesus had faith in ultimately being delivered, and that through death, why did he not bear the cross quietly, biding his time?

Because that would not be the earnest spirit seeking God. The true spirit importunes God ceaselessly. We, too, must follow Christ's example and teaching. We should not drift into that frame of mind which says—

"God will send Christ back to earth to establish the kingdom at the set time, and not before, so we need not persistently pursue these things in prayer. Our inward desire for these things is enough testimony to our own conscience of our sincerity."

But is that true? We may only **think** we desire Christ's Return and God's Kingdom. The real test of our longing desire is EXPRESSION. Both Christ and David are paramount examples of this. The true desires of the heart and mind must and will be expressed in both word AND DEED. If we desire and yearn for the things of God, they should break forth like roarings, loud and steady.

God will hear, He will answer and deliver, for He is Holy and True.

"But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."

Truth and righteousness are the sure foundations of faith in God. God cannot deny Himself, His character, or His purpose, for He is true and righteous altogether: in the past, in the present, and into the future.

Vs. 4 and 5 carry us back to God's dealings with the faithful of old—

"Our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them."

"They cried unto Thee, and were delivered: they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded."

The fathers of old, in faith, cried unto God, Who answered. They cried often and ceaselessly. They were not confounded—not ashamed in not receiving an answer. God answered them with deliverance. As God delivered the faithful fathers of old, so also He will deliver David and the Son of David and all the faithful.

Then Jesus says (v. 6).

"But I am a worm, and no man."

The comparison in Jesus' words is between a worm and a man. Can there be any greater contrast? Jesus was esteemed a worm; that is, insignificant, next to nothing.

Outwardly, this was so, since he was a fleshly, mortal body. Men looked only on the appearance of things, forgetting that which was more important, even his words and deeds. And there is Another Who esteems, besides men.

"That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."
—and the reverse is true also. Jesus further says he is—

"A reproach of men, and despised of the people" (v. 6).

A reproach, a shame, worthy only of derision and to be scorned of men. Truly he was despised of the people when he came unto his own and his own received him not. His own people and nation of Israel rejected him, esteeming him not by delivering him up to the Gentiles to be crucified.

Paul spoke of this shameful and spiteful rejection of Jesus by men in general and Israel in particular in 1 Cor. 1:22-23—

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness."

In vs. 7-8 Jesus tells us of the people's reactions to him as he hung on the cross—

*"All they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying—
"He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him. Let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him."*

Such were the actions and attitude of mockers and scorners. If they had the slightest inclination that what they were doing was wrong, would they crucify him and treat him thus?

Suppose Jesus was right? Then what? No, they were fully convinced in their own minds. They KNEW their taunts would not return upon their heads! It has been pointed out that Jesus was scorned and mocked from all quarters: they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads; the chief priests mocked him, with the scribes and leaders; the soldiers also mocked him; and finally, the thief on the cross cast the same into his teeth.

Verse 8 is fulfilled in Matt 27:43, words reflecting the blind ignorance of those who uttered them. Though they were supposed to be steeped in the Word of God (a lesson of warning to us), they erred, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. It was not God's will and purpose to save His Son at that moment. God's righteousness would be declared through death, and salvation from the grave would surely come.

God was not to save His Son FROM death, by keeping him from dying—but to save him OUT OF death, making him alive from the dead. Christ was to gain the victory over the grave and be the firstfruits from the dead.

But men thought that when death came it would be too late for help! They wanted him to come down from the cross NOW. Later would be too late. Death, they thought, would justify their not believing in him. (They had Moses and the Prophets.) Jesus, during his ministry, taught in parables to prevent all such from understanding and conversion.

Yet God gives His Own people more than ample evidence on which to base faith in Him. Beyond that which is just, right and reasonable ("Come, let us reason together"), He will not be driven, permitting the exercise of faith in all those who believe in Him.

The words of mock and scorn against Christ were a rejection of God. The Lord, the Eternal, was not His God, the scorners claimed, and therefore God would not deliver him. But Jesus says in vs. 9-10—

"But Thou art He that took me out of the womb. Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast.

"I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art my God from my mother's belly."

Contrary to the taunts of his enemies, God was always his God, from his conception and birth.

"Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast" is not correct. It makes the babe Jesus capable of hoping in God at such an age. But, rather, he was "kept safe" or "made secure" while on his mother's breast.

Even in his infancy, then, when he was most vulnerable to his enemies, when he was seemingly unprotected, God was his God, caring for him and keeping him safe.

V. 11—"Be not far from me."

We may add the word "now" —"Be not far from me NOW," or, "Do not stay far from me." The urgency of his anguish is incited by what is mentioned in the rest of this verse—

"For trouble is near: for there is none to help."

We behold the circumstances which prompts Jesus' cry unto God: the nearness of the danger and the remoteness of any help —and if God does not help, no one will. And yet there is no one to help no, not one, except God.

"Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" (vs. 12-13).

These figures accent the helplessness of the prey, the Hind of the Morning. These bulls of Bashan were noted for their size and strength. When size and strength are exerted in an evil sense, the evil is evil indeed. The idea is pronounced by Amos (4:1)—

"Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink."

But as if the strength and size of these wild bulls of Bashan were not enough to give the true picture of evil-wickedness, another figure is superadded for extreme emphasis: these strong bulls have mouths "as a ravening and a roaring lion." These large, fierce, strong, ravenous wild beasts encompass—surround—hem in—the Deer of the Dawn, so that there is no way out, no escape possible.

But we should recall that, during his ministry, there was a time when men sought to lay hands on him, but could not. And so, though encompassed about in the midst of a belligerent multitude, he went out from amongst them—he escaped—for his time was not yet come.

But when they came out against him in the garden, he knew—

"The hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

So the time had come when he would be surrounded by his preying enemies to be rejected, scorned, tormented and, as it were, devoured to death. For fierce bulls of Bashan had hemmed him in on all sides, "panting for him open-mouthed, like lions roaring as they rend."

Jesus' sufferings were both mental and physical, brought out abundantly in this Psalm, as in vs. 14-15.—

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and Thou hast brought me into the dust of death."

"Poured out like water"—the solid turned into liquid, expressing the ultimate in physical exhaustion, the lowest point of weakness. "All my bones are out of joint"—another point of emphasizing weakness, a body without its necessary frame to hold it up and in physical form.

These symbols paint a picture of extreme debility: strength of body reduced to the frailty of spent water, and the body-frame of bones collapsed.

His heart was like wax, melting in his breast. The heart here representing the center of power within, the seat of fortitude. This, too, was reduced to an extreme state of incapacity, the extreme once again being stressed, this time by melting wax.

His total strength is symbolized by a potsherd, which is a piece of broken earthenware, dried up, and ready to crumble into still smaller pieces.

The complete loss of strength and fortitude, of both mind and body, surrendered to the will of His Father, would end in the dust of death (though God would not permit corruption), but there would be no loss of trust in his Heavenly Father.

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"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16).

Dogs are among the lowest animals mentioned in Scripture; and they represent the Gentiles. To be likened unto a dog implied contemptibility and cowardice. Wild dogs forage in packs. As the bulls encompassed him, likewise the dogs encircle him.

There have been attempts to cast doubt on the rendering, "they pierced my hands and my feet," stating that it does not mean pierce, but "crippled," "bound" or "disfigured." It is a modern trend to attempt to weaken and obscure the strikingly clear prophetic Scriptures, and such efforts usually serve only to strengthen the picture by their own pettiness, as in this case. The scriptural picture is broad and consistent and, as here, one scripture strengthens another.

Jesus was NAILED to the cross—his hands and feet—just as dogs sink their teeth into the prey, into the exposed limbs, into the hands and feet. The prophecy must yet be accomplished when certain ones "will look on him whom they have PIERCED."

Those who took the Lord and with wicked hands crucified him, are in symbol likened unto these wild beasts; bulls, lions and dogs, who are the fierce, ravenous, vile and abominable. They join forces against the Deer of the Dawn, to surround him completely to keep him from getting away.

In v. 14 we were told that his bones were all out of joint. Now, in v. 17, he says he can count all his bones. We may turn to Job 33:21-22 for comment on this—

"His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers."

All these extremes are now converging in his physical and mental sufferings and agony: pain, fever, thirst, exhaustion, grief and sorrow. And v. 17 adds—

"They look and stare upon me."

With gloating satisfaction they feast their fleshly eyes upon him in his dire extremity.

Then, concerning his few earthly possessions, that which he wore, his garment and vesture, they divided as a spoil.

"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (v. 18).

This prophecy, concerning the sum total of his "wealth," was truly remarkably fulfilled, as recorded in Matt. 27:35 and John 19:24. A thing so seemingly little becomes, at the foot of the cross, an incident which stamps anew the authenticity of these words being inspired by God.

In the next few verses Jesus repeats his cry for help, for deliverance from the sword, from the power of the dog, from the lion's mouth. The end—"It is finished"—is coming. He cannot suffer any more, he cannot sink any lower, for the next degree downward means death. And we hear him say—

"Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns" (v. 21).

The horns of the unicorns (wild oxen) is one thing. The horns of the altar, to which the sacrifice was bound (Psa. 118:27), is quite another. From the horns of the wild oxen Jesus said, "Thou hast heard me."

This was the darkest period of his agony throughout the final storm of blackness and thunder when the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom. It is "the voice of the Lord" (God thundereth marvellously) which "maketh the hinds to calve" (Psa. 29:9). Though childless, the Handmaid of Jehovah would see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

"After the example of Abraham," our bro. John Thomas comments, "at the typical confirmation of the covenant, 'a horror of great darkness fell upon him.'"

Just before this happens—before the blackest part of the night that must come before the dawn breaks—Jesus said—

"Thou hast heard me."

These words speak of God answering by deliverance unto salvation. They mark the turning point of this Psalm — from suffering to glory—from darkness to light—from dark to day—the light of dawn brings God's Salvation. Jesus' words promise that Glorious Morning dawning—a Day without clouds, wherein all the faithful are brought to deliverance, safety and a glorious salvation.

We must mark these words well, fully realizing in heart and mind that there was no other possible way in the Wisdom and Power of God for His Glory to be made manifest. Christ on the cross in suffering agony, ending in death, is God's righteous judgment against sinful flesh.

This is not to pacify the wrath of a vengeful God, but an extension of His Love, an invitation to Life to those who look up in faith to Christ crucified. We are invited away from sin and death to partake of righteousness and life.

We can no longer put our trust in men, or in the arm of flesh, or in this world which consists of the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But rather let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, ever approaching Him in prayer through our Saviour and High Priest.

"Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him! All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him! And fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel!"

"For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard" (vs. 23-24). —N.M.
