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**Let God's People Bow Down**  
**IV. Bow Down Before Our King**  
**Psalm 22**

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Psalm 22 is one of the most profound pleas for help we can find in all of the Bible. We didn't read all of it a moment ago, but no doubt we are familiar with the opening line of this psalm: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" The very words Jesus quoted from the cross. But it is not just that opening line which ties this psalm to the cross. Of the thirteen Old Testament verses quoted in the crucifixion story, five of them come from this one psalm. In other words, Psalm 22 played an important role in helping the disciples and the early church understand what the cross of Jesus had meant – what it was about. And Psalm 22 is a key Old Testament text still for our understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ was and is the Messiah promised by God.

The psalm divides into three parts – and each part offers us a different insight into Jesus and His earthly ministry. The first part, as that opening verse would suggest, is pure lament – the psalmist just pouring out his suffering to God. Describing to God, crying out to God, about the terrible moment he is going through:

*I am poured out like water,  
 and all my bones are out of joint;  
 my heart is like wax;  
 it is melted within my breast;  
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
 and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
 you lay me in the dust of death.*

Now, the psalmist does not specify exactly what is going on – but that is to our advantage. For, in the psalmist's cry, we are given room to insert our own struggles, our own sorrows, our own desperate times.

But it is that opening line – and Jesus' use of that line upon the cross – which best cues us in to what the psalm teaches us about Jesus. The psalmist cries out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" A cry of utter distress, of ultimate sorrow. And Jesus on the cross – He who is God in the flesh – cries out these same words, and with an even greater intensity of suffering than that of the psalmist. Why does He do so? Because it means for us that Jesus Christ, in His Incarnation, didn't just come down to us on earth to be with us – Immanuel, God-with-us. But that Jesus went down with us all the way into hell itself – so that, even there, as the psalmist elsewhere says, so that even there, in the very most desperate hours of our turmoil and travail, even

there “*your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*”<sup>1</sup> Jesus crying from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” is Jesus showing us that there is now no moment so terrible, so frightening, so painful that we will not find Him right there with us, right there beside us. As the Messiah, He not only comes down to earth at Bethlehem, but He also descends into hell, as we say each Sunday – so that even in our worst personal experiences of utter sorrow and travail, He will be there for us – He will be there with us.

A young pastor in his first church got a call at three in the morning – a church member named Ed, calling to tell him that Dora, Ed’s wife, had been rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery to save her life. The surgery would begin in about thirty minutes – could the pastor come and say a prayer? The young pastor rushed to the hospital, found Ed and Dora in a hallway outside the operating room – fear written all over their faces. Both of them waiting for him to say something that would make that moment bearable. He didn’t know what to say. All he could think of were the words which begin the Lord’s Supper. He said to Ed and Dora, “*The Lord be with you.*” And they answered him, “*And also with you.*” “*Lift up your hearts,*” said the young pastor. “*We lift them up to the Lord,*” Ed and Dora responded. And suddenly, says that pastor, the Lord was with them. It was as if the presence of the Lord had suddenly filled that hallway, filled their hearts with the presence and assurance of His great love for them. The Lord was indeed with them.<sup>2</sup> The One who had cried out from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,*” did so in order that you and I should never have to do so again. So that we could be assured that whatever hell we are in, He is already there with us, beside us.

And then the second part of Psalm 22 – which is the psalmist pleading for God to rescue him from his plight:

*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!*

And then comes he comes up with a deal, a bargain. If the Lord will just do this, says the psalmist, then, “*I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.*”

But the Lord doesn’t need a deal to be struck in order to be convinced to save the psalmist. Jesus on the cross was God already making possible the deliverance of all who turn to Him. And Jesus on the cross is God overcoming, once and for all, the powers and principalities of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus descends into hell not just to be with us there, but also to lead us back out. To bring us back into life, back into the light, back into the laughter and joy of the people of God. As His descent into the forsakenness of death leads to our assurance that He is with us all always, in all conditions – so His resurrection from the dead is the power and proof by which we may trust that He will always save us, will always raise us up, will always prevail over whatever it is which has hurt or imprisoned us in fear and in sorrow. And so the psalmist finishes out this middle section with precisely that assurance:

*You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
 All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,  
 and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
 For he has not despised or abhorred  
 the affliction of the afflicted,  
 and he has not hidden his face from him,  
 but has heard, when he cried to him.*

Jesus is not just Immanuel – God with us. He is also our Savior – God delivering us, bringing all things round to good for us in the end.

So, thus far Psalm 22 has taught us two very important things about Jesus and His Incarnation – His coming into this world for our sake and for our salvation. His coming means that He is with us always and in all things; and it means that He has and will always overcome all that hurts or imprisons us – He can always be counted on to deliver us. So now comes the third and final section of the psalm. The psalmist speaks of the great and glorious truth that God’s plan and intention in this world is not just to be with us and to deliver you and me as individuals, but is, in fact, a plan and intention to restore all of His creation from its brokenness, from its groaning in travail. That God’s plan and intention in Jesus Christ is not just to rescue you and me, but to restore God’s good and glorious reign over all the earth – to make all things good and perfect again, just as they were in the Garden of Eden before our sin:

*All the ends of the earth shall remember  
 and turn to the Lord,  
 and all the families of the nations  
 shall worship before you.  
 For kingship belongs to the Lord,  
 and he rules over the nations.*

Back when it had all begun to fall apart, after Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, the Tower of Babel – each one worse than the one before, each one deepening the rebellion of God’s creature against God’s rule – after all that, God had come down, Genesis chapter 12, to a wandering Aramean named Abraham. And God made a covenant with Abraham and with his descendants, promising to make of them a great nation, promising to give them a promised land, promising to bless them. But all of this, said God, was not for Israel’s benefit alone – but rather was in order to bring about the final and far greater blessing which would be for all the peoples on earth. God would save and bless Israel, in order to save and bless and redeem all peoples – indeed, to set right all that had gone wrong upon the face of the earth. To restore God’s rule on earth, as it is in heaven.

That great promise was then given a little more focus when God added to that original covenant a promise to His servant, King David – the author of our psalm. God promised David that, after him, God would raise up a great king from David’s house and lineage.<sup>3</sup> A great king who would be the fulfillment of that greater blessing promised to Abraham and to all the nations. A great king who would rule over God’s people in all the earth forever. And so this was God’s great plan of salvation – the plan to put right all that had gone wrong and to restore God’s rule

over the earth. God, using this one people in the Old Testament, Israel, would eventually bring about the salvation and restoration of all peoples in the New Testament through David's heir – the Messiah, a king from David's house and lineage who would restore God's rule over the earth, just as it is in heaven. And whose reign over God's renewed and restored creation would be without end:

*All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.  
For kingship belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.*

And that, ultimately, is what God was doing in the Incarnation of Jesus – fulfilling that ancient promise and plan through His Birth, Life, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Jesus was that promised greater blessing from out of Israel, Abraham's race – going out into all the earth in order to reach and to restore all peoples to God. Jesus, Himself, had said precisely this about His mission. Not long before the cross, He had said to His disciples: *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*<sup>4</sup>

And Jesus was also that promised king from the line of David, who would restore God's Kingdom over all the earth, and would rule over that Kingdom forevermore. That is why He was born in Bethlehem – David's hometown. The coming of Jesus Christ on earth – His Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension – all of it points to far more than just my salvation and your salvation. It is God's promise that the day really is coming when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and we shall not hurt any longer in all of God's holy nation.<sup>5</sup> It is God's promise that peace on earth and good will toward all are not just words that the angels sang, but the truth about how it all shall end – happily ever after – when Jesus the Messiah comes again.

It is God's gift to us and to all the earth of hope – a hope which shall not fail. No matter how dark the hour may seem, no matter how bleak the prospects of peace may appear in this present moment, no matter how weak the cause of Christ may seem when set against those ancient powers of Mammon and Hatred and Anger and Greed and Sickness and War – still His promised Kingdom is coming. For if death upon a cross could not stop Him, then there simply is nothing else in all creation which ever shall. And the day is surely coming when:

*All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.  
For kingship belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.*

So, come, Lord Jesus, come. Come, Savior Jesus, come. Come, King Jesus, come – that all the earth may once again, and forevermore, bow down before our God.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 139:10.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Lischer, Open Secrets (New York: Doubleday, 2001), pp. 61-64.

<sup>3</sup> II Samuel 7:1-16.

<sup>4</sup> John 12:32.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 11:6, 9.