

More insight into Jesus' inner life from the Psalms

(Psalm 31)

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Introduction: As a matter of faith in God's Word, I believe that our story has an Author! Do you believe "your story" has an author? Or does your story seem to be more about chaos and haphazard chance?

- According to Scripture our life stories do have an Author, who amazingly allows us to have a say in the script! Yet He also remains amazingly in charge because He sets limits on what we can do (thank God for that!). I also believe, thanks to the Gospel, that difficult chapters in our lives don't have to be the ones that define us, because even the broken areas of our lives can be redeemed. That's the paradoxical power of our Savior, who was broken for us!
- So why would we set our sights on something less than what God wants for us? Because we think we know better how to satisfy our hearts! What we desperately need in the story of our lives is good role models to steer us in the right direction, because we *know* we'll have to face some serious difficulties, adversities, and trials somewhere along the line.
- We need good guides and role models, stable reference points, steady pace-setters, trustworthy path-finders, reliable teachers, and Jesus was all those things rolled into one, in the highest form even when it came to the worst conditions! Even through the most intense suffering, He kept setting the best example, showing us the way. With His redemptive suffering, He redeemed all our suffering and brokenness. So the writer to the Heb. says, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of the faith" – that's how we need to run the race: constantly focused on Him!
- We're finishing our series today on Jesus' use of the Psalms, and we've come to the final day of His earthly life, where we'll see Him again turning to the Psalms, even at His trial and hanging on the cross.

A) We begin in Matt. 26:64, when Jesus has been arrested in the wee hours of the morning and taken from the Garden of Gethsemane to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest.

- After a number of false witnesses came forward who couldn't agree on the charges against Jesus, two finally came up with the accusation that Jesus had claimed to be able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. When Jesus had nothing to say in response to the charges, the high priest got flustered and stood up to try to pry an answer out of Him: "What is this testimony these men are bringing against you? Why won't you answer?" But Jesus still remained silent.

- So the high priest charged Him under oath by the living God to tell them if He was the Christ, Son of God. Jesus didn't mince words. He responded with "You said it" (an Aramaic idiom meaning "It is as you say"). Then He added: "But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven!" In the first part of this affirmation, Jesus alludes to Psalm 110:1, which we've looked at before, combining it with another messianic passage from Daniel 7:13 about the Son of Man coming on the clouds. These two constituted nothing less than a claim to divinity.

- For Jesus the Old Testament was like a photo album with portraits of the coming Messiah all through it, and Jesus knew how to put those together. He knew Himself according to God's Word, not according to what His culture said or what other people thought. (The disciples would quote from Psalm 110 extensively in their early preaching, as would the writer of Hebrews.) This truth about Jesus represented their conviction from the time of His resurrection; it was not a doctrine that slowly developed over the centuries (as higher critics of the Bible hold): they knew Jesus to be not only Messiah, but God in the flesh! That's why they worshiped Him from the time of His resurrection.

- The reaction of the high priest to Jesus' words indicated that he clearly understood Jesus' claim – that He was the Messiah who would be honored at the right hand of God; so he shouted "Blasphemy!" And most of the Jewish Council joined in immediately, condemning Jesus as worthy of death, spitting in His face, striking, slapping, and ridiculing Him.

- In that society, a person of high rank who put someone on his right hand was giving him equal honor with himself, recognizing him as possessing equal dignity and authority. This is what the Apostle Paul writes about Jesus in Eph. 1:19-21, as he prayed that believers might know "the surpassing greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty strength which He exerted in Christ in raising Him from the dead and **seating Him at His right hand** in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in this world, but also in the coming age" [see this same phrase used also in Acts 2:33, 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34, Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; 1 Pe. 3:22].

- "God's right hand" actually refers to the Messiah Himself, not just in the sense that Jesus is God's right-hand man, but that **Jesus IS God's Right Hand** (Ps. 118:15-16, "The LORD's right hand has done mighty things. The LORD's right hand is lifted high"). This was how Jesus understood His role: **only God's right hand** could crush the evil one who had enslaved humanity; only God's right hand could expose the dark principalities and powers for who they were; only God's right hand could triumph over them in the cross, bearing up under such awful cruelty and shame with forgiveness and grace. Even as we cursed Him with disgrace, Jesus was blessing us with grace, because He is the very Right Hand of God, true King of glory (Rev. 3:21 says that when Jesus overcame, He sat down **with the Father on His throne**).

B) Jesus' next to last reference to the Psalms, according to the Gospel accounts, is perhaps the most difficult, found in Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34, where, after several hours on the cross, Jesus quoted from Psalm 22 to express His anguish: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

- The Psalms give us a voice when we are hurting and broken. But to understand what Jesus was going through, it's again a matter of looking at the whole Psalm, as we've seen in previous weeks. All of Psalm 22 was messianic and prophetic. We've noticed multiple times how the gospels point to the Psalms as the key to Jesus' own self-understanding, so in this passage we see Jesus on the cross in agony, "sifting his suffering through the sieve" of Psalm 22.

- Matthew and Mark make no commentary and give no clues as to how to understand this saying from the cross, nor do any of the New Testament theological "heavyweights" (Peter, John, or Paul). However, we can take one hint from Paul's word in 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting men's trespasses against them." From this emphasis we can clearly deduce that God did not abandon Jesus, but the only place in the Bible we can go for more details is Psalm 22 itself. There we find **the inner struggle of Jesus' soul** portrayed in graphic detail through David's experiences as the anointed one of his day, used of the Holy Spirit to foretell how it would go with the Messiah.

- After the initial cry of pain with which the Psalm begins, David continues his prayer by remembering how his forefathers trusted in God and found deliverance, whereas he himself is the object of constant scorn, mocking, and insults from those who despise him. He then remembers how "from my mother's womb you have been my God," certainly the case of Jesus as well, but he feels surrounded by strong bulls and roaring lions: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; I am laid in the dust of death ... They have pierced my hands and my feet ... people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" (which John saw at the foot of the cross and recorded in Jn. 19:24).

- All this describes what Jesus Himself was going through as He hung on the cross: the physical pain and desperation (slowly "drowning"), the feeling of sinking into an abyss of darkness, emotionally drained by the mockery, humiliation and rejection. But Jesus knew this suffering was to be His long before it happened, because He knew this Psalm by heart, having sung it in the synagogue. He knew it was about Him, and it's very unlikely that He quoted only the first line, but rather the whole Psalm gave Him His voice for expressing His anguish and a way to work through the agony.

- Then in v. 22, David's meditation takes a new turn: "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you ... For **he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face** from him, but has listened to his cry for help." What a comfort it was for Jesus to come to that line! So God clearly did NOT hide His face from His Anointed One while He suffered on our behalf.

- For our sakes He was utterly broken, as this Psalm especially reveals. We are all broken due to our sin, and life's circumstances gradually reveal our brokenness to us; we cannot fix ourselves. But Jesus had no sin of His own, so His brokenness was totally because of ours: He was graciously accepting our brokenness as His own, bearing it for our sakes, that we might find our comfort and redemption in His suffering and overcoming. So this Psalm reveals the depths of His suffering for us even more than the Gospels! It felt like abandonment, hopelessness, an unbearable crushing,

but Jesus sifted those feelings, not through selfish or fleshly perspectives, but through God's Word. What a perfect example for us!

- So the Psalms (which His Spirit had inspired) gave Jesus a voice in the midst of His suffering, just as they give us a voice, a way to express our agony, when it feels as though life is going to crush us. The Psalms provide **a way to turn our pain and despair into prayer**, dialogue with the Almighty, so that we can take hold of His grace and access His presence and power for our darkest valleys and hardest trials.

C) The last words from Jesus' lips were a reference to the Psalms, according to Luke 23:46, when He committed His Spirit to the Father, quoting Psalm 31:5: "Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth." This was undoubtedly the Psalm He was meditating on in His final moments, again a Psalm of David that reflected *his* suffering as God's anointed one for his times.

- The entire Psalm reflected the agony of Jesus' soul as He died. But Jesus knew how the story ended long before He came to the cross. He knew that **in order to redeem us, He would have to put Himself in the position of needing redemption!** In order to save us, He would have to put Himself in need of rescue.

- There's no greater moment of weakness than when we are dying, yet in His greatest physical weakness, that's when Christ was **most powerful to save!** In His weakness God's power was made perfect to carry out our salvation. This is the amazing paradox of God's way over our way, and Jesus is our perfect role model, so we need to fix our eyes on Him!

- What does this mean for "our story"? That paradox is how we access the transformation Jesus won for us on that cross, because **we can be transformed only by that same paradox:** not by exercising all our will power and strength and obedience for God's sake, but by simply confessing our weakness and surrendering to Jesus at the cross. When we are willing to acknowledge our weakness, only then can we experience His strength.

- In Php. 3:10, Paul expressed it like this: "I want to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made like him in his death." There's no experience of the power of resurrection apart from the fellowship of His sufferings. So Christian discipleship is about **reconstructing my mental and emotional habits** to look like His – so that my inner life becomes "cruciform" (Ann Voskamp), and even under the worst of circumstances, I will continue to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit. Meditating on the Psalms will help me experience that!

- Dwelling on Jesus' inner life as reflected in the Psalms will help remake my inner life according to His way, His Word, His image. This is why the New Testament writers continually used the book of Psalms, following the example of their Master, **to fix our gaze on the excellencies of Christ**, on the majesty, beauty, and glory of the One who through His humiliation and exaltation reigns over our world, so that your story could find its fulfillment in His story! He's God's Right Hand! So obviously His RULE is your SALVATION – let Him be the Author and Finisher of your story!