



1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? 2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. (Psalms 22:1-2)

A brilliant sunrise broke the eastern horizon and flooded the surrounding Judean hills with a golden glow – a glow that was facilitated by the vapors of the dews and damps of the morning. It seemed to be yet another beautiful spring day on this morning just before the Passover in Jerusalem. Budding flora of various stages of new growth punctuated the stone walls of a pathway that led out to the Lion’s Gate of the western wall – a pathway that would later be called the Via Dolorosa, or Way of Suffering, owing to the strange and earth-shattering event that was about to transpire. But there was an eerie and disturbing restlessness about the city. Roman soldiers in leather girdles and breastplates of gleaming brass had been dispatched to the Hill of the Skull (Golgotha) outside the gates of Jerusalem as they always had been when a desperate criminal was about to suffer death for his wickedness. This detail of soldiers were those who prepared the instruments of torture and death for those unfortunate ones who would suffer crucifixion – a horrible, slow, and humiliating death.

Visitors approaching the Lion’s Gate along that desponding route were made curious at the unseemly uproar that was sounding from within the Gate – it seemed to be coming from the Roman governor’s courtyard. The voices were harsh and militant. *“Crucify Him! Crucify Him! His blood be upon us and upon our children!”* *“This must be a most outrageous murderer and depraved criminal to provoke such anger,”* thought the visitors approaching the city. A great commotion was begun as the Via Dolorosa ahead filled with Roman soldiers and a variety of people – men, women and children – some chanting victoriously and some, mostly the women of Jerusalem, weeping bitterly. A dull, grinding sound came from the midst of the procession. The source of that sound was soon discernible in the form of what appeared to be a man (it was hard to tell for the abundance of blood that covered His visage) dragging a cross down the Via Dolorosa toward the Lion’s Gate and the Hill of the Skull! Soldiers flanked either side of the man and pitilessly beat him with whips at every step.

It was only appropriate He should depart Jerusalem from the Lion's Gate, for this Man was the Lion of Judah (another name for Jesus Christ). It would be inexcusable that any in Jerusalem would not have known Him from the enormous amount of mention made of Him in the Law and the Prophets. *For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.* (Hosea 5:14-15) Needless to say, some years following (70 AD) Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Roman siege of the city – not a single stone was left unturned.

The scene was in complete contrast with the otherwise radiant beauty of the morning. The contrasts were noteworthy and unsettling. Later investigation revealed that the Man sentenced to die had been a kind and gentle fellow who went about doing only good in healing and blessing the people of Israel. He had never lifted His voice in cursing or condemning. He had been accused of insurrection by the religious leaders of Jerusalem, yet He was pronounced an innocent Man by Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Inexplicably, the Man was to be put to death anyway – even after being pronounced innocent by the secular power.

Haltingly, the little procession continued to the base of the Hill, and the poor wretched Man bearing His rough-hewn cross stumble in exhaustion and weakness from loss of blood. The soldier's whip was not sufficient to induce the man to rise from His kneeling position under the cross. Another was randomly ordered from the crowd to carry the fallen Man's cross – Simon of Cyrene! Jesus bore His cross for you and me. Would it not be a blessing to be granted the privilege of bearing His cross for Him! But that is the commandment that Jesus gave each of us as well. On a much fairer day, did He not command: ***If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*** (Luke 9:23) That cross of Jesus is also our own!

So it is now that we come to the opening line of our Psalm under study: *1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* (Psalms 22:1) Jesus suffered a torment far greater than we can comprehend. It amounted to a greater torment than any fires of hell could have inflicted. He was abandoned by His closest friends and disciples. He was betrayed by one who knew Him well enough to love Him, yet he turned Him over to His enemies. He was falsely accused, and pronounced innocent in a Roman court; and yet, He was nonetheless crucified.

Jesus was not only free of any sin whatsoever, He was also modest in His moral constitution. He was Holy, and taught men to be so. Yet, He is stripped completely naked before a crowd of men and women at Golgotha and displayed for all to see on the cross. How this must have offended His tender sensibilities! He was full of virtue and goodness, yet treated as the most villainous of creatures who ever lived among mankind. The pain of His friends betrayal and abandonment was a great torture to Him; but not only that, but the torture of the accumulated sins of all mankind – even of yours and mine – bore upon His sinless countenance on the cross that day. *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:3-5) When I behold the Lord Jesus Christ on that terrible cross – a cross that rightfully belongs to me (and not to Him) – I am made acutely aware of my depravity and keenly sensible of my grave sins.

The opening lines of this Psalm may be misconstrued to claim that Jesus was

victimized – He was NOT! He went to that horrid cross with willing intent and the concurrence of the Father. He never hesitated to continue to that final sacrifice. His manly will would have shunned such an ordeal, but it was not HIS will that compelled Him. It was His love and obedience to that will of the Father that compelled Him to Calvary. At any point, He could have refused and been spared, but He never wavered. His plaintive plea from the cross was not unlike His prayer in the Garden at Gethsemane the night before: *O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.* (Matt 26:42) Such a plea was not uttered out of weakness, but out of strength. In His dark despondency and pain, would it not have seemed that even the Father had forsaken Him just as all others of His close companions? But this was an exclamation of grief and not of substance. We often feel that even God has abandoned us, but deep in our hearts, we know that is not even possible.

It is true that God had momentarily turned away His face from His beloved Son in anguish of Spirit. It was as a great a pain for the Father to behold the irreverence and cruelty with which His only Begotten Son was treated as it was for Jesus! Furthermore, God cannot look upon sin, and the sins of the world were taken upon the shoulders of Christ on that cruel cross. What a contrast – the only purely innocent Man to ever live having every wicked and evil sin of eternity past and future billed to His credit during those long hours of suffering that day.

“O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.” God’s love for His only Begotten Son did not eclipse the unmerited love He had for those who had accepted, and will accept, the promise made unto Abraham. God is Holy, and even His love cannot abrogate that truth. His Son, too, had willingly accepted all that His Father had proclaimed – it was a JOINT-VENTURE! Our Lord had cried out in His solitude the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane (in the night season) to His Father. But no answer came – for it had already been decreed. It is very much like loving parents hearing their child plead for mercy when undergoing some painful medical procedure that will save the child’s life. What answer can such parents give. What answer could God make to His pleading Son in the Garden, or from the cross?

Please observe the beauty of the Lord’s Gethsemane Prayer that includes you and me as well as countless others: *20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.* (John 17:20-26)

Like the disciples and close confidants of the Lord, you and I were there too, standing afar off, watching as Jesus died for you and me – the just for the unjust. What will you do about that, friend?

PSALM 22

To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David.

- 1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*
- 2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.
- 3 But thou *art* holy, O *thou* that inhabitest the praises of Israel.
- 4 Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.
- 5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.
- 6 But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.
- 7 All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying,*
- 8 He trusted on the LORD *that* he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.
- 9 But thou *art* he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope *when I was* upon my mother's breasts.
- 10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother's belly.
- 11 Be not far from me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help.
- 12 Many bulls have compassed me: strong *bulls* of Bashan have beset me round.
- 13 They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, *as* a ravening and a roaring lion.
- 14 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.
- 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.
- 16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.
- 17 I may tell all my bones: they look *and* stare upon me.
- 18 They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.
- 19 But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me.
- 20 Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.
- 21 Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.
- 22 I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.
- 23 Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.
- 24 For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.
- 25 My praise *shall be* of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.
- 26 The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.
- 27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.
- 28 For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S: and he *is* the governor among the nations.
- 29 All *they that be* fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.
- 30 A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.
- 31 They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done *this*.