

The Historic, Prophetic, Poetic Gospel

Psalm 22

I have really enjoyed spending the last few months as a combined church family and getting to know some of you better. I'd like to begin by sharing something about myself. When I was in school, I really disliked most of my reading assignments. English class was always a weakness for me because I wouldn't read my assignments. I could usually get by with skimming a few pages, listening closely to class discussions and then faking my way through the rest, but there were a few teachers who caught on and totally busted me.

That still didn't fix it for me though. Required reading was boring reading. But it's not that I don't like reading, it just takes the right material. When I have a great book in front of me, I can't put it down. And the person who got that started for me was my 5th grade teacher. He read the Hobbit to us and I loved every bit of it. I read the Lord of the Rings in 6th grade, and I love it so much that I ventured to read through the Silmarillion. That one is tough. It's like reading the Old Testament of Middle Earth. Though the first chapter that describes creation is really good. If you're a Christian who likes music, it is a very captivating chapter. The rest of the book was hard to read, though, and I remember very little of it.

For some people, they feel that way about the Bible. It feels like a bunch of really old stories that don't connect with them. Those stories themselves might seem random or unimportant. When you perceive the Bible this way, it's going to be tough to read and tough to learn from. But one of the joys of reading through all of the Bible is that you start to get a sense of the bigger picture. You eventually see how it all hangs together and all of the books and stories and commands come together to reach a climax. And that's what a good book will do, right? It will engage you a compelling story and use different literary devices to help the story progress. The Bible does all of that and it has the added bonus that it's true. In a good work of fiction, like the Lord of the Rings, all of the pieces of the story work together perfectly to get to the end, but that's because a good author will think about all of that as his story comes together. Well, that's true of The Author, too, the author with a capital-A who has written the story of redemption.

That's what Psalm 22 is about. It is a critical piece of the story in God's big story. It's a chapter where we see a little bit of the life of King David, we learn about the coming Suffering Servant, the Great King, and gain insight into God's plan and the way he work in this world and in the Church. Those are actually the three parts of this sermon, and you can remember them by looking at the title: The Historic, Prophetic, Poetic Gospel.

The first part is Historic and we look at the life of David. The second section is Prophetic, and we look at the passion of Christ, and the third section is Poetic, and we look at how this matters to the Church. There is a debate about whether this Psalm represents history, or if it's prophecy, or whether it was simply poetry. There's no reason it can't be all three, and we'll think about the Psalm from all three perspectives.

Historic

So we begin by looking at the Historic nature of the Psalm. If you've ever read the Psalms or Psalm 22 in particular, you can't help but notice that this one has a lot to do with Jesus. After all, the opening verse is a line that Jesus shouted from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This Psalm shouts that it's about Jesus. You can't go through it without noticing, "that's about Jesus and that's about Jesus and that's about Jesus." But if it's possible, for just a moment, I'd like you to try to forget that. Envision that you are a child of Abraham from before the birth of Christ, and you love to listen to the Psalms to hear about how God was working in the life of his people up to that point. I know I'm asking the impossible, but it really helps to see this Psalm from a historical perspective.

If you look at the heading on the Psalm, you see that this Psalm is ascribed to David, and I believe that to be absolutely true. Now, we'll see as we work through this that what David is describing doesn't look like it lines up with any of his experiences exactly in a one-to-one correspondence, but there were a few times in his life when he looked like he was on the ropes and might be killed by his enemies, but God delivered him. Writing a song like this from one or more of those experiences would be absolutely appropriate and still have its foundation in historical experience. That leaves room for the song to be more than just history, and we'll take a look at those ideas when we move from History into Prophecy and Poetry. But when David wrote this, I have no doubt that he was reflecting on his experience.

David was a man of war and had to constantly battle for himself and for his people. You will remember that he started off his life of battle by defeating Goliath. But after this, David had to flee Saul on more than one occasion because Saul was jealous of David and wanted to kill him. After Saul died, there was war between David and Saul's son Ish-Bosheth for a couple of years. Even after David united the Kingdom of Israel, there was war with the Philistines and war with the Ammonites and Syria. Then David's son Absalom went off the deep end, committed horrific sins and wound up starting a coup to become king of Israel. Some scholars believe that this is the event that David had in mind as he wrote Psalm 22. But even after David regained his throne, there was more

war against the tribe of Benjamin and more war with the Philistines. Finally, at the end of all of this, near the end of David's life, he wrote a Song of Deliverance that we find in 2 Samuel 22. That chapter begins, "And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul." Some of the lyrics of that song are (v5), "For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me, the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I called." Those song lyrics that see in 2 Samuel 22 are also the lyrics of Psalm 18. The point is, that even though David was successful in his campaigns, we can see from the history of his life, and the way he talked about it here at the end of his life, that he often felt death pressing in on him because of these wars.

The Psalm starts in the middle of a conflict that looks impossible to win. If I may use a Lord of the Rings reference, this is like the final battle at the Black Gate. In both the book and the movie, an army of the good guys came to draw out Sauron, but he answered with a dark army that was ten times larger. The evil army was so big that there was no hope for good to prevail in that battle. It is that kind of impossible situation that David finds himself in here in Psalm 22. So it's no surprise that he would cry out the words we read in Psalm 22:1, "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."

What's really interesting about this cry out to God is how David relates to God in the midst of horror. David has an honest reaction, "Where are you God?" but he never loses faith in God. He still calls God "my God". And verse 4 is the really fascinating response. David doesn't start listing off why God should deliver him or grumble more about his situation. He immediately comes out of himself and turns to God. Verse 4, "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel." David wonders where God is, but he knows God and knows his character. God is holy, and that's something you can say when you acknowledge that God is good, that he doesn't make mistakes and you trust him. David is saying, "God, even if it feels like you are forsaking me, I believe that you have a good reason for it." So David has raw pain here, but he also has raw trust in his holy God. David remembers, "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." David keeps his trust in God because he has always been faithful to his people.

Now, we've read through the Psalm, so we're not going to go through every detail again, but there is a structure throughout it where David reflects on his situation and then responds to it by reflecting on God. "I am going through *this*, but you God, are *this* and

you have done *this*.” In the next section, David’s enemies mock him for trusting in God, then David responds by saying “Yes, I do, because you God caused me to trust in you from the very beginning, from when I was a baby. You have always been with me, so be here now. The enemy is closing in, attacking and I am physically wasted. But you God can save me.”

What this Psalm represents is a final prayer of David. He had been praying to God and praying to God and praying to God but wasn’t getting an answer. The end was near and that prayer would look like 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!” That’s verse 21, and this is critical, this is the turning point of the Psalm. It’s not all doom and gloom, but God does deliver him and David proclaims in the second half of verse 21, “You have rescued me! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!”

The rest of the Psalm is a rejoicing and praise of God for delivering him. He is going to tell others of what God has done and how he has been faithful once again. He wants this message to go to the ends of the earth, verse 27, so that everyone turns to the Lord, and it ends with the same message that Jeff preached last week, verse 30 and 31, “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.” God has been faithful, remains faithful, and I want the future generations to know that God will be faithful. And Psalm 18 is one fulfillment of that as we read of God’s faithfulness to David all of his life. David lived his life out in 1 and 2 Samuel and at the end of that second book, at the end of his life, David declared, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and deliverer. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.”

So that was David’s experience, but as far as we can tell, it wasn’t exactly his experience. I had asked you to forget that this Psalm was written about Jesus. Well now is the time to stop that. You can flip that switch in your brain and see once again this this Psalm, though of David, was foreshadowing Christ. We can see that it’s about Christ, but more than that, Jesus himself wanted us to be absolutely sure that we knew it was about him. When he cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He was also crying out, “Hey everyone, Psalm 22, that was about me.” This Psalm is prophetic.

Prophetic

Matthew does a really good job picking up on that in his account of the crucifixion, so I want to read a little bit of Matthew 27 and I'll comment on the elements of Christ's crucifixion from Psalm 22. We're going to read from Matthew 27:26-50.

Then [Pilate] released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him [Psalm 22:16], they divided his garments among them by casting lots [Psalm 22:18]. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him [Psalm 22:7], wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. [Psalm 22:8] For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [Psalm 22:1] And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and

gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

It is clear from Matthew 27 that Psalm 22 was prophetic. It's so clear that Psalm 22 was foretelling the events of the cross, that we want to investigate what God was telling us by giving us Psalm 22 as prophecy.

The first point is that we need a savior. That's the premise of Psalm 22 as history and prophecy. No matter how hard David tries, he cannot save himself and he needs God to deliver him. God is the deliverer. David and all of God's people rejoice in God's deliverance, and that is a common theme through the Psalms.

The surprising part about this as prophecy is that it's showing us that the Messiah *himself* would cry out to God for deliverance. That's the second point. The Deliverer is the Suffering Servant. In other words, God doesn't merely deliver us, but he does it by taking our place. We see a picture of all of this evil surrounding the main character of the Psalm, and it's about to consume him. And for Christ, it did. He was pierced and on the cross and there was no deliverance. The thing is, we really deserve to be the one who is finished off. Our evil deserves death. But on the cross, Jesus takes our place and dies the death that we deserve.

That is part of the reason the Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It wasn't merely to make a theological point, but he was truly in agony, physically and spiritually as he was cut off from a holy God. It was a real cry and Jesus suffered real death so that you and I can really be saved.

The third point is that the deliverance is broadened. Psalm 22 ends in victory not defeat, and so as Christ dies on the cross and is buried in the ground, the Psalm tells us that this is not the end. Psalm 22:21 has that transition where David says, “Save me” and ends with “You have rescued me.” Matthew 27 ends with the death of Christ but Matthew 28 tells of the resurrection of Christ. That means that in Christ, we have true victory: victory over sin and death and hell. David received salvation of his life, but we receive salvation of our souls.

The author of Hebrews saw this, and that's why he quoted Psalm 22 as he was telling us how Jesus is the Savior. In Hebrews 2, starting at verse 9, we find out that through the path of the cross, Jesus identifies with us, and so he identifies with us in salvation and sanctification. Here's what Hebrews says:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;

in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” [That’s Psalm 22:22]

And again,

“I will put my trust in him.” [Psalm 18, also of David]

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Jesus made us his siblings by saving us the way he did. Jesus is the Great Brother who sings God’s praise and brings us into his family to sing with him. And this isn’t restricted to the Hebrew people only, it is for all people who put their faith in Christ. The grace that was shown to Abraham and his offspring is now going out to all people to the ends of the earth. When David says, in Psalm 22:27, that “all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,” the promise that Abraham would bless all the nations of the earth finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ as people from every tongue, tribe and nation come to sing the praise of God in the midst of this worldwide congregation. One pastor helpfully put it like this, “For Israel-by-grace, even more than Israel-by-race, was going to spread to all the ends of the earth, and to draw its adopted children from all the families of the nations. Verses 27–31 [of Psalm 22] transcend all the boundaries.”

Because Psalm 22 is prophecy, its meaning is broadened and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. And as Hebrews shows us, that can be an encouragement for the faith of Christians.

Poetic

That leads to our third part today, that Psalm 22 is poetic. When you look at the Psalm and see that it doesn't line up with any one of David's experiences, one natural question is to ask whether he is writing from experience, but writing poetically. Perhaps he's summarizing the feelings of every time he was in danger. Or perhaps he was taking one experience and speaking in heightened senses as the ultimate example of suffering as God's child. As a songwriter, it would be very natural for David to include literary elements that would help singers and readers feel his experience. That's what songs and poems are for. When you sing *In Christ Alone* or *Before the Throne of God Above*, it gives you a special connection to the truth of the gospel. It cements it to your soul.

Because of that, Psalm 22 can be a very helpful poem to the church. Not only do we learn history and see Christ fulfilled in prophecy, but we can use the truth to give us encouragement in our Christian walk. I have three simple examples today, but surely many more applications could be drawn out in your own study.

First, one example of how Psalm 22 as a poem helps us is in the midst of suffering. A Christian who is suffering can take comfort in the fact that God is in control of the situation. Even when you can't see him there and deep inside you're asking the question, "Why? Where are you God?" This Psalm gives you confidence in the fact that God is there with his perfect plan. For Christ, that perfect plan meant that he died. God's plan doesn't always look like what we expect, but because it's God's plan, it's better than anything we could have created on our own. As Christ died, it looked like a terrible outcome: God's chosen one, the Messiah, slain with apparent hope lost. But because that's the way the plan unfolded, we are saved. We can't always see God's end, but Psalm 22 reminds us that when the storm surrounds us, God is holy, and we will have final deliverance. In the end, we will be with him forever, and nothing on earth can take that away from us.

Second, another example of how Psalm 22 helps the church is by seeing God's faithfulness over millennia. The great truth we see here is that the gospel was God's plan from the beginning. As God called his people, he was always drawing them to a life of faith in him, with the ultimate faith to be put in Jesus Christ. This is another idea that the book of Hebrews elaborates on. In chapter 11, which many people call the Hall of Faith, we see the lives of many of God's saints who put their hope in a greater promise. These are the fathers whom David says trusted in God. From Abel to Noah to Abraham to Jacob to Moses--David mentioned their faith in Psalm 22:4, and of course David is an

example of faith in God as well. He trusted in God to the very end. Today we have those same examples and have confidence that God will fulfill his word toward us.

Third, this is a little bit more practical, but I hope the poetry of Psalm 22 inspires you to be a person of God's Word. I had mentioned at the beginning that I did not enjoy reading my school assignments, and I believe that a lot of people come to God's Word with the same attitude. It's a chore and it seems dull, but that's because you haven't connected the pieces yet. As you read the Bible more and more, parts of it like Psalm 22 really jump out at you and encourage you to read even more. Read your Bible through once, and you'll see so much of it pointing to your Savior. Read your Bible another time, and you'll start to see more and more connections. Your encouragement in devotion will grow on itself as you see the Big Story through the Bible.

Conclusion

This is where Psalm 22 has led us. The Bible is an incredible book written over thousands of years, it uses so many literary elements, and it all hangs together on a common theme: redemption through Christ. There are a lot of great books out there, like Lord of the Rings, but the truth is that they're all borrowing from God's story--the story of actual history--the story you're in and a part of. But God is the original Author. He is the Author of creation, the Author of the Scriptures, the Author of history, and the Author of salvation.

Because Psalm 22 is History, Prophecy and Poetry, we can have faith. We can be encouraged that we have salvation in Christ. As David said, He has rescued you! And you are a part of the ends of the earth and part of the congregation that shares in the praise of God for this work. And now we get to help share that gospel so that even more people from the ends of the earth will be our brothers and sisters in Christ. As you leave this place, take to heart the promise of David at the end of the Psalm:

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

He has done it
He has done it, it is finished. Amen.