

"A worm" yet "Jehovah of Hosts."

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A series of great and wonderful contrasts is found in Psalms 22, 23 and 24. Psalm 22 divides very naturally into two parts, so that we have four sections in all; and the main contrast lies between the first part of Psalm 22, where the sufferings of Christ are prophetically set forth, and the remaining three parts, which furnish us with glimpses of glorious results which follow. One of the striking contrasts we have chosen as our title. The One, who speaks of Himself as a worm in the early part of Psalm 22, is discovered to be the Lord of hosts when we arrive at the end of Psalm 24.

The first part of Psalm 22 ends in the midst of verse 21. The colon which occurs there in our Authorized Version is supplanted by a full stop in Darby's New Translation, which renders it thus:-

"Save me from the lion's mouth. Yea; from the horns of the buffaloes hast thou answered me."

The first sentence of the verse is thus the last cry of the suffering Messiah. The second sentence is His first utterance of triumph as He comes forth in resurrection to declare Jehovah's Name unto His brethren.

In the first place, then, we have an amazing prophetic forecast of the atoning sufferings of Christ, when as the single grain of wheat He fell into the ground and died. Then we discover how great a harvest is to be reaped from that sowing. The latter part of Psalm 22 shows that Jehovah is to reap a satisfying harvest of praise and worship.

The prophetic forecast of the sufferings of the cross is given with great fulness, only equalled by Isaiah 53. We need not pause to point out how minutely all was fulfilled, as recorded in the four Gospels; and others have dwelt upon the marvel that all the physical horrors of death by crucifixion should be accurately described, centuries before that dreadful form of capital punishment had been invented. We will briefly trace the varied sufferings which combined in that dread hour. May we do so with reverent and adoring hearts.

He had to explore vast fields of suffering which came upon Him as the result of the activities of fallen men and of that malignant spirit of evil by whom men fell. Verses 6 to 8 present most graphically *the reproach of men* which came upon Him. This was we judge the least part of His sufferings, for Hebrews 12 tells us that He "endured the cross, despising the shame." Nothing cuts us more to the quick than reproach and shame amongst our fellows. But that is just because they *are* our fellows. He was infinitely above those who shamed Him. Both in His Deity, and in His spotless and incomparable Humanity He towered above them so that the taunts they flung were as nothing to Him. Yet on the other hand He keenly felt it all, for He had a keenness of sensibility of which we know nothing. He despised the shame, yet He felt it according to God.

Then in verses 12 and 13 we have *the persecution of the Jews*. The leaders of that people attacked Him with the strength and ferocity of bulls. The militant Pharisees were like strong bulls of Bashan, and, inasmuch as they were the special agents of Satan in the matter, they partook of his character. He bears the character of "a roaring lion."

Verses 14 and 15 portray *His bodily sufferings*. In these of course He was not unique. The two thieves crucified on either side must have shared them, as indeed all others who at any time have been executed in this terrible way. What was unique was His power of feeling, for in Him no sensibility had

been blunted by sin; all was tuned to the highest pitch of perfection. And all ended in "the dust of death." *The power of death* is terrible indeed to us, it was far more so to Him, for He knew it right well as the original judgment of God imposed on man because of sin. As such He entered into it. He was brought there by God.

Then also there was *the cruelty of the Gentiles*, pictured in verses 16 to 18. It was the Roman soldiers who fulfilled these three verses. They were not marked by the ferocity of the bull, for they had no particular animus against the Lord; but there was an utter lack of decency and feeling. They were like the unclean dog, an assembly of evil-doers. All this He keenly felt.

And behind all this, behind the sword and the dog, lay *the power of Satan*. It is the devil who wields the power of death, according to Hebrews 2. 14; and so in going into death He was going into the very mouth of the lion. He came thus to grips with the devil in the very stronghold of his power. At this point we reach the end of the section which predicts His sufferings.

But in this brief survey of the sufferings we have thus far omitted that which is immeasurably first and chief of them all — that which is indeed the main theme of the passage. There were these minor ingredients in the cup of His sufferings, but the major ingredient was this — *He was forsaken of God*. The atonement that He made lay in this, that He bore the judgment of God against sin, even unto death. As bearing sin He was forsaken of God who is holy, and who yet is to inhabit the praises of Israel, and of many others besides.

This forsaking is, as we have said, the main theme. It fills the opening verses, and then the holy Sufferer recalls the way in which the fathers had been supported and delivered in their hours of need, which makes it all the more striking that He should be forsaken at this supreme moment. Then, in verse 11, it is again reverted to. He had been the dependent One from the very outset, never deviating from that attitude, so more than all He had the title to Divine support, all others having forsaken Him. This was the hour of trouble when most He needed the sunshine of the face of God.

Then follow verses 12 to 18, in which, as we have seen, the persecution of the Jews, His bodily sufferings, the power of death, the cruelty of the Gentiles, are all recounted. They are urged in verse 19 as furnishing potent reasons why He should enjoy the sustaining presence of God; so that again the fact of His being forsaken is reverted to.

When this is observed it at once becomes apparent that the fact of His being forsaken is the main theme. His other sufferings, great as they were, are only mentioned in order that the supreme sorrow of His being forsaken of God may be apprehended by us. The other sufferings, the reproach and persecution from both Jew and Gentile, even the power of Satan, were *incidental*. What was *essential* to His great work of atonement was the fact that as made sin upon the cross He was forsaken of God, He died as the Victim. As our Psalm puts it, "THOU hast brought Me into the dust of death" — it is not viewed as the work of evil men. Isaiah 53 says, "THOU shalt make His soul an offering for sin." In both cases the act is an act of God. Men played their evil part, but the great transaction really lay between Him and God.

The sin of man created the necessity. The sin of both Jew and Gentile furnished the occasion. But the work itself was wholly divine. The Father had sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, and the work lay wholly between the Sent One and Him who sent Him. We may well rejoice that this is so. It guarantees at once and for ever all that then was accomplished.

The grain of wheat having been sown, having fallen into the ground and died, the glorious harvest that is to be reaped, begins to appear. First comes the "much fruit" that is to appear for the pleasure of

God Himself. Praise and worship is His rightful due, whether we consider Him as Elohim in creation, or as Jehovah in covenant faithfulness, or as Father revealed to us in the Son. That which is His due He is going to get.

In the latter part of Psalm 22 we find that He who suffered is to become the Master and Leader of the praise. It is true of course that apart from His atoning death there could have been no praise. It is equally true that, His death being accomplished, He came forth in resurrection to declare God's name, and thus start the praise, and also to take the lead in offering the praise for the word is, "in the midst . . . will I praise Thee," and yet again, "My praise shall be of Thee" (verses 22, 25). So that which was set forth typically in Asaph, Jeduthun, Heman, and "their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord" (1 Chr. 25: 7), is seen antitypically in Christ, and His redeemed.

Verse 22 finds its fulfilment today, as Hebrews 2 indicates. He has declared God's name as Father to us, and in the midst of the assembly — of those called out for heavenly privilege and destiny — He leads the praise. The first notes of the song that will ultimately swell into the great universal orchestra of praise are struck in the assembly on earth today. It is indeed true that, "On earth the song begins," and the character of that song is very high, for it is in response to the declaration of the Father's name; though on the other hand it may be very feebly taken up by us, for the assembly on earth is in a condition of weakness.

After the assembly is gone from the earth there will still be found among various peoples those who fear the Lord, and more particularly so among the seed of Jacob or of Israel. These in their turn will praise and glorify Him, even amidst the afflictions that will come upon them. The Lord Jesus was pre-eminently the afflicted One, and they will find encouragement in the way in which He had been heard even from death itself. This verse 23 brings before us.

Yet again there is to be "the great congregation," when all Israel is saved according to Romans 11: 26. When at last He who once scattered Israel has gathered them as a born again people, redeemed, cleansed, re-united; then their great Messiah in His glory shall lead the praise of Jehovah, and incite their praises, as verse 25 indicates. Here is found the beginning of millennial praises, till all that seek the Lord shall praise Him, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship.

Not only will all that are blessed and enriched — spoken of as those who are "fat upon earth" — be worshipping at His feet, but those who go down to the dust will have to bow before Him. Here apparently we have an allusion to those who are spoken of as the "sheep" and the "goats" in Matthew 25: 31-46. Whichever way it is in that day, whether men are blessed or judged, they will have to acknowledge the Lord and yield glory to Him. Those who are truly "a seed" — the fruit and result of the travail of His soul — will serve Him and be reckoned as the new generation who enter into the enjoyment that God originally promised to His people. The old unbelieving generation (see Matt. 24: 34) will then have passed away, and to those yet to be born as the Millennial age runs its course will be told the story of the Saviour's sufferings, thus provoking further praise.

Thus we see the harvest of praise being reaped, beginning in the church of today and extending into the world to come.

Psalm 23 shows very plainly what a harvest of blessing we reap as the result of the death of Christ. He who died as the Victim on our behalf, lives in resurrection as the Shepherd of our souls. In having the living Shepherd we have everything. Not only is the wolf of "want" kept from our door, but we have satisfaction, and restoration, and righteousness, and comfort, and overflowing provision. There are found "goodness" and "mercy" like two faithful watch-dogs following all our steps, while before us stands the house of the Lord as our eternal dwelling-place.

Our path is not to be marked by the absence of trouble, as the Psalm plainly shows. On the contrary, there are enemies, there is evil, there is even death, for these are all mentioned. This world becomes to the saint " the valley of the shadow of death."

But here lies another striking contrast which we do well to remark. If we want to see death in all its force, death as the weighty judgment of God against sin, we have to turn to the early part of Psalm 22. Into the dust of DEATH was Jesus brought by God Himself when He stood in our place and bore our sin. Only the *shadow* of death is left for us. Of this fact we venture to make a twofold application. In the first place this world is for us shadowed by His death. Here He died; and this fact casts its shadow over the whole scene for every loyal heart that loves Him. In the second place, when the saint comes to the hour of dissolution and departure to be with Christ, he finds that he does not properly speaking see death at all. It is but the shadow of death that he has to face. Death itself was long ago faced by Christ on his behalf.

Psalm 23 is so well known, and so much has been said as to it, that we content ourselves with these few remarks; and turn to consider Psalm 24, which shows us that He who suffered is not forgotten when the results of His death are enumerated. He is to reap a harvest of great glory.

When at last the millennial day is reached the earth will be very manifestly the Lord's and the whole world be in subjection to Him. The hill of the Lord and His holy place will be elevated amongst men, and the question is raised as to who will be fit to ascend the one or to stand in the other. The answer is given in verses 4 and 5. The fitness required is moral fitness. Those holy places are reserved for the holy; those whose hands are clean, whose hearts are pure, who have eschewed all vanity and deceit. The godly, who will enter the millennial age, will be such in a general way. They will be the generation who seek the Lord, the seed who serve Him and are accounted a generation, as we saw in Psalm 22. But there is One who was all this, not merely in a general way but in an absolute way — intrinsically and perfectly and without any qualification whatever.

The Passover lambs and all other lambs used for sacrificial purposes, had to be without blemish. Their perfection qualified them to be so used. In this they were types. The Lord Jesus was the "Lamb without blemish and without spot." Had He not been He could not have suffered sacrificially on our behalf, as portrayed in Psalm 22. His perfection qualified Him to go *down* into death for us. It also qualified Him to go up into the hill of the Lord.

The last four verses of the Psalm picture Him as ascending into the hill of the Lord, and entering His holy place. The scene is one of millennial splendour, and the holy places as pictured by Ezekiel (Ezek. 40 to 48) pass before the prophetic view of the Psalmist. Not infrequently the passage is taken up by way of application rather than interpretation and made to refer to the entrance of our Lord into heavenly glory. This is quite permissible doubtless, for He has been glorified "straightway" in the presence of God, according to His own words in John 13: 32. Still the public glory which is yet to come is strictly speaking the point here. It is not enough that He should be glorified in private (as far as this world is concerned); glory of a public sort must also be His. And, more particularly, He must be abundantly glorified in the very scene of His public dishonour. When the gates and doors are lifted up, He shall enter, not only as the One in whom all moral perfection is found, but also as the King of glory.

But, "Who is this King of glory?" The question is repeated, and a two-fold answer is given.

First, He is, "Jehovah strong and mighty, Jehovah mighty in battle." He will come fresh from His victories — those victories foretold in Psalm 2, when He will have the kings of the earth and the rulers in derision, when He will break the rebellious nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. But then He who will ride in triumph to victory then, once suffered and was forsaken

that He might win victory of another sort at the cross.

So we may make an application of these words, rather than interpretation, and speak of how once

By weakness and defeat

He won the meed and crown

Trod all our foes beneath His feet,

By being trodden down.

Because He proved Himself strong and mighty in this way He is to enter into His glory.

But there is the second answer. He is the Lord of hosts, for others are associated with Him.

Revelation 19: 14 shows us that, when He shall come forth as a Warrior to judgment, there will be the armies of heaven who follow Him — His heavenly saints who are to wear His likeness and share His triumphs. In them, as in others besides, He will see the fruit of the travail of His soul.

We began by remarking that there were many contrasts in these Psalms, taking one of them as our title. We close by pointing out a few more. Once for Him it was all *reproach, despising, scorn*. Ultimately He is to appear as *the King of Glory*. Then He appeared as the *dependent One*, trusting on the Lord, and made to hope upon His mother's breasts. He shall yet be manifested as the Lord *strong and mighty in battle*. Then He was *forsaken* of God, and of men too for He had to say, "There is none to help." He shall then stand forth *surrounded* by the hosts of His redeemed, and He the Lord of hosts among them. Once He took the *outside* place of forsaking. Then the King of glory shall *come in*.

God shall be praised. Saints shall be shepherded. Last, but not least, Jesus shall be abundantly covered with glory. May God haste the day *when the King of glory shall come in*.