



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

**Finding
Jesus in the
Psalms**

Psalm 22

Psalm 51

Psalm 88

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2019

January

Session 1 – Psalm 22

Welcome to our first small group session of 2019. In our sessions this month, we'll discover together how we can find an indication of Jesus in the Psalms and how Jesus' knowledge of the Psalms assisted Him during His earthly life.

It may seem odd that we're looking to a book that's found in the Old Testament to look for Jesus, but we need to be conscious that, in fact, the entire Bible points to Him. We can find references to Him throughout the books of the law, the historical books, the books of wisdom, and the writings of the prophets. Many times, Jesus directed the people's attention to what was written about Him so that they would recognize that He was the promised Messiah foretold about for centuries. He brought the words of the Old Testament to their fullest realization.

These things are prevalent in Psalm 22, where we will begin our study this month. Psalm 22 is a psalm of David. It is interesting that it begins with a lament, but by its end, it becomes a psalm of praise. This psalm not only describes an experience that every believer can relate to, but it is also a remarkable and specific prophecy of the suffering of Jesus.

Let's take a look at three passages from this psalm and see how Jesus fulfilled the words of David.

The psalm begins with the following: *My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? Why are you so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.* What an agonizing prayer of David. He puts words to his experience of feeling alone and abandoned by God. Jesus echoes these words while on the cross, as recorded for us in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. As Jesus experiences the most dire moment of His life, crucifixion on the cross, the words of the psalmist are on His lips. He seeks a connection with God, the Father, but because of the weight of sin being laid upon Him, the Father seems distant. Jesus uses David's words to express His anguish at that moment. Yet, make a note that David still trusts in his relationship with God, as the use of the words *My God* tell us. He didn't relinquish his knowledge of his God, and he demonstrated his trust in Him to be faithful and to deliver him. During your times of suffering, how do you call out to God? Do you seek His presence as a loving Father? Are the words of the Scripture on your lips?

Let's continue by looking at verses 6 through 8: *But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue him; let Him deliver him, since he delights in Him!"* David's faith in God is being challenged by his enemies. He's being mocked for his faith because of the difficult circumstance that he finds himself in. Now listen to the words of Matthew describing the scene at the cross of Jesus: *Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him..."* (Matthew 27:38-43). The words spoken at the cross help us to realize that the words of the psalmist were prophetic in their foreshadowing of the experience of Jesus. Just like the psalmist, Jesus suffered insults, mocking, and His relationship with God was called into question by others.

Lastly, in verses 16 through 18, Psalm 22 reads: *For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.* Approximately 1,000 years later, these words are echoed in all of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:24). Whether aware of it or not, David, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, described his feelings of despair and anguish, and they described what would happen to Jesus. Isn't it incredible how the story of the Bible fits together? When we look at this from our perspective, we could often think, "How could the people of that time fail to see God's plan?" Perhaps a better, more self-reflective question is, what are we missing that God has so clearly laid out for us?

As we read through the Psalms today, we should be keenly aware of statements that tell of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. This knowledge serves to strengthen and build our faith. These passages serve to encourage us, like the psalmist, as we live through challenging moments when we may feel separated from God. Looking at what the psalmist wrote and what we learn from the life of Jesus, remember in these moments that God is your Heavenly Father. Reach out and seek Him in prayer, and through it all, praise Him for all He has done, is doing, and will do.

Session 2 – Psalm 51

Welcome! We will continue our search for Jesus in the Psalms with Psalm 51. Look up Psalm 51 in your Bibles and follow along with me.

As the title of the Psalm tells us, David wrote this “prayer of repentance” as a response to his sin with Bathsheba and the judgement of God that was brought to him through Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 11-12). Psalm 51 is one of seven penitential psalms, or psalms of confession. It focuses on David’s personal relationship with God where he expresses the seriousness of his sin and his longing for forgiveness.

There are two parts to the Psalm: a petition for the removal of sin and guilt, and a request for the sinner to be renewed. We can learn a lot about how to deal with our own sin from David’s example. The Psalm also follows the aspects of repentance that were laid out in the 2018 Autumn VISION article titled, *What is Repentance?* We’ll highlight some of those points as we continue.

Let’s look at the very beginning, verse 1: *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness...* Despite all his sins, David knows that he still belongs to God. He knows that he can still turn to God in prayer and that God will not abandon him.

After many pleas for mercy in verses 1 and 2, verse 3 brings us the first aspect of repentance – **awareness**. *For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.* We must start with recognizing our sin and feeling **remorse**, or deep regret and guilt. *My sin is always before me* – this guilt and sorrow was a feeling that consumed David. He could not get away from it.

Verse 4 brings us David’s **confession**: *Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak and blameless when You judge.* David is not denying his sin against others (Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah), but when looking at his sin against God, they pale in comparison; for when we sin against others we also sin against God. Nowhere in this prayer does David ask to escape from the material consequences of his sin. He refers to God’s judgement as blameless – there is no fault in it. David confesses his sin in prayer and then asks for mercy. Note the words in verses 7 and 9: *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow...Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities.* David is asking for a complete removal of guilt and sin. We can also see from these verses that he inspired one of our well-known hymns, “Blessed is the peace to my heart.” The chorus, based on these verses in Scripture, focuses our attention on sin and forgiveness.

Going back to verse 5, we see the very depth of the pain and despair that David feels: *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.* David realizes that sin is in his character as a human – it is what he has always been. He is not speaking against his mother, or the process of conception, but rather, that his sins are his own, they are the very element that he lives in. Because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, we cannot live without sinning.

In verses 10 through 12, David prays for renewal: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.* David is asking God to make him a new man, which can only be done through the Spirit of God.

Verses 13 through 17 lay out David's **resolution**. *Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to you...my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness...and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise.* Once David is renewed, he will tell others of God's righteousness; he will praise God for what He has done, and point other sinners to God as the source of salvation and mercy.

A broken and contrite heart is one that knows how little it deserves, yet sees how much it has received. David speaks of a heart that is broken by the grace of God. Through His grace, God shows us our brokenness, but also opens the way to mercy and forgiveness. In these final verses, we see where we can find Jesus in this Psalm; the mention of sacrifice in verses 16 and 17 points to a need for a sacrifice that can truly blot out sin and send the Holy Spirit to renew. Jesus is that sacrifice. Jesus is the only hope for sinners. Jesus is the One who sent the Holy Spirit to renew us. He is the answer to David's and our prayers for repentance.

Many theologians agree that verses 18-19 were added later, conceivably between the captivity of the Israelites and the rebuilding of the temple, when the Jews possibly used this psalm as a communal prayer of repentance.

In closing, let's read the first part of verse 12 again: *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...* What a beautiful reminder of all that we have in Christ. The forgiveness and grace that is available to us through His sacrifice, the salvation offered to mankind – the greatness of this should affect us, should give us a deep joy that we can return to, especially when faced with our sin. David's prayer leads us through the journey of repentance, and points us to Christ in the end.

Session 3 – Psalm 88

Welcome to the last small group session for January. In this session, we will explore how Psalm 88 points us to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 88 is a prayer of lamentation, written by Heman the Ezrahite, and we can see that he experiences great troubles in his life. While there is a sense of hope in the first line – *O Lord, God of my salvation* – the rest of Heman's prayer to God is filled with sorrow and anguish.

The psalmist pleads with God to hear his cries. Verses 3 through 9 speak of some of the troubles he is living through – he is near to the grave, he has no strength, he feels God's wrath upon him as if God doesn't care for him anymore, he is separated from his family and friends, and he can't escape his situation.

These verses are almost exactly mirrored in verses 13 through 18. As if it wasn't enough to recount once to God all of these difficulties, this psalmist essentially lists his sorrows all over again. Whether this repetition is because Heman feels the need to impress upon God the seriousness of his situation, or for some other reason, he is truly experiencing a great crisis of faith: in his time of suffering, the psalmist does not feel the presence of God.

It is with this feeling, the feeling that God is absent, that Psalm 88 ends. No hope is expressed and nothing is resolved for the psalmist. There may be situations in life where we have this same feeling; that in our darkest moments, we cry out to God asking where He is, and there is no clear answer or response. And yet, we can always seek God. Even if it doesn't seem like He is there, this Psalm demonstrates to us that God wants to hear our words of desperation, our words of doubt, our words of confusion. He allows us to approach Him as we are. In the midst of our unbelief and our mistrust, we can still come to Him.

This is because even when we don't sense God's presence, we can be assured that He is with us. This is how our prayer to God during suffering differs from the psalmist's prayer. For Heman, his prayer went unanswered. For us, the answer to our prayer is Jesus Christ. We know that we are not alone in our pain and suffering because Jesus experienced it also. As both True God and True Man, He could fully experience the depths of

human emotion. Though Heman believes he had been laid *in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths* (Psalm 88:6), Jesus is the One who truly experienced this when He paid the price for our sin. When we are in the middle of our own suffering, it may seem like nothing could be worse, but as Christians, we know that we will never truly experience the “lowest pit” because Jesus went there in our place. No matter how low we may feel, we are not alone. There’s no place we could go that Jesus can’t also go with us.

Every follower of Jesus must bear their cross if they are to have hope of eternal life (Matthew 16:24-25). Psalm 88 reminds us of our cross, but because of Jesus, we can have hope for our future. With our Savior in mind, we are encouraged that one day we will be restored and the difficulties we face will disappear.

While it is hard to be focused on the good things that God has promised for our future during sorrow or suffering, we need such moments. It is when we feel abandoned by Him that we realize He is the One we can completely depend on. Even this psalmist cried out to God in the midst of his troubles, praying to Him and seeking His presence. And so, in the middle of intense grief or trials, let us always resolve to continue in prayer and praise God.

In Psalm 88:10-11, Heman writes, *Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?* We could understand that Heman perhaps wrote these words in a taunting way. But we believe that the answers to these questions are yes! God’s faithfulness and lovingkindness are declared to all, both the living and those in the beyond. We can worship God through our times of despair because the Holy Spirit assures us of our future. We are victorious through Christ! Even when we are in the darkest pit, we look to Him.