

Christ on the Cross

Psalm 22.

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Part Second. EARLIER MINISTRY.

Everything in the beginning of this psalm is letting down, and at the end there is everything lifting up. It is full of suffering and joy, but the former chiefly. The Person standing before us here is distinctly the Lord Jesus. There is a difference between this psalm and what we have in Isaiah 53, and in the gospels. In Isaiah we have the blessed Lord as a Lamb set before us, but it is taken up with the special object of showing the different feelings of the persons who had to do with Him; some were cleaving to Him, others turning away from Him. In the gospels we have the historical fact of His sufferings, and in each there is something distinctive connected with the narrative. In Matthew the Lord is connected with Israel as the seed of Abraham; and there is the quotation from this Psalm, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" when He was on the cross. In Mark the Lord Jesus is set forth as the servant, and the same words are quoted. Luke takes Him up as the Son of man, and this is not quoted. There is peculiar repose in John, and there we have the Lord more in His divine character. Finding the quotation from this psalm in Matthew and in Mark, and not in the other gospels, seems to give a clue to the character of Christ's sufferings as the heir of promise, and as the faithful servant in the hour of suffering.

In the psalm it is the sufferings themselves that are shown; you see there the inward feelings, the deep tide of woe that rolled in on His soul. The heading of the psalm has a meaning — "The hind of the morning." The hinds go forth in their timidity in the morning — the harbingers of light, but disappearing as soon as day breaks. If anywhere in the Old Testament light breaks out, we have it in this psalm. In the gospels we have everything that was done to *insult* our blessed Lord; but that was not the bitterest part of His sufferings; and all that He suffered from *men* would only leave the question of *sin* untouched as regards *God and one's own conscience*. Sin has been committed before the infinite God; whoever has been guilty of it is obnoxious to His wrath. Wherever there has been sin there must be judgment. If I look into Scripture I find the character of God is perfect holiness. If He who is perfectly holy has to do with the sinner, what must be the consequence? Into however small a compass I bring my sin, it has been done against an *infinite God*. Where do we see what sin is? Is it in the ungodly High Priest, who blasphemed the Son of God? Was it in the Gentile monarch, who sanctioned the crucifixion? No; it Was when God's judgment was poured on Him for man's sin. He stood as the *sin-bearer*, and it is there only we get the true measure of sin. When there "made sin for us," He had

not one single ray of light from God to strengthen Him. He represented sin before God, and the sustainment He had — always had — from God now ceased to flow. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These words have quite a different meaning in Christ's mouth to what they have in any other. Have not you often used this language when God was really drawing you by His own love, but you were afraid to trust Him? and are not you ashamed to think of it? But it was very different in *Christ's experience*.

The word "Eloi," etc., in the quotation is expressive of nearness — "My God." It is not Hebrew, but Syriac. This expression coming forth to Him who was always so near has deep force in it; and the only moment in which He could be forsaken of God was *this*, when He was taking our sins upon Him. He was always in the full sunshine of God's favour; for He was *holy*. Christ could have been no *victim* if He had not been holy and separate from sinners. Nothing shows the perfect purity and holiness of the Lord like this psalm. A Jewish rabbi has called it a psalm of repining. True indeed there was a deep agony of soul when He said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" But almost immediately afterward He vindicates God: "But thou art holy."

What a state poor Job was in while waiting for God! But such is the contrast of Christ here. It is as though He had said, "I have taken this place of bearing sins before God, and I *ought* to know what the award is." There was a spring in Himself that enabled Him to say, "Though thou forsakest me, I will not forsake thee." Thus the essential purity and divine perfectness of what He was stood out in all that depth of humiliation. What a contrast we should exhibit in such circumstances! If we have nothing from God, we have nothing. Though there is the well of water in us springing up to everlasting life, we are dependent upon the divine source to cause it to spring up, and we are utterly and entirely dependent on God. Not so Christ. Though He stooped down as the servant, He was not limited to that. (vv. 5-7.) He links Himself with Israel (v. 6): "I am a worm." that is, "I am in the place of a sin-offering. I am a worm and no man — unworthy of the slightest notice or regard. Thou oughtest to turn away from me. Thy holiness requires it." You must have some measure with regard to sin. What is your measure? From the buddings of it in the garden of Eden to the last heading of it up in the Man of sin there is no divine measure of sin but on *the cross*. If we think of sin anywhere else but here, we get a human measure according to the circumstances.

If merely a human being had been here as Christ was, and forsaken of God, the well of water would have come to an end, and he would have been ready to call on the rocks to cover him; but in all this agony, when all the full tale of judgment was poured out on Christ, it left His perfectness untouched, and only made the brightness more visible. The contrast might be illustrated by the difference between a new-born babe left out in the open air all night, and a strong man in the same exposure. What would be certain death to the one would be overcome by the other. There was no comparison between the first Adam and Christ. The first Adam was no person to do with God. How could he? What was he to settle with God about sin? He could not, but Christ could; and He has settled it, and there is no fear now of God saying to a poor sinner who believes, "No; you must go and taste the sufferings which He bore on the cross." It was God's Lamb who suffered there, and it was to carry out the idea of *mercy* in the divine mind that He came: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." When we look at this force of the first verse, what sort of sanction does, it cast upon sin in a disciple? Do you talk of a little sin? the sin in your members little? See what Christ suffered for it. Nothing will make the disciple, the servant, so anxious to be free from sin as seeing what the judgment of it was now upon the cross. There is no such thing as little sin to the child of God who has this measure. Everything in yourselves, in your family circles, everything around you, ought to be brought into judgment, the sentence of death

passed upon it: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John 12: 24.)

The great thing in the present day is to learn that grand principle — "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." Not only sins in the general, but sin, have been judged in the cross of Christ; and if God is to show forth His *holiness* most efficiently, it is in the forgiveness of the poor sinner through this judgment which has been passed upon Christ rather than in the final condemnation of the sinner. Our hearts little understand what He bore in that hour. There is not room in our minds for more than a certain quantity of sorrow; but what another would not have felt, He gathered up and felt it *perfectly*. It is an important question, dear friends, as to how far *death*, as to anything that is noxious, is put away from your minds. Is a grave, a sick-bed, a terrible thing to you; or do you feel it better to depart to be with Christ? A remarkable test as to this point was experienced in France in the time of the Revolution. A poor woman was dying in a part of the town which was already cannonaded, and to be thrown down next day. The question was, Who would go to her? One said, "I will go." It was put before him what it would involve; viz., loss of life. But he said, "I died 1,800 years ago." He went, and was preserved. (2 Cor. 1: 9)

CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

PSALM 22.

THERE is one thing very helpful in studying truth connected with the several glories which centre in Christ in the latter day: viz., that they have their importance according to the place in which they are displayed. There is a vast variety in the expression of these glories. The majesty of the divine effulgence is seen through the Son in His glory as Head of the Church, as the last Adam, and as King of the Jews, in the heavenlies and in the earthlies, but there is a correspondence to a certain extent in all these fields of glory.

Government and worship even belongs to God, and in a sense they are always the same. God is the object, and the Spirit is the medium, and both roll *from God*, while they return *to God*. God displays Himself in the heavens. Earth is the place where God cannot come because of sin, so there is all the difference between that which is *above* and what is *below*. Compare the last eight chapters of Ezekiel with Rev. 21 and Rev. 22. The former is a reflection of the latter. God and the Lamb cannot be the temple below, so there is a temple there. In heaven there is no need for a temple, for God and the Lamb are the temple. In government, too, there is a difference *above* and *below*. The bride is associated with the throne, the dominion and power in Revelation; in Ezekiel it is *Jehovah*. Still the millennial power wielded by Christ on earth will be the counterpart of what is in heaven. Thus Christ is the centre in all, God is the spring in all, and the Holy Ghost is the power in all. There are thoughts in connection with redemption that are universally true. The serpent's head is to be broken. That was prophesied in Eden, and all was working towards the fulfilment of it. Christ is the atonement in all the dispensations, and by the Holy Ghost is the application of it.

Another thing is very helpful to see; viz., the Headship of Christ. He is the second Adam, the second Noah, the second King of Israel, the second Head of the Gentiles. In Psalm 22 there are the breathings of Jesus in suffering and in joy. The Psalms are the expressions of the Spirit of God in man on earth. We find in the same psalms often the language of Him who is the Fountain Head (who knew no sin), and of those who speak of sins committed by them. *Christ*, being perfect, could say, "My flesh crieth out for the living God." *My flesh* cannot do this. I would ask you to examine whether there are

not two parties often to be found in the same psalms. One perfectly pure; the other, sin there, but not imputed. The first two verses of this psalm take up the language of these two parties; verse 1, the language of Christ Himself, and verse 2, "I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not," etc., although true of Christ is at the same time the expression of the Spirit of Christ in the remnant when they *have little faith*. This may be the genuine expression of the Spirit of God in us, not understanding the full work of atonement. There are verses in the Psalms which seem true of the Church, and true of Israel, because *true of Christ*. The Church is not intended in the primary application, but as in Christ, a rib of Him, they are true. (v. 2.) The Church ought to see judgment behind the cross. God begins with us, as He did with Paul, in heavenly glory. "My measure," God says, "is *Christ*, whom I have received up to my right-hand." That is the way God begins with us. You may say, It was not so with me. Why? Because you are Judaized; but you ought not to have been on the ground of the ten commandments at all. The Jew is not on the same ground as we are; he has to learn to measure man, and to find out all his opposition and ruin.

There was an element of sorrow peculiar to the Lord Jesus. He took the cup of trembling, the wrath of God, *alone*. There had been the waters of the Deluge, the fire of Sodom, but no wrath was like that Christ bore, because none ever tasted what sin is but Christ, when He settled the matter about it. Sin can have nothing from God but judgment. When sin is even upon His Son, His word to Him is like this: "I have no light for thee." The Lord Jesus tasted fully what it was to be in the presence of God as the Sin-bearer. It is quite distinct from the sufferings spoken of in the following verses of the psalm. There, and in the gospels, we get the expression and narration of His bodily sufferings. But all these heaped up together are not to be compared with His inward anguish. The brilliancy of who Christ was, nowhere shines out as in this psalm (see v. 3), the expression of which is, "If I am forsaken, thy name must be taken care of." (vv. 5-7.) Why did He trust, and get no answer? The answer was, He was a sin-offering, and ought to be treated as an unclean thing. As the sin-offering, Christ had taken our sins as a fillet about Him. (v. 7.) There is the detail of sufferings — the taunt, the pout of the lip, etc.

Verse 9, is very remarkable, pointing out a peculiar element of the mind of the Lord Jesus. (This, too, Paul, Gal. 1: 15.) In the experience of the depth of trial and suffering, Christ remembers that God His Father is the God of *providence*. This is most important for the people of God to remember. See Moses and Jeremiah also. God knew what vessel He wanted, and could fit for the service. This adds great poignancy to the sorrow expressed in the first verse. The Lord alludes here to the providential care of God. "Thou hast sustained, guarded, cared for me up to this moment, and I am forsaken now!" "Crucified through weakness" is a word that had its full meaning for the Lord. He knew what a fainting heart meant. Verse 19 is also remarkable. He will not give up the truth, whether for Himself or others, that God was His strength. He would not give an answer and speak for Himself, because of the burden He carried on His heart. In verse 20, there are objects dear to Him which He will not let go — "Deliver my darling from the power of the dog." He will speak everything for God, everything for the people, but not for Himself. Contrast the Lord's conduct here with our own in the wilderness in all ages. In Him there was no murmur, no tossing to and fro, no restless impatience, no struggling under the yoke. Were you ever in sorrow like this — comforters not one? But you had Christ in heaven, whoever else you had not.

One word here in connection with the latter part of the psalm. I cannot help thinking that, although it is not quoted in the gospels, Christ had this spring of comfort in His soul all the time. He had the word ever laid up in His heart, and though He is not cited as Jehovah's fellow in connection with turning His hand on the little ones when the other part, "Smite the shepherd," is quoted, He must have known the connection. There were three grand titles belonging to Christ as the deliverer. As

Prophet, Priest, and King He had been presented to Israel, and He was all these as the sin-bearer, and the servant of Jehovah. This added to the bitterness of His being seen by them, not recognized, but rejected of God. An ambassador would feel a private mark of the sovereign's displeasure, but he would feel much more deeply his rejection in open court. Christ, though the faithful servant, was here on the cross not recognized. (v. 22.) What a verse this is! There is not a waver. He knew His Father's name. His glory and His first thought is to proclaim that name to His people. There were the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. There are three concentric circles round Christ — His brethren, the seed of Israel, and the ends of the world. (vv. 22-24.) We greatly fail to realize the Lord as the Leader of worship. I believe we little think what it will be to hear the Lord Jesus sing praise.

In verse 24, there is the subject of praise. What am I to sing about with Jesus? we might say; *He* will sing of things I cannot touch. But no; the Lord will choose a theme in which we can join; and when we see that it is *God's* faithfulness to *Him* that He will sing about, is there one who will not echo "Amen" to His praise? "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted." When we remember how He went down into the lowest judgment for our sins, we can sing with Him that song. We must not forget the range of the glories of Christ. There is not only the Church in the heavenlies, but Israel on the earth coming up to keep holiday unto the Lord. Then Christ will be the setter-up of *worship* as well as the changer of dispensations. What a scene the millennial age will be! All the power will be His to sustain the government as Son of man, as well as He is the Leader and Sustainer of communion.

Verse 27 shows the extent of worship; verse 29, Israel's history. When they shall get back a little to their earthly centre, all their energy will be used in setting up antichrist. Thus will be fully proved that they could not "keep alive their own soul." Then, when fully broken down in their extremity, a remnant is brought through to serve the Lord Jesus. See the bearing of all this practically (as to the finished work of Christ being in heaven). What does God show us of things on earth? When the testimony shall be on *earth* Christ will be on *earth*. This truth (Christ in heaven) is the key to unlock the systems of religion from Constantine downwards.

Is our religion *down here*? Where is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus? Where is the worship of which the Holy Ghost is the power, Christ the centre? Nowhere, but as connected with heaven. Another thing to be noticed is, that there is all blessing for those whose sins were borne by Christ on the tree. You must either say, "Christ has borne all my judgment for me," or else you must know you can have no standing before God in the judgment. What is your thought about Christ being at home, though you are in the wilderness still? If you are out in peril and suffering, you are glad that the objects dearest to you are at home in safety. Thus do we not feel joy that the earthly course of Christ is finished? It ought to be so. Ask yourselves this question, Do you love the Lord? Then is it joy to you that He has entered the rest? If our thoughts are right about Him, it will make our sorrows light to remember that He is no longer exposed to suffering. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."