

The Tree Which Makes Bitter Waters Sweet

March 29, 2024
Good Friday
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Psalm 22:1-11 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? *Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?* ² O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. ³ But You *are* holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. ⁴ Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. ⁵ They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed. ⁶ But I *am* a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. ⁷ All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*, ⁸ "He trusted¹ in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" ⁹ But You *are* He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust *while* on My mother's breasts. ¹⁰ I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You *have been* My God. ¹¹ Be not far from Me, For trouble *is* near; For *there is* none to help.

At Marah the Israelites found water but they could not drink it because it was bitter. The Lord showed Moses a particular tree. This wasn't just any tree, but one in particular which God chose. Moses cut it down and when he put it in the water, the water became sweet.

Today God has shown us a tree which makes the bitter waters of our lives sweet. If you look at Psalm 22, you'll see how the psalmist looks to the cross to find sweetness in the bitterness of life.

Psalm 22 moves back and forth between the "I" sentences and the "you" sentences. The "I" sentences describe the bitterness of life and the "you" sentences look to God and his promises.

Verses 1-5

In the first two verses you have the deep bitterness of someone in a life or situation where they are suffering deeply. So great is his agony that he accuses God of forsaking/forgetting about him. Continually he offers prayers to God, but they don't seem to do any good.

Opposed to this bitter suffering in verse three is the faithfulness of God.

The Psalmist declares of God "You are holy." This holiness is not the righteousness of the just God. That is to say it is not because God judges sin. That wouldn't be much comfort in our suffering. Job's friends tried to speak this way to Job. God is holy therefore if you are suffering you must have sinned. That wasn't very comforting to Job, and it wouldn't be to us. Rather the holiness the psalmist speaks of here is pointing to God's faithfulness. You have made these promises and because you are holy you will fulfill your promises.

The psalmist refers to this faithfulness in the next verse.

"They trusted, and you delivered the."

"They trusted in You and were not ashamed."

The "they" here refers to all the heroes of faith. In his suffering David finds comfort in the stories of God's people and how God was with them and delivered them.

We are taught how to find comfort in the midst of great suffering. We go back to the scriptures. Back to the examples of the God's people. We see how though they suffered for a short time, but in his own time and for his own reasons God delivered them.

Ultimately these words were spoken by Christ on the cross. Jesus cried out "My God why have you forsaken me." The bitterness of this life might make us think that God has forsaken us but really these words are only true of Christ. God forsook him and not us. Although we may indeed think these words are true sometimes, the cross of Christ removes the bitterness of our suffering by reassuring us that these words are not true for us. They were true for Christ, God forsook him, so that he would never have to forsake us.

Verses 6-10

In these verses the Psalmist feels as though he himself is worthless. His life is worthless. All that he has ever done is empty. He has no friends. His life has no meaning.

These feelings of worthlessness are in some ways much harder than suffering. If there is some suffering in your life you know you just have to get through it. In the midst of depression it often feels it will never go away.

Once again David turns to the cross, to the messiah to remove this bitterness from his life. In opposition to these thoughts of worthlessness comes the truth that God is our creator and redeemer.

David confesses "You took me out of the womb."

David knew that he is a creation of God and that God knew what he was doing. God made you and God doesn't make junk.

More than that David confesses, "I was cast upon you from birth." These words indicate that he was made a child of God and that this was not his doing.

The Israelites were circumcised on the eighth day marking them as God's children. Most of us were baptized as children, again marking us as belonging to God.

Isaiah 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine

We belong to the Lord, and he values us, even if everyone else treats us like trash. We have full confidence that we are not worthless. We were created by God and God cherished us enough to pay the price to make us his own.

As Luther reminds us you were bought "**not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and his innocent sufferings and death.**"

Once again like the Psalmist we are often tempted to think these words of worthlessness are true of us. Once again, they do not describe our life but Christ on the cross.

He was ridiculed. He was mocked. He was despised and rejected. He was "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief," because it is true of him it is not true of us.

Jesus is rejected, mocked and abandoned, but we heard in our gospel reading how Mary his mother was not. Even in his agony Jesus provided for her.

The cross is the tree that removes the bitterness of our feelings of worthlessness reassuring us that Jesus values us.

The cross of Christ removes the bitterness from our life even to the bitterness of death.

Psalm 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.

"It is finished" Jesus cried and with those words removed forever the fear of death.

The fear of death comes from the guilt of our sin, and the punishment that we deserve. Christ's words declare that the punishment is paid. The full wrath of God was spent on Christ while he hung on that cross, because of this no punishment remains for us to fear. Our sin is forgiven.

Perhaps you remember as a kid, being in dread of what punishment you would get for something you did wrong. Yet what a relief when the punishment was over. There was no longer anything to be afraid of.

Here is a tree that gives sweetness to what would otherwise be a bitter life. In the bitterness of life, we come to the cross of Christ to receive the joy of his grace and salvation. His tree removes the bitterness from our life and gives us the water of life. Amen