

A Suffering Saviour

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Date: 31 August 2014

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] evening. And like this morning's Sam, Sam 45 was a royal wedding Sam. This is certainly not a royal wedding Sam. But it's probably almost entirely messianic. There is debate about whether this morning's Sam had a historical context into which it was written and it probably did have. And the same question is asked about this Sam, whether David, who wrote this Sam, was specifically thinking of a situation that he was expressing and explaining here. And that may well be the case. But it seems clearly also to be the case that he was saying more than he knew. And he was, through the inspired word, through the inspiration of the Spirit, he was prophesying, he was reaching forward into a situation that he didn't know and he didn't understand. And as a king and as a prophet in many ways, he was appending scripture and giving us the inspiration of God to this situation. Because normally the normal pattern for the Bible is that the New Testament sheds light on the Old Testament. That's the rule of thumb, is that we find the Old Testament quite difficult and things that we don't understand. But usually it's made a bit clearer when we have the understanding of the New

Testament and the life and work of Jesus and the teaching of the New Testament. And that often sheds light on the Old. We spent a number of months looking through the book of Hebrews in the New Testament and that keeps going back to the Old Testament but kind of unpacking it and explaining it and making it clearer for us and helping us to understand it. This is one of the exceptions to that. This is one of the sections of the Bible where the Old Testament sheds light on the New Testament because it's as if it's like an open door into the mind of Jesus. It's as if Jesus on the cross cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And those who heard that and those who knew that were able to say, well, that's from Psalm 22. And we go back to that. And as they did so, it opened up something to them that they previously wouldn't have known. It opened up to them some of the suffering, the mental anguish and the personal suffering of Jesus that is unparalleled in the New Testament. We simply don't get a view of Jesus Christ, God's Son, and his mental anguish in the way that we do in this Psalm. It truly is a door that is opened into the mind of God and into the mind of Jesus. It's remarkable at that level. Breathtaking. It helps us to look into the suffering, into that kind of mysterious moment in the cross in a way that the cross itself and the cross, as it's given to us in the different Gospels, doesn't allow us to do. And so Jesus on the cross cries this cry and unlocks his own mind to us by pointing us through that cry to this Psalm. And it's a remarkable Psalm.

It's really a remarkable prayer as it unfolds and as it reveals in a hugely mysterious and yet genuine way the mind of Jesus Christ. It speaks to us about his unique relationship with the Father, his God the Son, and his relationship with God the Father. And yet there's this mysterious darkness and division on the cross in the atoning work of Jesus Christ for us. It speaks about that relationship. But also at some levels for us at least is a model and an example for us of, you know, we all struggle to pray, don't we? We all struggle to understand prayer and know how to pray. Well, here's Jesus praying. He's praying intimately to his Father. And at some level for us it's an indication, a reminder to us of the kind of prayers that we can offer and the kind of things that are legitimate for us to do in prayer. And a reminder to us of the level of intensity that God wants us to have with him in prayer and not just that kind of shallow, hello God, thank you for everything today and for all your goodness, forgive all my sins, amen. And breaks us into something that's just a little bit more in our hearts and exposes our need and exposes his answers to us. So it does speak about deep suffering and it speaks also about blessing.

I had a great quote from my book and I didn't bring it with me. And it will not sound the same next week. So annoying when I do that. I had it with me. No, I'm not asking anyone to get it because they probably won't find it. But it was a great quote about suffering.

And I was going to relate that from the beginning. So I've just told you something I'm not going to do. And so you're all hugely disappointed. I'm sorry. You just have to get used to that.

[5 : 31] But anyway, suffering Christ here undergoes great suffering and the cross and verses one to 21 of the Psalm is really very clearly divided. The first half of the Psalm or the first 21 verses are very much about his suffering and the intensity and the depth and the uniqueness of his suffering. And then the second half of the Psalm from verse 22 is really much more about his praise. So it doesn't end in darkness. And it's not just about suffering.

But we're reminded that Jesus Christ here, there's no real, you know that this morning we had a two verse introduction in Sam 45 and a two verse conclusion. Nice and literally in a literary way, it was, you know, it was well modelled and it was had the correct elements to introduction, main core conclusion. This just bursts into this. It goes right to the crescendo. It goes right to the final act right at the beginning. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And it's that dramatic entrance, no introduction whatsoever. But we have the cry of all cries. There's been no cry like that ever since. There's been no cry before. This is the most unique cry that was ever made in the history of cries as Jesus Christ on the cross as it's as we're reminded in Matthew and Mark that this is Christ on the crossing. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? I've said this to you before probably several times. Martin Luther wanted to study this cry and to see if he could understand it and he went into solitude for three days without food and water. Just to pray through this and to seek God's blessing and to seek God's wisdom on this cry. And he came out from three days of that intense prayer and wrestling with God is to the meaning of the word. God forsaken of God, he said. Who can understand it? And really we can't do more than that because that reality of divine aloneness, of God, this is God, remember that we know

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in that perfect trinity of love and union and closeness and trust and faithfulness together through all eternity. And we have a concept of one of the persons in the trinity being alone, being forsaken on the edge of despair. God the Father as it were having departed from him. Just a remarkable cry if we begin to think about and consider the uniqueness of God and His nature and His character and His trinity and love and His perfections. And this is Jesus who had heard the cry earlier on or the acclamation from the heaven earlier on. This is my beloved Son who my love with them. I'm well pleased. And now this desperate cry of forsakenness. And yet in these early verses he says, my God, my God, my God three times in that first two verses he acknowledges not first his forsakenness but acknowledges first that he still belongs. God is still his God because remember Jesus is the Son of God but Jesus is also Son of Man and he has put himself in that place of trust and dependence like a perfect human being trusting in his Father. But he does that in order to be a redeemer, to be our saviour, to be our substitute. And as our sin-bearer he senses that forsakenness. That's the introduction to the Psalm. That's the theme. That's what he's laying out, this amazing sense of forsakenness.

So that's what the Psalm is about in many ways, the sense of abandonment from God. Now can we apply that to ourselves? Can we take these words and apply them to ourselves? Well almost not. Almost not because as believers we're in that place where we accept that Jesus has taken this forsakenness and abandonment so that we will not be utterly forsaken and abandoned of the Father. But there's no doubt that we can feel forsaken and it can feel abandoned and we can feel that God has left us alone. And it is a great thing to remember that Christ knows and understands and has done what he has done so that we will not and are not and never at any point are forsaken of God. That is a fundamentally significant reality for us because there will be days in our lives when we feel forsaken. We feel God is far away, we feel He's abandoned us, He's gone away and we take courage from being encouraged like Jesus to what did He do? He cried heavenward. It was a cry of desperation but He still cried heavenward and He didn't say even oh God. He said my God, there was that position of trust there still and there's time. That's what faith is actually really like. You know we talk about faith and we think of people riding on white horses and going down the street and converting thousands of people and being strong and that's not really great faith. Great faith is when you feel forsaken and you can still cry my God, my God and you still go to Him in your struggles and your fears and your lostness and it's to Him that you go because you know that that is where your hope lies and you know that that is where there will be answer for you and that's a great encouragement to us. And the early part of the Psalm is very much one of crying out despair, kind of trying to alleviate despair than falling into despair again, alleviation of despair and then answered prayer. It's a kind of it goes up and down or goes in and out and it's very similar in many ways to our lives because He moves on this utterly forsakenness, utter sense of forsakenness where He's crying out almost relentlessly and God doesn't appear to be answering Him,

He's not answering Him. And then He inverses three to five, He says, yet you're enthroned as the Holy One, you're the praise of Israel and what He does, what He tries to do here is He recalls the experience of Israel and how God had treated Israel in the past and He says just as He speaks about God three times, three times in this little section, three to five, He talks about trust, you know, in your fathers but their trust, they trusted and you delivered them and you they trusted and they were not disappointed. I mean He's playing you on to this, isn't it? That God has been faithful to His people, that there's this covenant nature of God that we've spoken a lot about in the last few weeks about this covenant, you know, linking it to the marriages that I was speaking about this morning where people take vows and make a covenant together faithfully to be exclusive in their relationship with one another. It's a covenant, it's a vow that they take and what Jesus is doing here as He speaks through David the Samist here is He's reminding us that He needs to think about this God who is a covenant keeping God in whom they trusted and when they trusted

[13 : 33] He was always faithful to them. It's kind of like a drowning man gasping for air and He goes back to the knowledge of the word and that's always important to us too. When you're struggling and when I'm struggling as Christians it's a good place to go to see how God has worked faithfully through scripture. The Bible is important to us, continues to be important. We keep opening the Bible, keep going down there, we keep plowing there, keep finding this God who in history, you know that's why it's important that we recognise the Bible is not fable, the Bible's fable will close the book, will go home. The Bible's history, the Bible's true, the Bible has contained that God's actions with people faithfully through essentially in this covenantal relationship and we remind ourselves of that. Then Jesus returns as we have His mind opened in verses 6 to 8 to despair. There's no let up for Him. It's the Son of God. It's Jesus who walked in the water. It's Jesus who tamed the water into wine and here He is, He says, look I'm a worm, not even a man, I'm scorn and He recognises not only as He feels forsaken of God but here we have, He feels forsaken by

His friends. Jesus didn't mind being forsaken by His friends, of course He did. He's a perfect human being. He loved people and people loved Him but here on the cross He's forsaken by His friends. All who see Me mock Me, the Harlots, you know that's, isn't that so, so like the crucifixion picture where there's people there mocking Him and deriding Him and even His closest friends have abandoned Him and turned their backs, you know, they said, you know, He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue Him. God is not listening to His cry. There's no let up for Him and there's this sense of being abandoned and you know, it's good to know these things because there's very often in our lives where we're let down, particularly by our fellow Christians, or let down by the people we love or let down in our family situations or let down in our job situations or people treat us badly and we think nobody, nobody really understands what I'm going through. Nobody has a clue. In the simplicity of the Psalm we're reminded that Jesus Christ absolutely knows and understands and appreciates, you know, what does God know? God knows exactly because He's had these cries being made to Him. And not only then in this kind of seesawing to and fro of God, Jesus dealing with God and thinking of God's dealings with Him and then going through His experiences, there's God's forsakenness then He remembers how God treated His people, then He feels forsaken by other people and then in verses 9 to 11

He goes back to God again in this kind of seesawing and says, Lord, You brought me out of the womb, You made me trust in You, even in my mother's breast from birth I was cast upon You, do not be far from me, for trouble is near, there's no one to help. See all this ongoing battling over trust and He says I've trusted You in the past and He appeals to not God's dealings with His people, Israel, but God's dealing with Himself in His personal life and His own experience and He remembers these words of being well pleased and He remembers God's favour and blessing on Him and He says, you know, don't be, help me, there's no one else. Again, if we're talking about a model for prayer, it's important in our lives that we don't just go back to a God of the Bible, which we might feel is a bit distant from us sometimes, an experience, but we can go back as Christians to the way God, we have been treated by God in the past, in our despairing times, we need to go back to Him and remember how He has been there for us and what He has done for us and be assured of His love and the centrality of a past personal experience. If we have no past personal experience of God, it's going to be very difficult for us to keep going when things are difficult, because we look back on these times and we appeal to these times like Jesus did for our deliverance. Do not be far from me, I am your child, have pity on me. He opens His soul and His prayer is different from ours because He alone then goes into the den of the enemy on the cross. People talk about Jesus dying and being shot and then spending three days in the grave and then being resurrected. If there are three days in the grave, there is days in hell, not so. This on the cross is three hours of darkness on the cross, that's when He is in hell, that's when He is experiencing our lostness. At the end of that experience, the unnatural darkness comes to an end and Jesus says it is finished and

He gives Himself over to death because that is part of His sacrificial work on our behalf, and He says to the thief, today you will be with me in paradise. He returns, His body remains in the grave, He returns to the Father, but the hell He experiences is on the cross.

You have that section from verses 12 to 21 where He uses pictures of wild animals to express what He is going through on the cross. Bulls of basing, which were apparently supposed to be very wild bulls that were known to the people of the time. Roaring lions, He explains some of the physical sufferings that are unique to the cross and that David couldn't really have understood or known about if it was simply David speaking. He poured out his heart, turned to wax his bones out of joint, his strength is dried up, his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth, he is laid in the dust. Dogs are a band of evil men and so they have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. People stare and gloat over me, they divide my garments among them and cast me a lot of gloat. His Christ nailed to the cross, naked to the cross. The embarrassment and the shame of people just staring and gloating over him. He said he was the Saviour. Let him call the Moses and bring him down from the cross. All of that is just an insight into the mind of Christ at that point as he experiences not just the animosity and the vigorous hatred of his enemies and those around him, but the darkness symbolised, the darkness of hell symbolised by these wild animals, terrorised the rage of hell that is poured out against him where he does know not only the forsakenness of God but the full power of evil and darkness. You know, in nearly every film that has ever been made, every book that has ever been written has got evil and good connotations haven't they? And the best books are the books where good triumphs over evil are like a good story, we are all like a good ending. This is where it comes from. The reality is that that is the reality of the universe in which we live, but that is not an equal battle between good and evil, is that Christ was always going to defeat the power of death and the grave and sin and evil on the cross, but the cost was remarkably great and we should never forget that. And we shouldn't simply just shrug our shoulders and say, yeah I am a Christian, yeah I follow Jesus. We should take time to think about the

[21 : 38] Son of God, the reality of the eternal Son of God and the Trinity of God ripped apart in this incredibly deep way in order for us to be saved. You know, there is nothing I can say about verses 12 to 21. It is just horrendous. The curtain is pulled back, you know they talk about the curtain being ripped in two and Christ died from top to bottom, soon after we had access, it was opened into the Holy of Holies. Well, I don't think I can pull back this curtain. I don't think we can understand what Jesus went through on the cross, even though we are given some words here that in His mercy and grace He tries to give us to express what He felt like. You know, and so in our Scottish Christianity we have so much of the stiff upper lip and everything is good and everything is okay and we will muddle on by. And He is God's Son and He is expressing despair and humiliation and horror and lostness because He was doing it for us. We really need to recognise that and allow ourselves, especially in His presence, to express these things ourselves and our struggles and our depths and our difficulties. And even at one level I think it wouldn't be a bad thing to, in a guarded way, with one another, at least with some that we are particularly close to, that we can express our struggles because that is the beginning of healing for us. So I just want to finish very briefly just with that and I will be brief because I know we want to be away sharp tonight because the fireworks are on the castle and we'll be closing roads and all that kind of stuff. So if you've got a car in your trailer you might not want to, I'll not get too much inspiration, preach too much longer.

But I just close with this wonderful triumphant end to the Psalm 22-31 and it's an absolutely essential part of the Psalm, is that it doesn't end in the forsakenness and in the darkness but we know and we appreciate and we recognise that God is the one who listens to Him. And verse 24 he says, you know, I will declare your praise, you fear the Lord praise Him, we're coming round to praise and redemption, He is not despised nor redeemed, the suffering of the afflicted one, He is not hidden in His face, He is listened to His cry for help.

It didn't seem like that did it? And there's a sense in which He didn't answer Him at the point of His greatest need on the cross but God did listen and God did respond in the recognition of what Jesus Christ had done, He had overcome evil and death, His sacrifice was pleasing and acceptable to God and God raised Him from the dead. That ultimate act of trust on Jesus' part as He moves and separates His body and soul and Father resurrects the body and returns it to its soul and God listened to Him and as a result His people will sing His praises and it's great that that holds. The first section is amazingly individual and it's God, Jesus Christ and His intense suffering and His close relationship with the Father and it's brokenness and the forsakenness and the questions and the doubts that come from that. The second section in praise is all about praising with the people and because

He brings in salvation the people with Him. He hasn't done it for Himself, He's done it for His people and so there's this great sense in which you know all the ends of the earth will remember come the theme of my praise and the great assembly, all the riches will worship and generation is for, there's this His people, He's done it for His people, He's done it for you and me. He's done it because He loves us and because through what He has done we will live and that is the great theme of God's praise is that God has done this for a people, for a people who will be redeemed, love greater love is no man than this, they lay down His life with His friends and He's done this so that we can live and that we can overcome and that we can serve. Now we know that in this period, we mentioned this this morning, there's struggles and battles, Jesus first and Jesus second coming, we recognise that, recognise the time of the already and the not yet, we recognise that He's yet to come and bring us home, but we recognise He's ascended and He's enthroned and He's sovereign and that in this period we share with His sufferings, never to His degree, but we suffer because we're Christians, we suffer because we have life and because the life in us battles with the death that remains in us and that's a struggle, sin and the grave, we suffer because we stand up and our Christians in a world that sometimes persecutes Christians or rejects

Him and we suffer because we have an enemy, a spiritual enemy thrashes out and wants to destroy and defeat us and so Peter says in 1 Peter 4, do not be surprised at the painful trial you're suffering but rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed and we look forward to that glory and to see things much more clearly than we do now because the Bible makes clear we see only but through a glass darkly and I'm sure you feel that, I certainly feel it, great deal, it's a battle and it's a struggle and we just, it's like, you know, I've been wearing contact lenses for 30 years and sometimes they get really cloudy and I can't see very well and it was really frustrating but even worse than that is I'm getting blinder by the day so I don't need contact lenses, I need glasses as well and I'll need binoculars and I'll need telescopes and you just don't see that clearly, you get older, I hope spiritually as we get older actually we should see better, physically we see less but I hope spiritually we see more but even at the best we only are seeing through a glass darkly and the Bible remains but then we will see face to face, then we will see Him as He is and this will make much more sense to us and His suffering will be something that we will praise God for but this is a reminder to us of prayer and of what Jesus Christ has done for us and of the nature of our own prayers and the legitimacy of asking why, you know, it's a good and a legitimate question and many times we will not have the answer but we will trust but we are legitimately allowed to cry out to the living God and ask Him why because His

[29 : 25] Son did that on the cross and we can do that also, we are not know-it-alls and we are not expected to know-it-all, we're expected to trust and maybe that we can go from here and trust Him, Amen. Father God help us to trust You better, help us to understand more clearly, forgive us when the blindness that we have is not because we are in a period when it's not clear but sometimes the blindness is there because we choose not to see, we choose to look the other way, we choose to fill our vision with worldly things that will choke as it were our vision and stop us seeing clearly and will make our spiritual vision misty and blurred but help us to see as clearly as we can by faith and to be transformed and to be seen clearer as time goes on and remind us that there will be many times that we are simply asked in all our ordinariness just to trust and that You as God on the cross appealed to that faith and that trust and we do so also tonight and I say to you to help everyone here in the week in which they've entered to trust you and to put their faith in this great God Jesus Christ who once for all died to defeat the power of the grave and who did so at great cost and Lord maybe not take that for granted and maybe we not abuse it but encourage us and build us up and help us to praise you in the way that

He was able to come round to praise you for His resurrection and ascension and His victory once for all. For Jesus' sake, Amen.