Psalms - Commentaries by Edward Acomb

Thoughts Upon Psalm 22, Psalm 22, Thoughts Upon (22:21-31)

The holy Sufferer and forsaken One is heard from the horns of the unicorns: "save Me from the lion's mouth: for Thou hast heard Me from the horns of the unicorns." v. 21. And so the work being finished, redemption accomplished, Satan vanquished, death robbed of its sting, and the grave of its victory, God raises the Blessed One up from among the dead; then immediately that mighty conqueror began to dispense the spoils of the victory: "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee." This was literally fulfilled when Jesus said to Mary after He arose, "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." John 20:17. Raised up from the low depths of that death, and standing in resurrection, it was His great joy to bring His people into a new relationship with Himself, and declare the Father's name in a way that it had never been declared before. Blessed family oneness is expressed in those words, "My Father, and your Father... My God, and your God." He is not ashamed to call us brethren, saying, "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee. "Heb. 2:12.

Is there not something inconceivably precious in the thought that this was the first act after He arose from the dead—to declare the Father's name to His brethren, and to make them acquainted with the fact of their new place before God in family association with Himself? Hitherto His disciples had been members of a nation which had been brought into outward nearness to God, and who were individually the people of God. Now they are brought into corporate family oneness with the risen Lord Himself. If we remembered this on every occasion when gathered together to celebrate His praise, how high and holy our strains would be, and how sweet would be the flowing forth of that which God delights to accept from grateful hearts.

But, it is not the purpose of our psalm to introduce us into all the glories belonging to the Church, and the calling and privileges of it. In fact the Church is not the subject of the psalm; it simply states in the 22nd verse, Christ speaking prophetically of Himself, that He would declare the Father's name to His brethren, and sing praises in the midst of the congregation, which is interpreted as the Church (Heb. 2:12). Then it passes on with what the psalm is occupied with, that is, Israel's restoration and blessing, and the nation's and the earth's blessing in the millennial period yet to come, when "the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that

day shall there be one Lord, and His name one." Zech. 14:9. Then it shall be said, "Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel." Psalm 22:23. This evidently takes us into the "age to come"—not into eternity, for nationalities cease there, but into the "age to come," when Christ shall have taken away the joint-heirs to glory, and have returned with them to judge the living, restored Israel, and those saved of the nations, when Satan shall be bound, and "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

It is this that our psalm points to, from verse 23 to the

end. And how interesting to know that this present sin-blighted scene shall be so relieved and refreshed under the righteous sway of the rightful King. Not only will God bring the now scattered tribes of Israel from the north and the south, from the east and the west (Isa. 43:5, 6) and establish them in their own land, and make Jerusalem the joy of the whole earth, but He will also bless the saved nations, and cause them to serve and worship the King—the Lord of Hosts that reigns in Mount Zion. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's: and He is the governor among the nations." And what then? "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear Him." Here it refers not to the Church, as in verse 22, but to the mighty millennial gatherings, when the center of the nation's and Israel's gatherings shall be "Zion the city of the great King," and the King Himself the object of universal adoration. Blessed time! Blessed release from Satan's power!

Then waves of blessing shall roll forth from the grand center until they have reached the utmost limits of the King's vast domains. His kingdom shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, and the tide of blessing shall wash the utmost limits. These will not be waves of demoralizing evil, but those of wondrous ennobling and exalting blessing, which shall result in the acknowledgment of the supremacy and worthiness of the One who is then reigning.

Blessed are the purposes of God! He will not stop until all is found in blessed acknowledgment of that once lowly Lord Jesus, for it is the mystery of His will that He has so graciously made known to us, "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him." Eph. 1:10. God has purposed that His dear Son, the once rejected and cast-out Jesus, should be the grand center of heavenly and earthly glory, that every nation of the earth should worship Him (Zech. 14:16), and that the angels of God should be ascending and descending upon Him (John 1:51). Thus God will honor the One who honored Him even to death!

But in contemplating this vast scene of coming glory, we do well to remember that it is the fruit of the death of the cross that God's blessed Son endured. All is based upon and flows from that death and the atonement made by it. There can be no blessing for the fallen race and a sin-blighted creation apart from the cross. It had to be endured first, by the very Son of God, with the bearing of the judgment and the forsaking. And then blessings infinite and universal can flow forth without a hindrance; yes, the whole scene shall exult in blessing under the righteous scepter of the King of kings.

Thus does this wonderful psalm introduce us to not only the ground of blessing—the forsaking and the wrath-bearing of Christ upon the cross, but it also spreads before us the whole scene of future millennial blessing and glory, the precious fruit of that Cross endured by Him. Then,

not only shall the heavens adore and worship Him, but everything beneath the sun shall bow down before Him and own Him Lord of all.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the once-rejected but now enthroned One, He is worthy, worthy of all!

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Thoughts Upon Psalm 22, Psalm 22, Thoughts Upon (22:1-20)

This beautiful psalm at once opens up to us a scene which to every Christian must be especially precious, that is, "the cross." But then, it is the cross in connection with the awful question of sin-bearing, and the consequent forsaking of Christ on the part of God. There are several ways in which we can look at the cross and the Blessed One who hung there—ways which tell out the fullness of that scene which can never be forgotten in time or eternity.

There are at least five ways of looking at that scene. In the first place, we see the expression of human guilt in the crucifying of the Lord Jesus Christ. From man's standpoint we see it to be but the unfolding of the human heart—terrible, desperate wickedness!

Viewing the cross in this way, we see the true state of ourselves naturally. It tells me what I am as a part of that old creation that failed to appreciate the Holy Son of God when He came down here in perfect grace and love. Man showed his contempt of God's Christ by putting Him on the cross as a malefactor. Oh! how awful is this disclosure of man—this expression of the state of his heart. It is here we see that not only is the fruit of the tree corrupt, but the tree itself. Man is that tree; a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.

When the representatives of the human family raised up the Son of God upon the cross, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us," the trial of man was finished, and the verdict of heaven was returned—"the whole world standeth guilty before God." He now sees the first Adam creation as an utterly ruined thing, under condemnation. The Lord in view of the cross had decided this when He said, "Now is the judgment of this world" John 12:31.

Secondly, we may view the cross as the expression of Satan's hatred and seeming triumph. It was there that he bruised the heel of the seed of the woman, but his seeming triumph was to return upon his own head in everlasting defeat. The judgment of the first Adam race was expressed there and the ground of Satan's defeat (and his being banished from God's domains forever) was found there also. Christ had said in view of the cross, the scene of His conflict with death, and Him who had the power of death: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" John 12:31. The head of the serpent was bruised even at the time of his seeming triumph. Blessed be God, all the powers of darkness were foiled; every foe of God and man was conquered when that Holy One gave His brow to the thorns, His hands to the nails, and bowed His head and died! On the third day He stands in resurrection—the proof of His having vanquished all. All praise be to His peerless name!

Thirdly, in Christ's going to the cross we see His perfect love and obedience expressed to the Father. This is told out in the two following scriptures: "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." John 14:30, 31. "Wherefore, when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, 0 God." Heb. 10:5-7. From the manger to the cross we see in the blessed Lord Jesus one continuous display of perfect love and obedience to the Father. He was in life a whole "meat offering" (Lev. 2), and in death—that death viewed as the expression of His love and obedience to God—a perfect burnt offering, "an offering... of a sweet savor unto the Lord" (Lev. 1). Fragrant with frankincense was that sacrifice, and appreciated by God the Father with an infinite appreciation. The cross, viewed in this way, was the culminating point of Christ's love and obedience to God. He could go no farther down in the path of self-surrender—He had reached the lowest possible point—the lowest possible depth! And all this was as a matter of love and obedience, that the world might know that He loved the Father, and that the heart of the Father might be satisfied and refreshed by such an expression of love and obedience in man. The first Adam had failed in love and obedience; here was a recompense for it all, in the last Adam. God is satisfied. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:9-11. This is the glorious answer of God to the love and obedience of His dear Son. He went down to the lowest depth; now He is raised to the highest possible height. Shall not our hearts exclaim, He is worthy! He is worthy!

In the fourth place, we view the cross as the infinite expression of God's love to a guilty world. As it is written: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. Here God makes known to a guilty world the fact that He loves it. He shows them His heart! Precious display of God! Blessed making known of the love of His heart! It was unasked for, and undeserved, yet His heart is seen exhibiting itself—flowing out in the gift of His Son. Unworthy man is the object toward which this love is shown and toward which it flowed in all its mighty fullness.

Creation might display His power and wisdom, and Providence His beneficence toward His creatures, but it is in the gift of His only begotten Son that we learn the fullness of His love toward guilty, lost and undone man. God, standing upon the lofty height of His throne, viewed man in his ruin and misery, and loved him. His dear Son was given up to express that love, so infinite and so boundless. God's delight from all eternity was given up as proof of that love. The Father would give that bosom companion up that poor sinners might know that He loved them. Oh! how overwhelming is the thought of all this—this display of pure, infinite, and undeserved love on the part of an offended God. May we know its blessed actuating power in our souls; may it constrain us to yield ourselves unreservedly to Him who loved us even unto death!

The fifth way in which we may view the cross is as the place where the great question of sin was settled between God and Christ, the sinner's substitute. It is by viewing the cross in that light that we are brought back to the 22nd psalm, where we see the blessed Lord in the

circumstances of a sin-bearer. How solemn are the opening words: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? 0 My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." Could anything be more solemn? From all eternity up to this moment there had been not a single bit of distance between God and His dear Son, but here, all was changed. It was, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and, "Thou hearest Me not." Why this change? Had the Son faltered? Had the Father's joy in His Son diminished? Neither. What then? Sin was in question. Christ had taken the sinner's place; sins and iniquities were laid upon Him; He must be treated as the sinner (substitutionally), and until God was glorified concerning sin, there could be no communion between Him and the Holy Sufferer.

Let none for a moment suppose that God's delight in His Son had lessened in the least degree; that could never be. But rather, while sin was upon His Son, the very holiness of His nature demanded a suspension of communion, and a distance between them. It is here we learn the true nature and deserts of sin—what it is in itself, and what was needed to put it away.

When we speak of distance coming in between God and the blessed Lord on the cross, it was not that there was anything in Him personally to cause that distance. No, He was emphatically "the Holy One and the Just." He knew no sin, personally. It was sin that was imputed to Him, and iniquities laid upon Him, which caused the distance. He voluntarily took the place of infinite moral distance which belonged to the sinner, and there became subject to the wrath and judgment of God.

This is the subject of the 22nd psalm—not that man is not seen, but God is referred to throughout—all is received as from Him. Bulls may beset Him, and dogs may encompass Him, but He receives death at God's hands: "And Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death." Man did his worst with God's Lamb, but as to atonement, man was not in the scene except as a spectator with no power to comprehend what was happening. In those three hours of darkness, none but God and the One who suffered can tell what was endured.

This was what the Blessed Lord was contemplating while prostrate in the garden of Gethsemane. He there was anticipating what He here is seen enduring. There the dark shadow of the cross and the outlines of that cup passed before Him, which brought Him into deep agony of soul; here, however, He is overwhelmed in the horrors of the judgment and wrath found in that bitter cup. Alone, at infinite distance from God, and enwrapped in impenetrable darkness, He experienced the unutterable woes of the lowest pit, its darkness, its depth. God's wrath lay hard upon Him. He was afflicted with all His waves. The fierce wrath of a sin-hating God passed over Him. His terrors cut Him off. (Psalm 88.) It was then those words were fulfilled which said, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me." Psalm 42:7. Such was God's holiness, and such was God's hatred of sin, that nothing short of all this could put it away and open up a way for the blessing of salvation to flow out far and near. Infinite claims needed an infinite sacrifice to meet them. This was done when the lowly Lord Jesus Christ laid Himself on the sin-offering altar of Calvary. There sin was perfectly atoned for and put away; the curse of a broken law was borne; the justice of God was satisfied; the throne, majesty, and glory of God were all vindicated. There God was infinitely glorified concerning sin, man's need perfectly met, and the ground laid for the righteous carrying out of all the purposes of God.

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