

# Psalm 22

## Plea for Deliverance from Suffering and Hostility

**To the leader: according to The Deer of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.**

- <sup>1</sup>My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- <sup>2</sup>O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.
- <sup>3</sup>Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- <sup>4</sup>In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- <sup>5</sup>To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- <sup>6</sup>But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- <sup>7</sup>All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- <sup>8</sup>“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”
- <sup>9</sup>Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
- <sup>10</sup>On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- <sup>11</sup>Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.
- <sup>12</sup>Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- <sup>13</sup>they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax;  
it is melted within my breast;  
<sup>15</sup>my mouth<sup>[a]</sup> is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup>For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.

My hands and feet have shriveled;<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones.

They stare and gloat over me;

<sup>18</sup>they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.

<sup>19</sup>But you, O LORD, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

<sup>20</sup>Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my life<sup>[c]</sup> from the power of the dog!

<sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued<sup>[d]</sup> me.

<sup>22</sup>I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;<sup>[e]</sup>  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

<sup>23</sup>You who fear the LORD, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

<sup>24</sup>For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;

he did not hide his face from me,<sup>[f]</sup>  
but heard when I<sup>[g]</sup> cried to him.

<sup>25</sup>From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup>The poor<sup>[h]</sup> shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup>All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>28</sup>For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup>To him,<sup>[1]</sup> indeed, shall all who sleep in<sup>[k]</sup> the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
and I shall live for him.<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,

<sup>31</sup>and<sup>[m]</sup> proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.

## God Is Love

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup>We love<sup>[b]</sup> because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters,<sup>[c]</sup> are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister<sup>[d]</sup> whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters<sup>[e]</sup> also.

**April 29, 2018**

**1 John 4: 7-21**

**Does Love Require Sacrifice?**

**Kerra Becker English**

We are now to sermon #3 in a series from the first letter of John, and guess what? Again, it's about love. It's as if the letter writer was asked the question – what makes you a Christian? And he went on for several paragraphs, pages in fact, about the love of God demonstrated in Jesus. To emphasize that point, he puts it right out there that: “God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them.” This is after he's already said that love is from God, and is born of God, and knows God, and as he goes on to say that perfect love, like this, will cast out any fear. It's a beautiful passage, often read at weddings – and with good reason.

He's not just talking about an other-worldly kind of love either. This writer believed that the love of God ought to inspire us to love other human beings. There's something that we are supposed to DO about this love, and what we are supposed to do is then be loving. Makes perfect sense, right? The gospel of John that seems to be echoed in the letters of John tells us that Jesus gives his followers a commandment, even greater than the golden rule (Do unto others), or the admonition to love both God and neighbor (the summary of the law). Those who follow Jesus are called to love as he loved, and there's no greater love than this – to lay down your life for your friends. Love is not just liking or being nice. Maybe it means giving it all. Or living completely with love at the center, even if it brings you to trouble, or even death.

Another love passage that is a favorite for me comes from the intensely passionate poetry of the Song of Solomon: Love is stronger than death; passion more fierce than the grave. This concept that love is fierce, strong, protective, and at times sacrificial makes sense to the “mama bear” part of me. I

resonate with the idea that love is not an easy task. It requires a lot from us. It may require everything from us. Now I live in a pretty comfortable bubble where my risks are small compared to so many. I don't have to flee with my children to find safety like some refugees do, nor do I have to stand in harm's way to protect them from violence in my home or on the streets. My ideals have not been put to that kind of test. I thank God for that. And may God reach out to help those who do face such trials and tribulations in their daily living.

But I am a parent with children I love. I am also a pastor with a congregation I love. I have a husband and friends who mean the absolute world to me. I could easily make the case that the love I have for "my people" means more to me even than my own life. Jesus was tremendously protective of his followers and poured out himself for everyone he met. I'm no Jesus – but I understand what he was doing and I think I get the point he was trying to make. Love is worth even more than life itself. Then this letter, composed by immersion in one of those early Christian communities, also stands as a testament to love that goes that wide and that deep. But I dare say that the Christian story over time has had some pretty convoluted ways of trying to explain that kind of love and get it into a well-framed theological context.

When love is understood as requiring sacrifice – or being glorified by sacrifice - it gets weird. Why did Jesus have to die to save us from our sins? Is God such a horrible parent that he exchanged Jesus' life as retribution for our sins? Is it the best metaphor to think of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice, the Passover Lamb that gets led to slaughter – so we can have eternal life? Some say even Shakespeare is believed to have written Romeo and Juliet as a tragic satire of love that is glorified in death. What's so romantic about suicide? What's so redeeming about the cross? These things should actually bring us some pause. If our hope really is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness – what the heck does that mean?

We say these things – and even believe these things – but when we pause to reflect upon them, they may sound so far from love that we have to back up, and evaluate, and make justifications for how the horrific death of Jesus can be the thing that brings God back into right relationship with humankind. It's disturbing. And if it isn't at least a little bit disturbing, it could mean we aren't truly paying attention anymore.

But I dare say that every religion that wants to lobby for the existence of a loving God has the same problematic question that we do. How will we claim the love of God when the world we live in is so dang full of suffering, pain, and death? These things don't feel loving to us, and frequently we don't have the ability as human beings to stop them. These things are not OK – but how do we understand that they are routinely a part of life as we know it?

But even more important, I think, than justifying a theological concept about how Jesus' death somehow assures forgiveness or eternal life, is to ask how. HOW will we remain fiercely, loyally, honestly loving in the face of such threats? For me, as well as for the writer of this letter, we choose to stay in a place of love because Jesus did, and Jesus risked far more than I risk, and I'm sure felt sent into a far more dangerous set of circumstances than my calling has placed me. God knew and weighed the risk, and then caused? permitted?, allowed?, sent? Jesus to enter the world of humanity anyway. The words we choose to use about what we believe do matter, they carry weight, and they cause huge arguments in and among various types of Christians. And yet, if Jesus' suffering and death are to be instructive for us about how we choose to live and die ourselves, what, in God's name, did it mean for him to give up his life willingly, and purposefully, but with intense human anguish? I think that's the key to understanding how Jesus could sacrifice everything he knew, everything he was – all for love.

Whether we long for a greater understanding or are simply content to believe the things we've been taught about how Jesus died to save us, I'm even more interested in how Jesus found himself on

this path toward sacrificing life for love. The words that came to me in the study of this passage that is so drenched in love, were that he gave it all for love willingly, purposefully, and with a tremendous amount of suffering. Those things are important to the story, and tell me even more about who he was and why so many were moved to a new way of life because of how he lived and died.

Rather than script it all out – I'd rather just reflect on those words for a few moments and allow what comes to mind to come to mind – because I think that love is also fluid with our experience. Love has to change and move and flow and grow to be real – and amazing.

Jesus gave himself willingly...

Jesus gave himself purposefully...

Jesus was willing to suffer the agony of human pain...

Do those things show love? Absolutely...