

The Suffering Savior -- Psalm 22

by A.B. Simpson

Christ's sufferings, as described in Psalm 22, demonstrate His love for humanity and offer us the gift of redemption and eternal life.

Scripture: Psalm 22:1, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 19:10, John 3:16, Romans 5:8, Philippians 2:10-11, Hebrews 2:9, 1 Peter 3:18, Revelation 7:9-10

Topics: "The Suffering of Christ", "Redemption and Hope"

Description

A.B. Simpson presents a profound exploration of Psalm 22, depicting the suffering of Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for humanity. He emphasizes the depths of Christ's anguish, including the Father's desertion, the cruelty of man, and the relentless attacks of Satan, all culminating in His death. Yet, amidst this suffering, there is a silver lining of hope, innocence, faith, love, and the promise of redemption for all who believe. Simpson encourages believers to reflect on the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice and to share the Gospel with the world, as it was His dying wish to save humanity.

Transcript

This is the Holy Ghost's picture of the suffering Savior. It is the Ecce Homo of the Psalms. The Gospels have given us the outward picture; this is the inner one, the Holy of Holies of the Redeemer's anguish when He trod the winepress alone.

Well does it precede the twenty-third Psalm. That is the picture of the Shepherd in the fold, but this is the Shepherd in the night, in the desert, in the wilderness, among the wolves, with bleeding feet and broken heart, seeking for the sheep that went astray. May the Holy Spirit engrave the picture upon our hearts!

I. CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS

1. The first element in it is the Father's desertion. The opening verse is the wail of Calvary: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

Have you ever felt a sense of God's displeasure or desertion? Do you remember your first conviction of sin and your cry for pardon? Then you know something of the suffering of Christ when He stood in the place of a sinner under the judgment of God and suffered the penalty our sin deserved.

For the first time in His existence He felt the withdrawal of the Father's love. Never had the Father's face been clouded before. But now it is turned away. Nay, it is turned against Him. "It pleased the Lord to

bruise him. You have made him sick in smiting him." We can scarcely understand it. But it was strangely, awfully true. For one day God dealt with Jesus as He will deal with sinful, rebellious men. All other agonies could not compare with this. This was the dregs of the cup of woe, the desertion, the wrath of God.

"The Father lifted up His rod.

O Christ, it fell on Thee!

Thou wast sore smitten of Thy God;

Thy bruising healeth me."

2. The second ingredient in the bitter cup was the cruelty of man. How vividly is it all portrayed! The mockery around the cross: "All that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him, seeing that he delighted in him." The cruel crucifixion: "They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me." The weakness and agony: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax: it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like potsherd." The awful thirst: "My tongue cleaves to my jaws." The approaching dissolution: "You have brought me into the dust of death."

It was the most painful and shameful form of public execution. Then, added to the torture of the cross were the insults of the men who mocked Him. How easily could He have silenced them! How easily could He have sprung from that cross and made them fall at His feet in terror! How easily could He have shown the power they doubted! But that would have forfeited our salvation. It was true, "He saved others; himself he could not save."

Thomas Carlyle tells of a Scotchman who once, when ascending a coal shaft of a mine in the bucket, found the strands of the rope giving way. One had already snapped, and the other was breaking. There was another man in the basket, but the rope would not hold both. In a moment his purpose was formed. He was not afraid to die. He turned to his companion and quickly said: "Good-bye! You are not ready, and I am; meet me in heaven!" and he dropped from the basket to the bottom of the shaft. He saved another; himself he could not save. There was room only for one life. So the Master "died to save us all," and bore the jeers and taunts of men that they who mocked Him might not die, but be saved by His very sacrifice.

3. The third element in the Savior's cup of suffering was Satanic hate and demon rage and cruelty. Around Him there gathered in that dark hour, not only the cruelty and hate of men, but all the wrath of hell. "They gaped upon me with their mouths" is the strong language of the inspired picture. "Save me from the lion's mouth." "Deliver . . . from the power of the dog." Like wild beasts they seemed to Him in their ferocity and hideousness. And so indeed they have often seemed to many of God's dear saints in the dark hour of spiritual conflict.

Some of us have passed through the valley of the shadow of death. Amid the host of hell we have spent nights and days that seemed to be infested with dragon forms and fiendish shapes. Our very cheeks could feel the fire, and our ears could almost hear the hissing of the serpent ; and even the smell of the pit was in our nostrils as we passed along, or stood in the evil day in desperate conflict with the powers of darkness. In such an hour Martin Luther actually believed he saw the devil, and threw his ink bottle at him in reality of the conflict. The dying and unsaved soul has often been known to realize the vision of that dark and evil world, even as the departing saint has seen the opening of the gates of glory and the angel

forms that wait.

Oh, if we have ever known the anguish of spiritual conflict and the awful pressure of Satan's power upon our spirits, we can have some conception of what our Master suffered on that day on Calvary. There is no pain so keen, except the wrath of God, as that which comes from the fiery touch of Satan. But all the fury of the pit was concentrated upon the Savior in that day, in that hour. Man had determined to take His life, but Satan was determined to have His soul. Oh, if Satan only could have seized the precious spirit of the Son of God, and trampled beneath his feet the deeper life of the Sinless One, hell indeed would have triumphed and heaven have been lost forever.

Like packs of wolves, Satan's hordes crowded around, blotting out the light of heaven with their dragon forms, piercing His spirit with their fiery darts, filling His soul with darkness and agony, and trying in vain to defile Him with their wiles, or betray Him into some word or thought or feeling of impatience, or distrust, or sin. Could they but for one instant have tempted Him successfully; could they have compelled Him to doubt His Father, to complain of His sufferings, or to resent His injuries, a shout would have gone up from their dark abodes that would have shaken the walls of heaven and filled the eyes of angels with tears they never shed before. He knew all this, and the strain of that awful conflict was infinite and indescribable. But not for one moment did He yield. Not one whisper of murmuring escaped His lips. Through all their hosts He passed in triumph, and even Satan had to acknowledge Him conqueror. They could only torment, they could not tempt the sinless Son of God. But, oh, the torment, what tongue can tell, what heart can understand!

There is a strange and beautiful Hindu legend that sheds a sweet vividness on the Savior's sufferings, and especially His sufferings from the hand of Satan.

It is said that a human spirit was once pursued by the demon of vengeance. When about to be overtaken, it cried to the goddess Vishnu, who changed it into a dove so that it was able to rise above the serpent's reach. But now the serpent prayed to his god and was changed into a hawk, and soon swooped down upon the dove. He was about to seize his prey when the dove again cried to the goddess; and now Vishnu opened her bosom and took the frightened fugitive under her protecting wings. But the hawk demanded his prey, and claimed the rights of justice.

Vishnu did not dispute the claim, but said: "You cannot have the dove, but I will bare my bosom to your beak and talons, and you may tear from my flesh as much as will satisfy you for your lost prey." And then, the legend tells us, the demon sprang upon her breast and tore from her bosom as much as would be equivalent for the rescued dove. So heathenism has blindly pictured the mystery of the atonement and the strange substitution whereby we are saved.

Jesus gave Himself up for a season, even to the devil's hate. Oh, can we ever love Him enough for all our life has cost Him?

4. The next element in His cup was death. For Him there was no release. Down to the dark abode of Hades His spirit must descend. There is something in death which tells its own story of dread and agony. Naturally, and apart from the Gospel, it is indeed the King of Terrors. Truly has it been said:

"The worst

That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment

Can lay on nature, is a Paradise

To what we fear in death."

True, to the Christian this has been changed; the sting has been extracted because it has already been borne. But it was not thus that death came to Him. To Him it came under the law and with all the bitterness of the curse. To Him it came as it comes to the sinner -- not only with all its natural bitterness, but with a sense of penalty, a consciousness of sin and condemnation. He tasted death for every man. (Heb. 2: 9.) The emphasis is on that word "taste." He drank the dregs of the cup, and now for us the bitterness of death is past. But what it was to Him can be understood only by the combination and concentration of all that it has ever meant to sinful, dying men.

5. Helplessness is another element in this cup of woe. There was no escape. In our darkest hour, for us there is hope of release; but for Him there could be none. From the beginning He knew that He must tread the winepress alone until the last; that He must drink the cup to its uttermost dregs; that there could be no reprieve; that it could not pass from Him, and that no one could help Him in it. He was utterly alone and inevitably doomed by His own act. He had chosen that dreadful place of substitution, and He could not now retrace His steps. Not for a moment did He wish to; but that utter loneliness, desolation, and unutterable woe was terrible even to imagine. What must it have been to realize and endure?

II. THE SILVER LINING

These were some of the dark shadows of the cross, but the Psalm does not close without the brighter silver lining on the awful cloud. Four things are especially noticeable, in contrast with Christ's sufferings, as described in this Psalm.

1. There is the consciousness of innocence. Nowhere through the entire Psalm is there a single hint of any iniquity on the part of the Savior. It cannot, therefore, be a mortal man whose distress is here described. The best of men in their afflictions have been conscious of some lesson to be learned and some imperfection to be acknowledged; but this Sufferer has no consciousness of sin. It must have made the burden lighter, while at the same time it made it stronger. He was suffering wholly for others, for He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. His sinlessness was essential to make the substitution adequate. With nothing to answer on His own account, all the merit of His sacrifice is imputed to the sinner, and settles the claims of God against us.

2. We see the spirit of faith. Even when He cries, "Why have You forsaken me?" He can say, "My God! My God!" Again we find Him fighting the good fight of faith, as His children often do, by re-echoing the promises of God and the faithfulness of His love and care. "Our fathers trusted in You," He cries; "they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried unto You, and were delivered: they trusted in You, and were not confounded." "You are he that took me out of the womb: You made me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from the womb: . . . be not far from me, O Lord: O my strength, hurry to help me. . . . You have heard me from the horns of the unicorns."

Here we see His spirit trusting in God just as we must trust Him today. It is a glorious example of faith resting on the promises and faithfulness of God in the dark hour. We are apt to forget the perfect humanness of Christ in His life and death. It was as a man that He trusted and triumphed in the strength of God. He was ever dependent upon His Father just as we are dependent upon Him.

It was not through His exalted divine nature wholly that He was able to endure His sufferings, but He was in all points tempted like as we are, and sustained even as we are -- not from Himself but from His Father's supporting strength. And so He is for us the Author and Finisher of our faith. He who fought this battle once, comes still to fight it in our hearts. He who believed for Himself now believes in us, and sustains in us the spirit of trust and victory.

This is our weapon in the hour of suffering -- to believe God and trust His faithfulness and promises. "Who is among you that fears the LORD, that obeys the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." Let us go forth unto our trials in the spirit of His faith, and, like Him, we shall triumph, too.

3. We see the spirit of love. His sufferings were not for Himself. Very beautifully is this thought brought out in one of the obscure passages of the Psalm (v. 20): "Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog." What is His darling? The usual interpretation of this is "His own soul," and the Hebrew word does mean my "only one." But is it not sweeter and loftier to apply it to His beloved Church, His dear Bride, His people, for whom He died, and between whom and destruction He was standing in that awful hour? Dearer even than His own soul was your soul. He was covering you from the destroyer and holding you to His bosom while He sank to protect you from the fate He would not flee.

On a Scottish moor the shepherds found one morning, beneath a snowdrift, a slumbering babe on the naked breast of a lifeless mother. The little babe was wrapped in its robes and the mother's outer garments. As the numbness of death crept over her, she had wrapped her mantle around her babe. Death to her was less terrible when she knew her babe was safe. She was saving her darling from the power of the storm. So He sheltered us that dreadful day from the power of the dog. He bore the cruel blow -- no, gave His life itself, and we live because He died. Strange if that child could ever forget its mother's love! Years afterwards, it is said, the remembrance of that story brought that child to God.

Oh, let the memory of our Redeemer's sacrifice bind all our hearts by cords of everlasting gratitude to Him, who loved us and gave Himself for us!

4. Hope was the last bright ray upon this cloud of sorrow. Bright, indeed, it is; so bright that in its glory all the darkness has passed away forever. In a moment the cries of anguish are changed into songs and shouts of praise. As soon as He passes the gates of death, lo, all the regions of the dead resound with the announcement of His victory. "I will declare Your name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise You." And then the vision brightens until it covers all the future, until it takes in all the generations of the ransomed, and until it rises to the glory of the millennial world. He sees His ransomed people enjoying the fruits of His sorrow. "The meek shall eat and shall be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord." He sees the gift of eternal life coming to poor lost sinners, and He cries, "Your heart shall live forever."

He sees all the ends of the earth remembering and returning to the Lord. He sees all the kindreds of the nations worshiping Him. He sees the kingdoms given to the Lord, and the nations bowing beneath His scepter. He sees the proud kings of the earth submitting to His throne. He sees a seed serving Him, and a generation born from His own bosom to love and serve Him. He hears age after age re-echoing the story of His redeeming love. He sees thee, poor sinner, burdened with thy guilt, sinking in thy woe, helpless and despairing, and His heart is glad to know that thou has found in Him a Savior; and thy tears of penitence, thy songs of grateful praise, and thy service of love are recompense enough to repay even Calvary.

He sees the heathen world rescued from its idolatry and wretchedness through His precious blood shed for it. He sees that innumerable company that no man can number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, with white robes, and palms in their hands; and the distant echo of their shout, "Worthy is the Lamb," takes away the sting of death, lights up the darkness of the tomb, and enables Him, for the joy set before Him, to endure the cross, despising the shame.

Oh, shall we not join to give Him His recompense by bringing others to know Him, and sending the good news of His death and redeeming love to all mankind? It was for them He died as much as for us. They are His joy and crown as well as we. His heart bleeds at their sorrow and peril. Oh, let us rouse ourselves to do our best for their redemption, and to haste that day when He shall be crowned with the crown of all the world, and enter into the joy which comforted Him to anticipate in the hour of His agony.

Let us go from the study of this Psalm imbued with the spirit of missions and of service. It was the dying thought of Jesus to save the world. The great work in which we are now uniting all our energies was the work on His heart in the last conscious moment of His life. It was also the thought next to His heart when He was leaving the world and bidding farewell to His disciples on Olivet. Let it be our deepest, highest, latest thought.

When they told Dr. Backus, of Baltimore, that he was dying, He said: "Lift me from the bed and put me on my knees." There for the last two hours of his life he poured out his strength and soul in prayer for the heathen world. It was his last thought, his dying prayer. Like His Master, he entered into the eternal world in the spirit of missions. Oh, let it be our spirit while we live, and in it Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied!

Can we ever bear to let one drop of that precious blood be lost? Can we bear to let one soul perish that it might save? Shall we not say, like the lepers of old, when they found the camp of the enemy full of spoil, and the city they had left was dying of famine, "We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." Oh, let us not hold our peace with such a Gospel, but give it to the world, the whole world,

"Till every kindred, every tribe

On this terrestrial ball,

To Him all majesty ascribe,

And crown Him Lord of all."

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