

## **Meeting God At The Cross**

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February 3-4, 2007

Meeting God in the Psalms Series

Psalm 22

A few weeks ago I started a new series from the Book of Psalms. And I mentioned to you that for many people coming from both a Jewish as well as Christian faith, the Book of Psalms is their favorite Book in the Bible. Now one reason that so many folks when asked would say that, "I like the Book of Psalms better than any other Book in the Bible" is because the Book of Psalms helps us to put into words what we experience and feel. It gives us language when we are struggling with language to speak about what matters most to us – our illnesses, our fears, our failures, and our feelings of being betrayed by others.

The psalms most especially help us to pray when we find that we don't have words to say because life has become so overwhelming to us. The psalms give us the words. The psalms enable us to speak to God – to complain to God when God seems remote or uninterested in our lives and to thank and praise God when we feel God drawing near and answering our prayers.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, one of the most wonderful things that we experience in the psalms is the feeling that someone else understands, that we aren't going through whatever it is we are going through by ourselves. When we read the Book of Psalms we find that there is another person walking beside us saying, "I've been there; I know what you feel like." Isn't it a comfort to know that no matter what your situation is you can have someone putting their arms around you saying, "I understand."

Not only do the psalms assist us in giving language to our own feelings; and not only do the psalms assist us to know that someone else understands, but most importantly the psalms form a meeting point between us and God. If you want to get in touch with God, start praying the psalms. And I would encourage you, as we are doing this series on the psalms, to begin to develop a habit in your own prayer time to open to the Book of Psalms. Some people have found it useful to read psalms out loud. That's what I do. And I take 5-6 psalms every day. I've been doing this for the last couple of years. I take 5-6 shorter psalms, if a psalm is longer, maybe I only do 1-2 in my morning time with God. I speak the psalm out loud and turn it into my own prayer to God. And often as I just speak these ancient words, I find myself getting in touch with God.

Now today, we are going to read what may be among the 3-4 most familiar psalms in the whole Book of Psalms. We are going to be looking at Psalm 22 in which we find a prophetic foreshadowing of the sufferings and death of Jesus at the cross. It is a psalm that was written a thousand years before Jesus suffered

and died. Yet we are going to see that there is a prophetic foreshadowing of the most exact nature in the psalms.

Now, when we approach a subject as vast and deep as the cross, we can approach it as theologians using words like justification and redemption and atonement and salvation. These are wonderful words. They are biblical words. They form the foundation of our faith. We need to understand the words of the Bible and search them out and squeeze them for all their worth. These words are the steel trusses; they are the reinforced concrete upon which we build our Christian faith.

But today I want to approach the subject of the cross not from the words of the theology, but from the words of story and history. And as we look at this profound subject of the cross of Christ, perhaps the most appropriate modern analogy would be to consider a couple of stories from the Holocaust.

### The Cross and the Holocaust

One of the most powerful books I've ever read is by the Nobel Prize winning author, Elie Wiesel. Elie was born a Hungarian Jew and in 1944 the Gestapo moved all of the Jews from his city. They traveled by train for three days. 80 men, women and children stuffed into each cattle car. On the arrival at the concentration camp, Auschwitz, the men and women were segregated and Elie never saw his mother or his sister again. Here is what Elie Wiesel writes in this most powerful book titled *Night*:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke [of the crematorium]...never shall I forget those flames which consumed my fate forever...never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul, and turned my dreams to dust.

A bit later in the book, Elie wrote about what might have been the most horrifying experience of all. It was when the guards first tortured and then hanged a young boy, who Elie describes as:

A child with a refined and beautiful face, a sad-eyed angel.

Just before the hanging, Elie heard someone behind him whisper:

Where is God? Where is he?

Thousands of prisoners were forced to watch the hanging (it took the boy half an hour to die) and then to march past, looking him full in the face. Behind him Elie heard the same voice ask:

Where is God now? And I heard a voice within me answer him: "Where is he? He is here – he is hanging here on the gallows..."

Elie Wiesel's words were truer than he knew because he was not a Christian. He said he was all alone in the world without God and without man, without love and without mercy. But I wonder if Elie Wiesel would have felt the same way if in Jesus he had seen God on the gallows? That that sad-eyed boy hanging on the gallows was a contemporary replaying in some fashion of the cross; God not truly absent, but God suffering in the suffering of his people.

Let me tackle this from a slightly different angle. There was a little play written called "The Long Silence." In the play we read that at the end of time billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them, but some groups near the front talked heatedly not with cringing shame, but with belligerence:

"Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering" snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror... beatings... torture... death!"

In another group a black boy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn, "lynched...for no crime but being black!"

Far across the plain there were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in this world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of the groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a Black, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a Thalidomide child. In the center of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God can be qualified to be their Judge, he must endure what they endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth – as a man! "Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think he's out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured. "At the last, let him

see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.”

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled.

And when the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence.

Today as we read Psalm 22 I am not going to talk about the cross so much as a place in which God offered his Son up as our substitute. In other words, I am not going to talk so much about God sending his Son Jesus to die for us. Instead, I am going to talk about the cross as a place where we find God suffering with us; not so much God for us, which is certainly a major part of our understanding of the cross. But in meeting God at the cross today, I want to talk about God suffering with us. I’ve called today’s talk, “Meeting God at the Cross.” Let’s pray.

When we read Psalm 22 what we find is in the psalm is a prophetic exactness.

### The Cross and Prophetic Fulfillment

In other words, if the psalm was written by King David, we are reading prophecies about an event nearly a thousand years in the future from King David. The prophecies have an exactness to them that is just really remarkable. There are at least five direct quotes from Psalm 22 in the Gospel stories of Jesus’ sufferings. Perhaps the best known is a direct quotation by the psalm by Jesus at the cross. We read those words in verse 1:

#### **Psalm 22:1**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

We also read in this psalm of the casting of lots for Jesus’ clothes in verse 18:

#### **Psalm 22:18**

They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

And we know that there was a division of Jesus’ clothes. Very strikingly, the psalm speaks of the piercing of the hands and feet of the sufferer in verse 16,

#### **Psalm 22:16**

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce<sup>5</sup> my hands and my feet.

In fact, as I will mention later, the details of the psalm are filled with so much exactness in the suffering and death of Christ, that scholars of a more liberal bent and some Jewish scholars dispute the translation of certain words. They say that this psalm is almost too good to be true. There is no way it could be this exact in predicting the sufferings of Christ. And yet, here we have it. One of the reasons I believe that the Bible is inspired by God is because of the exactness in which its prophecies are fulfilled. No one other than God could have known the details of the cross 1000 years before Christ's death. And we know that this psalm was written many centuries before Jesus.

The psalm points to the death of Christ in another way as well. In almost all of the other psalms concerning the psalm writer's enemies, the psalmist calls down curses on his enemies. He asks God for vengeance. But here there is no petition for God to judge or to slay. There is a complaint to God to be sure, but there is not a hint of revenge as the psalmist prays. And this just again points to Jesus because what we find at the cross is not fantasy of revenge, no "how can I get even?", no "God is going to get you." The psalm points ahead to the grace and mercy Jesus showed when he prayed: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Do the worst you can to me is what Jesus is saying. I'm going to overcome your hostility and your rebellion, and your hatred of God with my love. I'm going to defeat you by infinite grace and infinite mercy. I'm going to melt your heart with my goodness.

And friends, isn't that what God does with us today? He melts our hearts. The way he overcomes your rebellion and my rebellion, the way he overcomes our pushing away of God and our disobedience to him is by communicating to us incredible love and incredible grace.

Now, as I said, I am going to speak about Psalm 22 not from the angle of God's suffering for us in Christ, but rather God suffering with us in Christ. And one of the ways that we find the Lord identifying with us is in this first verse where we find the sufferer, who ultimately was Christ, the sufferer crying out to God and asking the question: Why? Verse 1;

**Psalm 22:1**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

The Cross and the Question "Why"

Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me?

When we say that we don't understand, we don't get it, Lord; we don't know why this is happening to us; we can find incredible comfort in the fact that Jesus also asked the question: Why? It is OK for us as believers to ask God, why?

One of the most comforting little phrases from the writings of the apostle Paul is found in 2 Corinthians 4:8 where Paul says:

**2 Corinthians 4:8**

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

It does not show a lack of faith when you are confused, when you are perplexed, when you don't understand, and when you ask the question: Why? I talk with so many sufferers who not only are suffering, but who feel bad because they say, "My faith should help me to understand, and I don't understand." Know this, friends, when you are suffering, Jesus asked the question: Why? And the apostle Paul said that he was perplexed. So it is OK to say, "Why?" Why, Lord, must I live every day of my life in pain when it would be so easy for you to heal me? Why, why must I watch my child make choices that are so destructive when you could easily intervene and change them now? Why, why, Lord, couldn't you have delayed the drunk driver just two seconds so that he wouldn't have struck my beloved?

We have a person in our congregation whose son was hit with gunfire in Iraq. And surely the question can be asked, "Why, Lord, didn't you have the sniper just miss aim by a few inches?" Why?

Don't you feel this way when you watch the evening news, or read the newspaper? Why another dozen sobbing Iraqi women tearing their hair out, clutching their blown-up sons and daughters. Why massive unimaginable chaos and evil going on in that country? Why, Lord, the delays in answering prayer for peace?

And this why is asked urgently by the psalmist. It is asked with great feeling, with great pathos. It is a why not asked by a philosophy professor standing in front of a class. This why is not the why of abstract intellectual questioning, an interesting puzzle to be solved by a group of bright students. This why is more of a scream; it is more of a shriek. It is a howl, literally, a roar. That's what Mark the gospel writer says in the way Jesus spoke it Mark 15:34:

**Mark 15:34**

And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Or in here in Psalm 22, we see in verse 1:

**Psalm 22:1**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

The psalmist calls it his groaning. The pain the psalmist feels is not philosophical, it is personal.

And so many folks when they ask the question about evil in the world, and how it ties to belief in a good God, the question that they are asking is not an intellectual one, it is not a philosophical one, it is not some abstract question. It is not wrong to ask that way. But for so many folks, the question is a personal one. Why has this happened to me?

And you understand, don't you, friend, that when a Christian asks the question why, often the Christian is asking from a place that is more painful than the question that would be asked by those who don't claim a relationship with God. You see, a Christian's question why is not the evidence of a lack of faith. The Christian's question why may be an indication of the presence of great faith. Let me say that again. When a Christian asks the question why, it may not be evidence of a lack of faith. Rather, it may be evidence of the presence of great faith.

You say, "Why is that, Rich?"

Because we Christians have huge expectations of God.

The Contradiction of Our Expectations of God

You see, one way to protect yourself from disappointment is to lower your expectations of another person. Parenthetically, that is a wise thing to do for some of you in some of your relationships. If you have a mom who is always critical of you, never affirms you, if you have a dad who regularly breaks commitments and breaks your heart, who makes promises and thinks nothing of breaking those promises, who lies and who regularly deceives, then a way to emotionally and psychologically protect yourself is to lower your expectation of your parent's behavior towards you. To say, "Well, I am just not going to expect very much of this person."

I have talked with several women in their 40's who are distraught and they complain and say, "I can't believe what my mother said to me over lunch. I spend the day taking her out shopping. I took her out to get her hair done. We ran around. I took her to a nice place for lunch. And she got on me because I was eating a roll at lunch. She said to me in the way that only she could say it, 'Do you think you should be eating that roll with so much butter when you are

watching your weight? You are so pretty, if you just dropped 25 pounds you would look so much better.’ Can you believe what my mother said to me?”

When I hear that kind of thing, I want to respond and say, “Is the first time she said something like that to you?”

“No, it’s like the thousandth time she’s said this to me. It has been going on since I was 8 years old.”

And you are still hurt by it? At what point do you say, “I love my mother. And as a Christian I am committed to honor her and to care for her and to have relationship with her. But for me, she is a very critical person especially about my weight, or my appearance, or my childraising, or whatever. So I am going to lower my expectations regarding her. She is not a level 10 affirmer of me. She’s a level 2 critic. So I expect level 2 behavior when I get together with her.”

And this is psychologically and emotionally wise; I would recommend this for some of you. For some of your relationships, you should expect level 2 behavior and not be shocked by it. And if, by some miracle, your mom affirms you, if by some miracle, your dad actually comes through in one of his commitments, then that is a gift. That’s grace. You can celebrate it and say, “WOW! That was unexpected.” So many of us need to lower our sights regarding what we expect from another person, especially if they have a long track record of being hurtful towards us.

But while we can do this with people, a Christian can never do this with God. God presents himself to us as a level 10 person. That is what our faith affirms. God says to us, “You can count on me. I’m not a human being. I never lie. I’m totally faithful. I’m totally trustworthy. I won’t let you down. My word is true. You can bank on it. You can build your life on my word. You can fully unreservedly give yourself to me without self-protective psychological devices. I am absolutely committed to come through for you.”

And we say to God, “God, you tell me that you are not a God who is blind, but that you see me. You promised me that you are not a God who is deaf, but that you are all ears to my cries. You remind me that you are not a God who is like any person I’ve ever met. You are kinder. I will never be around someone who is kinder than you. You tell me that I am your child. I am your beloved. That you are my Abba, my daddy.”

This is what makes the pain of God not answering our prayers, the pain of God not protecting us and our loved ones, the pain of God not intervening to do justice so severe. It is because God is not a disappointing person that disappointment with God is so hard on us. It is because God invites us to expect so much that shattered expectations rubs so much salt in our wounds. It is this



utter contradiction between what our faith teaches and what our experience is that tears us up inside.

I want you to see this with me. In verse 3, the psalmist looks up to God.

**Psalm 22:3**

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

He knows God as the one who is great, the one who is powerful.

**Psalm 22:3**

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

And he not only looks up to God, but in verses 4-5, he looks back to what God has done in the history of his people.

**Psalm 22:4-5**

In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

Essentially, the psalmist is saying, "What you did before, Lord, do it again. Be consistent."

The Contradiction of God's Activity in the Past

But his expectation regarding God is not only based upon what God has done in the history of his people. The psalmist's expectation regarding God is so high because of what God has done for him in his own life.

The Contradiction of God's Activity in His Own Life

Look with me at verses 9-11:

**Psalm 22:9-11**

Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me feel secure on my mother's breast. <sup>10</sup> From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. <sup>11</sup> Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

The psalmist is using a metaphor that shows God in the role of a human father back in the Middle East who takes the child as it comes out of the womb and lays it on its mother's breast to be nursed. A father who provides, a father who protects and offers security. The psalmist's whole life has been a life of experiencing God and God's faithfulness. He calls him "My God;" not just God,

but “my God.” And this is what causes the psalmist and this is what causes the Christian to hurt so much when we encounter things that we don’t understand.

See, unlike the unbeliever, the Christian’s pain involves God. It is not just the loss of a child. It is the absence of God that hurts so much. It is not just an illness. It is the failure of God to heal it. It is not just the collapse of a business, it is the failure of God to provide. The pain for the psalmist is not just psychological like everyone else’s. It is not just physical or emotional like all the rest of the world. The psalmist pain, the pain for Jesus, the pain for a Christian is theological. It is focused on God. The central problem for us is where are you, God, in all of this?

So, again, let me say as plainly as I can for you as a Christian, for the psalmist, for Jesus, it is not a sign of a lack of faith, or a deficit of faith that he asks the question why. It is precisely because of his faith, because of his enormous expectation regarding who God is and what God does that he struggles so much.

And all of the psalmist’s relationships are ruptured.

#### The Cross and the Shattering of Relationships

In his pain, his relationship with God has been ruptured. But his relationship to himself is also ruptured in pain. Look with me at verse 6,

##### **Psalm 22:6**

But I am a worm, not a human being; I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

I see this with folks who are depressed, if you’ve ever gone through a depression. I see this with people who are in crisis, who have suffered a devastating loss. There is an accompanying loss of self-confidence, a loss of self-esteem, a shakiness with regard to our own perception of who we are and our own judgments. The sufferer is separated from God. The sufferer is separated from himself. And the sufferer is separated from others. Verses 6-8,

##### **Psalm 22:6-8**

But I am a worm, not a human being; I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people. <sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. <sup>8</sup> “He trusts in the LORD,” they say, “let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”

We see with prophetic exactness here the mocking of the sufferer supremely shown, of course, at the cross. And while God is far away, all of the space near him is filled up by people who hate him. Verses 12-18:

##### **Psalm 22:12-18**

Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. 13 Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. 15 My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. 16 Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. 17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. 18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

The psalmist uses animal metaphors to describe the bestial attack on him.

**Psalm 22:12**

Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

**Psalm 22:13**

Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

**Psalm 22:16**

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce<sup>5</sup> my hands and my feet.

Now, I do need to mention in verse 16 that there is a translation problem. Where it says in your Bible,

...they pierce my hands and my feet.

There is a translation difficulty here. The text as we have it in the Hebrew that comes to us from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, uses the Hebrew word,

Hebrew = Cari

Nobody can fit in this phrase; it means literally like a lion.

Like a lion

So the text would read:

...like a lion my hands and my feet.

The last letter is the letter

YOD = Smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

It is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It looks like an apostrophe. It appears the text was changed. And if you just run that little apostrophe down, the word becomes a verb. It is the Hebrew word,

Hebrew – Caru

Which means “they have dug” or “bored”. And this is the way the Greek translators of the Bible 200 years before Christ translated the words. They obviously were working off the word “caru.”

The short of it is a lot of people have objected to this word “pierced.” And this is a major debate in Christian/Jewish dialogue because it just seems too good to be true. We have this prophetic exactness. Not only is the sufferer surrounded and mocked and his clothes divided by lots, and he is crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But his hands are pierced. And as I’ve read over all the literature, I can tell you, friends, my own perspective is that this word “pierced” was in the original. It is not a later edition. It is not a New Testament tinkering with the Psalms in order to make it fit the crucifixion of Christ. This psalm really does serve especially for the Jewish person as a pointer ahead to the Messiah whose hands and feet would be pierced for our sins.

Now, notice as well the rollercoaster that this sufferer is on.

#### The Cross and the Rollercoaster of Faith

Notice that the psalmist and the ultimate fulfillment of the psalmist’s cry in Jesus at the cross, notice this movement back and forth between his complaint about his own condition and his faith regarding God in verse 2. He seems to alternate between despair and hope between complaints to God and confidence in God.

#### **Psalm 22:2**

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

And I find no rest. And then in verse 3:

#### **Psalm 22:3**

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

In other words, here is what I am experiencing, yet you are like this. And in verse 6:

#### **Psalm 22:6**

But I am a worm, not a human being; I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

And then again a refocus on God in verse 9:

**Psalm 22:9**

Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me feel secure on my mother's breast.

In verses 12, we see:

**Psalm 22:12**

Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

Going down to verse 19, again:

**Psalm 22:19**

But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

It is hard for the psalmist to maintain his focus entirely on God when he is suffering so much. It is hard for the one hanging on the cross to focus his whole attention on God when he is in so much pain. Back and forth he goes, alternating between his own experience of suffering and his knowledge of God. Is this not our own experience – alternating between looking to God and being overwhelmed by a problem? It is hard to maintain focus totally on God.

It is a myth that the life of faith is a serene, peaceful always confident state of mind like sailing on a placid lake in mid-July with a gentle breeze blowing. The life of faith is often sailing in a storm-tossed sea, feeling totally overwhelmed. Biblical faith is not a stroll in the park. Biblical faith is hand-to-hand combat. It is a wrestling match. It is a fight. That's how the apostle Paul describes it. He talks about the fight of faith. Faith is hard work in a fallen world of contradictions, and evil, and unanswered questions. Faith is hard work.

One of the lies and accusations that the enemy brings us in the midst of our confusion is this lie that you have no faith because it is so hard for you to focus totally upon God. This lie that you have no faith; this accusation that it is easy for everyone else to live out this journey of faith, it is just hard for you, so your faith is weak. It is not real. And if you want to expose the absolute untruthfulness that anyone's life of faith is easy, all you need to do is read through the pages of this book. Read about the great heroes of faith whose walk with God was anything but a stroll through the park. Look at the life of Abraham, and Rachel, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses, and Joshua, Ruth, Naomi, Daniel, Esther, Peter, Paul. Think about Jesus. On the night he was betrayed, see the Lord Jesus kneeling there in the Garden of Gethsemane. As he knelt in the shadow of the cross, praying that God would take this cup from him. Sweat pouring from his face; great drops of sweat beading up on his forehead. His back and neck drenched in perspiration.

The Christian faith is hard work. Christian faith involves a fight. And if you are looking for something serene and easy, don't sign up for Christianity. You want an easy faith? You just want a little bit of peace? You are just looking for something that will bring serenity to your life? Don't sign up for Christianity. Try anything else. Try some do-it-yourself New Age religion. Try some Eastern spirituality. Try a bottle of Scotch. If you want something easy, do not try Christianity. Because at the core of Christianity is a Savior hanging on a cross, suffering and dying an agonizing death. This is not an easy faith. This is a hard faith.

And sometimes when you commit yourself to follow the one who hung on a cross, it can feel like you've been involuntarily strapped into a rollercoaster car and you are going for a ride that you did not want to go for. God, I didn't sign up for this. I didn't know that the hill was going to be so steep, and that the journey down was going to be so far.

But I'll tell you, friend, the cross doesn't just speak to us about the suffering of God and our own suffering. There is incredibly comfort at the cross. Our why, our struggles to understand, our perplexity, the contradictions that we have in this world between what we believe and what we experience, all of that is made so much less burdensome when I realize that God is never truly absent. It may feel that way. I may see no sign of him, no evidence of his intervention. But then I remember that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And even in Jesus' supreme moment of abandonment, when the nails went into his hands and into his feet, when he felt himself cut off from God, even in that moment of abandonment, there was God. God, the Bible says, was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The nails that went into the hands of Christ went through the hands of God.

### The Cross and the Suffering of God

And over 3 decades of walking with God, I can tell you that I have found continual encouragement as I lay hold of this by faith that God understands how I feel because he has been there ahead of me. God suffers in and with his people.

There is a story that came out of Brazil in which a poor man who lived down in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The favelas are those horrible slums in Rio where some children are literally naked. There is hunger and disease and unemployment. Some people are living literally in garbage dumps. The story that comes out of Brazil in which this poor man from one of the favelas climbs up the 2300 foot cliff up to the colossal statue of Christ, which towers over Rio.

### The Christ of Corcovado

The poor man speaks to the statue and he says, "I've climbed up to you, Christ, from the filthy, confined quarters down there...to put before you, most respectfully, these considerations: there are 900,000 of us down there in the slums of that splendid city...and you, Christ, ...remain here at Corcovado surrounded by divine glory? Go down there into the favelas. Come with me into the favelas and live with us down there. Don't stay away from us; live among us and give us new faith in you and in the Father. Amen.

What would Jesus say to that kind of request? Would he not say, "I did come and live among you. And I live among you still." Would he not say, "I understand your suffering because I endured it myself. I know what it feels like to be hungry and naked and abandoned. I know what injustice and oppression and poverty and abuse feel like. I know what you are going through because I've been there. I don't stand up on a hill. I've been down in your world."

I derive incredible comfort from the cross. I tell you, over the years one of the reasons why I continue to live as a Christian and have not been attracted to one of the alternative faiths in the marketplace of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam, is that I can't bring myself to believe in a God who himself does not suffer. I can't bring myself to believe in a God who doesn't identify with human pain. I can't bring myself to believe in a God who himself never cried out "why?"

It is this fellowship of suffering, this communion of God with those in pain that makes me love Jesus so much.

And then from verses 22ff there is this marvelous turn in the psalm as we read about the cross and its triumph.

### The Cross and Its Triumph

#### **Psalm 22:22-31**

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. <sup>23</sup> You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! <sup>24</sup> For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. <sup>25</sup> From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. <sup>26</sup> The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever! <sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, <sup>28</sup> for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. <sup>29</sup> All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive. <sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. <sup>31</sup> They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

And I want to close here reading from verses 26-31,

**Psalm 22:26-31**

The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever! <sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, <sup>28</sup> for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. <sup>29</sup> All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive. <sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. <sup>31</sup> They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

The Cross and the Spreading Triumph

At the cross all the forces of evil were unleashed against Christ – politicians and religious leaders condemned him, soldiers and ordinary people mocked him, demons howled and women wept. And yet, in this one supreme act of suffering and dying, Christ took all of the sin, all of the evil, all of the pain in this world into his own body. He drank in the sin of this world to the last drop and triumphed over all of it.

Having undergone the cross, the benefits of the cross are not spread to all of creation. The poor in verse 26:

**Psalm 22:26**

The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever!

And the rich in verse 29:

**Psalm 22:29**

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive.

The living, and in verse 29, the dying:

**Psalm 22:29**

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive.

Are included.

This generation and future generations, verse 30:



**Psalm 22:30**

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

As one author put it: Everyone, everywhere, of every condition in every time, every single person who comes to faith will experience the benefits of the cross.

There is coming a day, friend, in God's time, when all of our whys will be answered. All the contradictions between our faith and our experience will be eliminated. All of our pain will be healed. There is coming a day, friend, when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. Heaven will come down. And we will enter the New Jerusalem. And as it says in Revelation 21:4:

**Revelation 21:4**

'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

No more whys; no more how can this be; then all the threads of our lives will come together and all our questions will be answered. And because of the cross we can begin to experience something of that future victory right now. Right now at the cross, we can meet with God. Amen. Let's pray.

## **Meeting God At The Cross**

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Rich Nathan

February 3-4, 2007

Meeting God in the Psalms Series

Psalm 22

### **I. The Cross and the Holocaust**

### **II. The Cross and Prophetic Fulfillment**

### **III. The Cross and the Question “Why”**

- A. The Contradiction of Our Expectations of God
- B. The Contradiction of God’s Activity in the Past
- C. The Contradiction of God’s Activity in Our Lives

### **IV. The Cross and the Shattering of Relationships**

### **V. The Cross and the Rollercoaster of Faith**

### **VI. The Cross and the Suffering of God**

### **VII. The Cross and the Spreading Triumph**