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The Cry of the Suffering Christ

'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? why art Thou far from My salvation, from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry by day, and thou answerest not; and by night, and there is no rest for Me: and Thou art holy, Thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel'

Psalm 22:1-3

In Psalm 22, we have one of the many Old Testament prophecies which refer directly to our Lord Jesus Christ. This one, however, is distinguished from the rest because it foretells facts concerning His unique and unfathomable sufferings which are not to be found in other predictions. Here we have them in all their simple, solemn, and pathetic sweetness from the lips of the Holy Sufferer Himself.

Three Outstanding messianic Psalms

Many Psalms give glimpses of Jehovah's Anointed One Who was to come, but three of them are conspicuous among the rest by the vivid details of His sufferings which they make known beforehand. Besides Psalm 22, there are Psalm 69 and Psalm 102. All three foretell in words of song the amazing pathway of the Hope of Israel laughed to scorn by all who saw Him and the Saviour of men without a place to lay His head. Each of the three Psalms presents its own particular phase of the sufferings of Christ followed by its appropriate sequel, but the one which touches our affection and devotion most deeply is Psalm 22.

The theme of Psalm 69 is the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ as He unflinchingly bore the reproach of Jehovah in the face of those who hated Him without a cause. High and low were His enemies. Those that sat in the gate spoke against Him, and He was the song of the drunkards. 'Save me, O God' He cried, 'for the waters are come into My soul.' Jehovah heard and answered, as the latter part of the Psalm shews. God will bring righteous and overwhelming retribution upon the ungodly generation that rejected and crucified their Messiah. The sufferings caused by the enmity of man are followed by the righteous judgement of those who caused those sufferings.

Psalm 22 is differently framed, and its theme is unique. here, though the sufferings depicted are far deeper and more poignant, the result for man is not judicial but merciful. Not a word is uttered about wrath and judgement for man. Indeed, one might almost call Psalm 22 the nearest approach in the Old Testament to the revelation of the super-abounding grace of God in the New. Instead of thunderbolts of wrath from God falling upon those who maltreated the Messiah, the Psalm ends with praise arising to God from all mankind. The sufferings of Christ will yield what the whole world has never yet rendered to God—united and universal praise. Now, there is praise from a few here and a few there; but the Psalm views a time when all the world will be rejoicing in God and giving Him what is due to His name, giving Him, in fact, what man's tongue was designed to render—intelligent and heartfelt praise. And 'in that day' all the 'kindreds of the nations' will worship before Jehovah of Israel in consequence of the sufferings

of Christ which are set forth in the prophetic monologue of this Psalm.

Psalm 102 so celebrates the sufferings of Christ. There Messiah is presented in His humiliation among and by men and in His invariable attitude of meek and lowly submission to whatever was the will of God. The Psalm is called 'the prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed'. In His infinite greatness, Christ 'emptied Himself', and obediently took the poor man's place in a world of self-sufficiency and self-exaltation. he was forsaken of men, and left to mourn 'as a sparrow alone upon the housetop'. In His distress, Messiah cried, 'O My God,' desiring that He might not be taken away in the midst of His days. Thereupon Jehovah vindicates His suffering and outcast Son (vv. 24-27). Though the days of His humiliation might be shortened, was He not the Creator of the earth and the heavens? All creation perishes, but Messiah abides unchanged continually, the Same 'yesterday and today and for ever'. Thus, the prayer of the afflicted One is answered by a divine witness to the intrinsic glory of His person; and the passage is quoted in Heb. 1:10-12 as a crowning testimony to the glory of the eternal Son, by Whom God spoke to men in new Testament days.

Sufferings and Praises

In Psalm 22, however, the sufferings of Christ are from God. Forsaking by God is expressed in its opening stanzas, and affords the key to the whole Psalm. The ferocity of men appears as in other Psalms, but the abandonment of the Messiah of Israel by the Holy One of Israel is, as it must necessarily be, the predominating features of the prophecy. Moreover, it is the holy

Sufferer Himself Who confesses that he is forsaken by His God. He Who endured it describes it. He is, indeed, the Speaker throughout this Psalm. And as He records His own sufferings, so He declares the praises to God that follow as their effect. We learn that propitiation or atonement being accomplished, the earth, in due course, will become full of praises to God.

you will recollect how beautifully this combination of propitiation and praise is portrayed in Leviticus 16 by the blood and incense. There the great work of Christ's atonement is foreshewn in type. The blood of both the bullock and the goat is taken from the court of the tabernacle into the most holy place and sprinkled there upon and before the mercy-seat. Aaron enters that most holy place where Jehovah's presence rests enthroned upon the mercy-seat with blood and incense. The sprinkling of the blood of sacrifice in the required manner is accompanied by the fragrant fumes rising from the burning incense and affording a sweet odour to Him Who sits between the cherubim. Thus the type illustrates how the incense of praise is intimately associated with the propitiation Christ made in respect of our sins. His atoning work is the abiding basis for the believer's worship now, and for the homage of all men in the millennial day and kingdom.

As we were reminded this afternoon, the Father 'seeketh' worshippers; and if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been constituted worshippers on the basis of the propitiatory work of the Lord Jesus, and the Father seeks that we worship Him as we are thereby entitled to do. What then can we offer to God the Father that will be acceptable? Shall we bring any material offering in our hands? Shall we bring anything

in our hearts springing from our own natural affections and efforts? You surely know that we can find nothing in ourselves worthy of His acceptance.

Where then as worshippers shall we find what is sure to be acceptable to God the father? everything that concerns the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is well-pleasing to the Father. And if one subject concerning Him is more acceptable than another, it is that which relates to His sufferings and death, whereby 'God was glorified in Him'. As worshippers, therefore, we need to have in our hearts a clear sense of the vast work of atonement accomplished upon the cross when He, the blessed Son of God, Who knew no sin, was 'made sin for us' by God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Scripture often refers to Christ's atonement in easy words that even an infant may recite, but how profound and unfathomable is their full significance! They are, however, for us to meditate upon continually, allowing the Holy Spirit to develop and enlarge their meaning and implication before our eyes so that our hearts may break forth in worthier songs of praise as we remember that the holy, perfect, sinless Son of God was upon the cross 'made sin for us' by God. We cannot fully understand the profound doctrine, nor need we do so in order to worship God. But when we are before God in 'the holiest of all' and recall that the death of Christ is the most notable occurrence in the world's history and that something was done there and then of immeasurable value and requiring no repetition, then songs of irrepressible praise will swell within us. the incense of acceptable praise will ascend to the eternal throne.

The Sufferer and His God

Let us bear clearly in mind that in this Psalm we hear the words of Christ Himself addressed to God. Most of us are familiar with the bitter cry which forms the forefront of the Psalm and provides the keynote to its pervading theme. We read, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Here the pathetic words occur prophetically. In the Gospels they are found historically. Matthew and Mark record that the Lord uttered them upon the cross. In the depths of His anguish, the Lord used the words, having the fullest sense of their profound significance and also the knowledge that the prophecies of Psalm 22 were being fulfilled in Himself. At the due moment He had appeared in the world for the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In this work the Blessed One stood alone-the God-forsaken One. This awful experience He Himself proclaimed aloud that whosoever would might hear-'Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani?' As so often, those who heard did not understand His speech. Thy said, 'Let be, let us see whether elias will come to save Him.' That this crucified One should thus address God in heaven was beyond their comprehension. The fact is that therein lies the central truth of the propitiation which Christ made for our sins and for the whole world.

This occasion is, I believe, the first time that we read in the Gospels of our Lord using the words, 'My God', when addressing Him. The Son was constantly in communion with the Father, hearing His word and doing His commandments. In converse with His Father, we read of Him answering and saying, 'I praise Thee, father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed

them unto babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in Thy sight' (matt. 11:25,26).

This communion of the Son with the father was unbroken, not only during His public ministry when He was preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the sick, and doing His multitudinous deeds of mercy among men, but also, as you will remember, during that solemn midnight hour in Gethsemane. There the Lord was alone, apart from His disciples, prostrate upon the ground, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Yet in this agony of anticipation, the Blessed One was not altogether alone. As He said to His disciples earlier that night, Ye 'shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me' (John 16:32). Throughout His 'strong crying and tears', communion with the Father was unbroken. 'Abba, Father', He cried. 'O My father, if it be possible...' 'O My father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done'. Knowing fully what the Father's will had decreed for the morrow, the obedient Son acquiesced in Gethsemane as He had always done. 'The cup which My Father has given me, shall I not drink it?'

But here the Lord is speaking from the cross. It is now not 'My Father' as in the garden, but 'My God'. The question of sin has arisen, and God, Who is Judge of all, is the appropriate name of address. God is the righteous governor of the world. His nature is opposed to sin, and His essence demands the punishment of sin. There can be no communion between holiness and unholiness, between light and darkness. And there, Him Who knew no sin God had made sin for us. In the consciousness of sin-bearing, and of being 'made a curse for us,' He

exclaimed, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

So our Lord in the midst of His suffering for sin confessed Himself forsaken by His God, but still addressed Him as 'My God'. This relationship of Jesus subsisted from His earliest infancy. In this very Psalm, He declares, 'Thou art My God from My mother's belly' (v. 10). From the manger in Bethlehem right onwards He the perfect and blessed Man, recognised God as the One Whom He obeyed and on Whom He depended. But here it was a time of noontide darkness, and there was an immeasurable difference. His God in Whom He trusted God forsaken Him! and Why?

Christ had come into the world to take the place of the unholy and unrighteous under the judgment of the righteous and Holy God. He Himself was the Holy One. 'That Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God,' the angel said to Mary (Luke 1:35). the very demons in Capernaum said to Him, 'I know Thee Who Thou art: the Holy One of God.' And what charge did Peter lay against the Jews after Pentecost? 'Ye denied the Holy One.' And when the apostle referred to the resurrection of Jesus (acts 2:27), quoting from Psalm 16:10, He said, 'Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.'

But here Christ, the Holy One, acknowledges His God as the Holy One: 'O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not...but Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.' What is the explanation? The Holy One was the sin-bearer. The Just One stood in the place of the unjust. 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' Oh, deepest of all deepest depths! Oh, profoundest

of all unravelled mysteries that this should be! the human heart stands still in silent awe before the impenetrable veil for ever screening from mortal gaze the Saviour in that dread hour. One only was there in the darkness and in the shadow of death. he alone can speak of it. He has spoken. His words are before us. 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken ME?'

We cannot understand this cry of anguish wrung from the heart of Christ, nor fathom its import. Apart from its interpretation, however, we possess the truth and blessedness of the fact through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit. Our faith lays hold of this poignant utterance of the suffering Christ. It tells us of the price paid for our redemption. It measures for us the value of the sacrifice made upon the cross for our sins and for the glory of God in respect of them. The Holy Christ was forsaken by the Holy God!

Hence, the more we meditate upon this great cry in the presence of the Lord from Whose lips it came, the more we learn of His atoning work. Then He was standing where He had never stood before-beneath the weight of our guilt and of God's wrath against it. During His life of ministry, He was not bearing our sins, as some wrongly imagine. It was upon the tree that He bore our sins in His own body, as Peter tells us. There He suffered for us, for our forgiveness, for our redemption, that we might be brought to God, that the blessings of God in all their fullness might flow unhindered into our souls.

But there is another aspect of the work of atonement that we must never forget. Because of man's sin God's glory was at stake. God's eternal attribute of justice was in question. Was God the Holy One Who abhorred sin? or

was He One Who would favour sin and overlook its due penalty? the Lord Jesus supplies the answer in His Person, and upon the cross He upheld the immutable holiness of God. There he declared in the ears of the universe, 'Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel,' witnessing to that holiness by the confession of His own abandonment.

The Holy Sufferer had been made sin and was deserted, left alone because of it. In His agony Christ called aloud to His God. 'My God, My God,' He said. The repetition means much-deep emotion, pressing need. When Abraham stood at the altar on which Isaac lay bound, holding aloft the knife to slay his only son, the angel of Jehovah called, Abraham, Abraham. Twice the father's name called from heaven. There was urgent need for the patriarch to hearken. Not a moment must be lost. More urgent still was the cry of the blessed Lord. He was in the depths of His anguish, submerged beneath the waves of divine wrath against sin; and the cry rang out in the desolate waste, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

These are the words of the beloved Son of God, the Only-begotten of the Father, God manifest in flesh. Let us ponder over them and brood upon them, again and again. Let them penetrate our inmost souls. To do so purifies the spirit and enlightens the heart. We behold fresh visions of the grandeur of God's grace, and we glory more and more in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see more and more of the light and love of God in Him Who stood alone in that dread place of darkness and curse. And we adore more fervently Him Who loved and endured to the end, never even when abandoned by him losing touch with his God, calling

Him 'MY God' in the confidence that He would be heard for His piety (Heb. 5:7).

- Part 2 -

We learn from the Gospels of seven utterances made by our Lord during His crucifixion. Three of them were spoken during the earlier hours, and four during the later period. the only one of the seven found in more than one Gospel is the cry of Christ's abandonment by His God, recorded by both Matthew and Mark. It is evident from this double testimony of the Holy Spirit that this cry demands our reverent attention and prayerful meditation, especially.

First, the Lord, when they bound Him to the tree of cursing, prayed, 'Father, (He did not say 'My God'), forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 22:34). Again, while the sun still shone brightly in the heavens, Jesus saw Mary His mother and the beloved disciple. he said to her, 'Woman, behold thy son,' and to him, 'Behold thy mother' (John 19:26,27). His sympathies were not dulled by His sorrows and His sufferings. Further we can hear His gracious and assured promise to the believing robber sharing the horrors of crucifixion at His side, 'Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in paradise' (Luke 23:43). though poorer than the poorest of the poor, the Lord could still give. Cast out of His inheritance, stripped even of His garments, He seemed to possess nothing, yet He bestows upon this converted criminal the right of entrance to paradise itself. What joy there was in heaven over the one sinner who had repented!

But then the noonday sun was super-naturally eclipsed. There was darkness over the whole land from the sixth

to the ninth hour. The Holy Sufferer was hidden from the eyes of men. He was closeted with God; and in the 'night season' He was not silent. But out of the prevailing darkness came the cry, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' John also records (19:28-30) two other utterances, 'I thirst' and 'It is finished,' both spoken with the assuredness of omniscience. What had to be done had then been accomplished.

What then had been finished? What had been done? Who can describe it? Who can measure it? Was it not that stupendous work of propitiation which in respect of all His attributes satisfied God as to sin, enabling Him to be just and the justifier of the unjust who believe in Jesus? The Lord knew what He had accomplished. He knew what He had endured, and that in His suffering He was forsaken of God.

Moreover, the Son of God knew that the appointed offering for sin had been made and that the sacrifice was acceptable. He knew that the darkness had passed, and that He had emerged into the sunshine of God and the Father's delight and complacency. We have next the seventh utterance, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit' (Luke 23:46). And He passed into paradise, there to welcome the penitent robber who had believed on Him and for whose sins He had made Propitiation to God.

Propitiation and Praise

In the third verse, Messiah provides the answer to His own inquiry, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The answer is, 'Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. 'the holiness of Jehovah required the judgment of sin before either His people or the praises of His people

could be acceptable to Him. Propitiation for sins is the foundation of worship and praise, because the place where Jehovah dwells is holy.

Now the children of Israel were a people separated from all other nations of the earth of offer praises to Jehovah continually. The tabernacle was built in the wilderness and the temple on Mount Zion that He might dwell among them and receive their tribute to His name. Jehovah appointed that daily, morning and evening, the priests should burn 'the most holy incense' to Him in the holy place. Incense is a figure of the sweet-smelling praise that God seeks from the lips of man.

Israel was elected in order that in their daily service of praise they might illustrate what Jehovah required from all men. He brought them out of the house of bondage, showing them His mercy when the destroying angel passed by their dwellings, and His redemption when their enemies were drowned in the Red Sea.

Immediately, the song of praise ascended to Jehovah from His redeemed people. Moses and the children of Israel celebrated His victory, ascribing their deliverance to the strength of His right arm (Exodus 15).

Moreover, in this national praise-song, Israel looked forward to the mountain of Jehovah's inheritance, His dwelling-place, the sanctuary established by His own hands in the land of promise. Then 'they believed His words; they sang His praise.' But soon they forgot Jehovah's mighty works, disobeyed His commandments, and worshipped the idols of the heathen that knew not God. They forsook the Holy One of Israel, and neglected their daily offering of praises before His dwelling-place. Israel sinned grievously, and provoked the righteous

wrath of their God, the One Who inhabits the praises of Israel.

To this great sin by that favoured nation especially the Holy Sufferer seems to make allusion in verse 3.

Because of their sins, not His own, He was forsaken, and His cries were unheard. Jesus was standing in the breach. He had given Himself a sacrifice for sins. He was making propitiation for sin. By His suffering, He would bring holiness where there was now unholiness, righteousness where there was unrighteousness, and praise where there was now but 'cursing and bitterness.' By His atoning work, the Lord Jesus would satisfy every claim the Holy One inhabiting the praises of Israel made in respect of the sins of men; but in the meantime that Holy One was irresponsive to His cry.

The close connection between propitiation and praise is plainly marked in the construction of the Psalm. The former part, to the middle of verse 21, depicts Christ upon the cross, while the rest of the Psalm foretells the results of Christ's atonement in imbuing Israel and all the nations to the ends of the earth with the spirit of praise to Jehovah.

The fathers Delivered, but Christ Abandoned

In verse 4 the Spirit of Christ still speaks. The Lord upon the cross contrasts Himself with pious men of olden days. 'Our fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and others) trusted in Thee; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto Thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.' Was it not, therefore, contrary to God's past dealings that the Lord Jesus should be forsaken by God in His sufferings, and His cries for deliverance disregarded? Abraham was

not perfect in his piety, yet his prayers were heard. Job was noted for his patience in suffering, but showed much impatience with his 'friends,' and confessed to Jehovah, 'Behold, I am vile.' Job, too, was heard and delivered.

But when the Messiah in His agony cried out to God, there was silence in the heavens. No arm of Jehovah was outstretched to save Him in that hour. What the will of God had given Him to do, He must do by Himself, enduring all alone, unaided. And in His soul was the bitter sense that in His extremity, God was not helping Him as He had helped the fathers in Israel. Why was this change? Because He, Son of man, Who knew no sin, had been 'made sin' to make expiation for sin. Then and then only, for this and for this only, did God forsake His obedient Servant that the glory of 'the death of the cross' might shine undimmed throughout the ages of eternity.

But the patience and lowliness of our Lord comes into view in that dark hour. As the forsaken One, He says, 'But I am a worm and no man.' He accepts a place of nothingness among the sons of men. He obliterates self entirely. Now as always, 'Christ pleased not Himself.' As a 'worm and no man,' He surrendered every claim upon divine deliverance. This is the crowning evidence of that Blessed One's perfect humility and self-abnegation. The worm is the symbol of utter weakness, and the Lord Who was 'crucified in weakness' applied the figure to Himself to justify the seeming neglect of His God.

On the cross, the Lord is not oblivious to the thoughts and words of the bystanders. They add to His sorrows and sufferings. He is reproached and despised of the

people. They taunt Him because no deliverance comes to Him from God in Whom it was well known that He trusted. But, unperceived by onlookers, Christ in the midst of His crucifixion maintains unbroken confidence in His God (verse 9-11). As in Bethlehem and Nazareth, in Capernaum and Chorazin, in Bethany and Jerusalem, so at Calvary, Jesus was 'the leader and completer of faith' (Heb. 12:2). Despising the shame of the cross, He abode steadfastly in the will of God according to His own word, 'Not My will, But Thine be done.' Man mocked, Christ suffered, God was glorified.

At the commencement of His ministry when our Lord was tempted of Satan, He was in the wilderness with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13). When upon the cross, He sees men around Him behaving towards Him like the cruel and shameless beasts that perish. He is beset by 'strong bulls of Bashan' and by the 'ravaging and roaring lion.' Unclean and destructive 'dogs' have compassed Him about. Nailed to the tree in the midst of them, He is helpless. He is poured out like water. His strength is dried up like a potsherd. All His bones are out of joint.

Such is the confessed weakness of Christ crucified as the assembly of evil-doers surround Him and work their wicked will on Him Whose hands and feet they have pierced. They strip Him of His raiment and gamble for His vesture. they gloat upon His nakedness as a sight for their wicked hearts to enjoy amid the solemnities of the paschal feast!

In these verses (12-18), Christ by the prophetic Spirit is describing His sufferings from man as they were multiplied and concentrated at the cross. But throughout, Messiah expresses His unwavering

dependence on Jehovah. He says, 'Thou art My God... Thou art He that took me out of the womb... Thou art My God... Be not far from Me' (vers. 9-11). Thus the Christ spreads out before His God the story of His sorrow and suffering from man led on by the prince of this world. All that the power of darkness brought Him in that hour He received as the will of God for Him. As the self-emptying Son of God, He was obedient even down to the death of the cross. And in this lowest depth of humiliation to which He had come, He owns the supreme purpose of God that brought Him there: 'Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death' (ver. 15).

The Cry of Conquest, 'It is Finished'

But the end comes. The intensity of prayer is replaced by the fervency of praise. The Lord pleads with Jehovah: 'O My strength, haste Thee to help Me. Deliver My soul from the sword; My darling (only one) from the power of the dog; save Me from the lion's mouth' (vers. 19-21). Then in the middle of verse 21, the Speaker suddenly changes His tone. Hitherto in the Psalm, unanswered supplication has been His theme. Now, the answer has been given; the reply is received. 'Yea, from the horns of the buffaloes (unicorns) hast Thou answered Me.'

No statement is made in the Psalm concerning the immeasurable significance of the change from asking to receiving by the One Who at the outset confessed Himself forsaken of God. It is left to us to ponder upon the fact that the same Voice that said to God, 'Save me from the lion's mouth,' adds afterwards, 'Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.' The One Who previously said, 'O My God, I cry ... but Thou hearest not' (ver. 2) now declares to Him, 'Thou hast heard Me.'

With strong crying and tears, with prayers and supplications, He had called upon God in His suffering upon the cross as the sin-bearer. then the moment came when He knew that His work of propitiation for sins had been accomplished, and that because of His piety He had been heard by Him who was able to save Him out of death (Heb. 5:7). His piety or holy fear had been tried to the uttermost; and in the very bottomless depths of suffering when abandoned by God on behalf of guilty man His unfaltering obedience shone untarnished and undiminished, approved of God though derided by man.

now deliverance had come even when He was transfixed 'by the horns of the unicorns' and under 'the power of the dog.' The throne of righteousness in heaven and the cross of Calvary on earth were united when Christ Jesus had offered His one sacrifice for sins. His atoning blood was upon the golden mercy-seat beneath the cherubim of glory. His eternally efficacious work of expiation for sin was completed 'in the body of His flesh' upon the cross. this fact, the Lord Himself in His omniscience announced to men, to angels, to demons. 'When therefore Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and having bowed His head, He delivered up His spirit' (John 19:30). The apostle John thus records the Son of God's verbal testimony to the conclusion of His own work. It was but one word as originally uttered upon the cross, but it fell from the lips of omniscient omnipotence, and will reverberate to the ends of the universe throughout the ages of the ages.

After hearing the Lord's own pronouncement upon the work He had by Himself undertaken in respect of sin that God might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus, can we entertain the notion that

nevertheless something more remained to be done to establish fully the glory of God? Is it possible that when Christ gave Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, and said, It is finished, there still remained something more to be done in order to make propitiation for sins? Unless supported by plain scripture, such a suggestion by its implications discredits Christ Himself and impoverishes both His word and His work.

Opening the gates of Praise

The Forsaken One having been heard from the horns of the unicorns, propitiation having been made, the service of praise at once begins. The fragrant odours of the most holy incense mingle with eyes uplifted to heaven, the captain of salvation, now made 'perfect through sufferings,' says, 'I will declare Thy name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee' (ver. 22). Here is the prophetic promise of the results of an accomplished atonement. The name of God as the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit should be thereupon unfolded, and Christ Himself would be the Leader of worthy praise to God in the midst of His assembled worshippers.

Historically, it was in this strain that our Lord spoke of His God to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection. He said, 'I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God' (John 20:17), a declaration not made nor true before. But now atonement for sin had been made, the righteousness of God in respect of His grace had been established, and it was consistent with the glory of God that a new relationship of believers should be announced. Accordingly through the work finished upon the cross, our Lord associated His feeble

and failing disciples with Himself as His brethren. Now they were entitled, not merely because they had been born afresh by water and by the Spirit, but because of Christ's offered and accepted sacrifice for sins, to stand before God as sons in an acceptance like that of Christ Himself-'My Father and your Father.' The Lord connects His own with Himself as His brethren. As He had said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit' (John 12:24). 'My God' was the cry of the Lord when alone and forsaken, when bearing our sins in His body; none could then share that cry. But now He says to His brethren 'My God and your God.' This new link was the first-fruits of Christ's atoning sufferings and death.

But the harvest follows the first-fruits. Throughout the remaining stanzas of this psalm, the unfolding of ever widening circles of praise to Jehovah continues. All the seed of Jacob and of Israel shall glorify and fear Him. All the ends of the earth and the families of the nations shall remember, shall turn unto Him, and shall worship before Him. And in the concluding verse, we read, 'They shall come and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He has done this.' The final phrase, 'that He hath done this (it)' is suggestive. The words are general, and some might ask, Who has done it? and What has He done? But to every spiritual mind the reference is obvious. It is the unrivalled act of making propitiation performed by Christ on the cross, where He was set forth as a mercy-seat to declare the righteousness of God in respect of sins (Rom. 3:23-26).

Christ Himself in His utterance, 'it is finished,' was the first witness to His own completed work. His followers, led by the Spirit of God, have continued that testimony

on earth throughout succeeding generations. Expiation for sins is the foundation of all praise, worship, and service. And heaven and earth shall yet unite in ascribing all worthiness to the Lamb that was slain. Every heart and voice of the redeemed shall joyfully confess to the glory of God that 'He hath done this.'

Let this psalm, beloved friends speak continually to us of 'the affliction of the afflicted' One (ver. 24); and may it awaken our songs of praise, imparting to them a holy savour befitting the sanctuary of God and the presence of Christ. His sufferings and sacrificial death form the everlasting basis of acceptable worship. The Father seeks worship in spirit and truth. Who can render this save those who know Christ Jesus and who rest in faith upon His finished work! May we have the happy experience that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst of His assembly as the Leader and Theme of its praises as often as we remember that 'He hath done this' and indeed whenever we gather unto His name.

W. J. Hocking