

Summer in the Psalms: The Psalm of the Cross

Psalm 22  
ABC 6/20/21

If you could go back in time to one day in biblical times, when would it be? Creation would be amazing; the 1<sup>st</sup> rainbow with Noah; David & Goliath; some of Jesus' miracles; listen to Paul preach; the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection Sunday would have to be right up there. But I think if I had to choose, I'd want to listen to Jesus as He taught the 2 disciples on the Emmaus road, as **beginning with Moses & with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures** (Lk 24:27). Can you imagine? This morning, it's my prayer, that we get a small glimpse of that as we continue our *Summer in the Psalms* by looking at Ps 22. I'm sure Jesus explained this psalm to those disciples in a much more profound way than we'll do this morning. On one level, this psalm refers to some event in the life of David. But we don't know the details. What is clear is that David is going beyond himself & applying things prophetically to Christ. After all, David was a prophet (Acts 2:30), & in this psalm he wrote about the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> It gives us a different perspective than the gospels as it gives us a hint of the thoughts & emotions of Jesus as He died in our place for our sin. The NT gives the facts of what happened at the cross, but Ps 22 gives what Jesus was feeling & facing as it happened. This is a psalm which Jesus seems to have meditated on as He hung on the cross. I always feel inadequate to preach but I feel especially that way this morning as I speak on this text. In Ps 22 we see something of what our salvation cost our Savior. Though His sufferings go far beyond anything we can comprehend, we get a hint of what He endured for us. The only proper response is to bow in worship & to submit ourselves once again to do the will of Him who loved us & gave Himself for us.

**1. Agonized Prayer** The psalm begins with a section dominated by the agonized prayer of David (1-21). David is expressing his own experience of feeling abandoned by God but also prophetically, looking ahead to Jesus who fulfilled this psalm in a much greater way. **1-21**

This begins with the most anguished cry in history, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** These are the words that Jesus said at the depth of His suffering on the cross. His suffering was

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, p 89

unique as He offered Himself for the sins of His people. We've tended to see this cry as unique to Jesus, which is natural. But Jesus wasn't inventing phrases, He was quoting David. Whatever David was going through, he felt abandoned by God. He felt his prayers weren't getting through. God wasn't answering. Ever feel that way? But David hadn't turned away from God. It's still **My God**. Neither David nor Jesus were forsaken by God, but it seemed that way. As God's wrath is being poured out on His Son, it's the only time Jesus doesn't call God *Father*. Because of sin's separation & God's holiness He says, **My God**. In the garden He cried, **Abba** (Mk 14:36) & even earlier on the cross it was, **Father forgive...** But as sin is put on Him, the intimacy They had from all eternity shatters as Jesus bears our sins & cries, **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** When Jesus was crucified, darkness fell on the land for about 3 hours & He cried out these haunting words of David (Mt 27:46). Do we understand God forsaken by God? It's an unfathomable mystery. No one can really know what was involved in God turning His back on Jesus during those hours of darkness. We know that Jesus bore God's curse upon our sins & somehow God in His holiness was forced to turn away from His Son. Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God who knew no sin was made sin, a curse, on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). He bore God's wrath which we deserved. Thus, He was forsaken by God His Father. This is the very essence of the atonement, Jesus bearing our hell so we might share His heaven. To be **forsaken** means to have the light of God's face & the sense of His presence hidden. How could this happen? How could one Member of the Trinity turn His back on another Member of the Trinity? I don't know. But this is what the Bible teaches. What makes this so perplexing is the fact that Christ & the Father are one (Jn 10:30). But because Jesus bore our sins, He was alienated from God. Because of our sins, Jesus had to endure the desertion of God that should have been ours for all eternity. While His physical agony was terrible, & we'll see that shortly, the spiritual agony was infinitely worse. Yet it fulfilled God's good & loving plan of redemption. We can imagine the answer to Jesus' question: **Why?** God says,

*Because, My beloved Son, You have chosen to stand in the place of guilty sinners. You, who have never known sin, have made the infinite sacrifice to become sin & receive My just wrath upon sin & sinners. You do this because of Your great love & because of My great love.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> David Guzik, [www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Psa/Psa-22.cfm](http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Psa/Psa-22.cfm)

We can't understand this but we can be grateful.

David continues in vs 2 & cries for deliverance. Ever feel that way? Jesus did too. He prayed that, if possible, this cup should pass from Him (Mt 26:39). Yet He wasn't delivered from death or spared the cup as David apparently was. Instead, He went through death & was delivered in the resurrection. But in the midst of it all, David feels that God doesn't hear him & doesn't care about his suffering. & this isn't just the experience of David. It's the experience of all God's people in the face of troubles. We wonder how our loving heavenly Father can stand idly by when we're in such pain. Yet, even in this extreme distress, David never loses faith or falls into hopelessness. His anguish leads him to prayer & the 1<sup>st</sup> words of the prayer are **My God**. Even in his suffering & wondering about the ways of God, he doesn't let go of his knowledge that God is his God. In the midst of his anguish, he articulates his faith. He remembers God's past faithfulness in Israel's history & how God had delivered them (4-5). In vs 6 David calls himself a **worm & not a man**. Why a **worm**? A **worm** is an object of weakness & scorn. Can you imagine a sports team calling themselves the *Worms*? We have the Bucks, Bruins, Bears, Bulls, Broncos, Tigers, Timber-Wolves, but no *Worms*. David wasn't really a worm, but that doesn't mean he didn't feel like one. Because this is written to be sung, this isn't limited to just 1 man in history. It may be you have or will feel forsaken by God, that He's not answering your prayers or even hearing them. They're hitting the ceiling & He seems far away & distant & you don't understand why you're not getting the help you want. If you've ever felt the rejection of men's mocking words or felt abandoned by God, you need to know even David felt that way. He wrote about it so all God's people would see how God helped him & helps us. He goes on to speak of people like roaring lions or raging bulls or rabid dogs. Don't think of Ferdinand the bull or fluffy Fido. Think mean, mangy, ravening, rabid jackals or hyenas. Their mocking cuts deep, & makes him feel less than human, worthless & detestable. From man's point of view, David was scorned & despised. Jesus was too. Vss 7-8 describe the exact actions & words used by Jesus' enemies when He was on the cross (Mt 27:39-43). They mocked His own claims of trust in God. But David remembers God's past care in his own personal life. **9-11**

David has moved forward in his thinking, since his memory now isn't of God's faithfulness to others but of God's faithfulness to himself as well. A recurring spiritual help in the Psalms is to fill the mind with memories of God's past faithfulness to assure us of His present faithfulness. When we're feeling like God isn't listening or doesn't care, we must go back through our own history & the history of all God's people & see His faithfulness.

This psalm isn't just the experience of every believer, it's also a very specific prophecy of the sufferings of Jesus. We see the scene of the crucifixion especially clearly in **14-18**.

This is an amazing prophecies of Christ's crucifixion written hundreds of years before crucifixion was even known to man. It was a brutal, torturous, humiliating means of execution. Note David's description, which, although truly felt by David, goes far beyond his own experience.

**Poured out like water** (14) points to the dehydration caused by the suffering plus the feeling of weakness as life slowly ebbed away.

**Bones out of joint** (14) perhaps not literally, but the feeling of being stretched out by the arms as He hung on the cross.

**Heart turned to wax & melted** (14) This is the heart struggling to do it's job.

**Strength dried up like a potsherd, tongue sticks to roof of mouth** (15). Again, weakness as His life ebbed from Him; extreme thirst as His body was dehydrated. This was reflected in Jesus' cry, **I thirst!** (Jn 19:28, KJV).

**Dust of death** (15). He's all but dead. Returning to the dust God has created man from. But notice he says, **You lay me in the dust of death**. Even in this persecution he recognizes the hand of God. His tormentors are only God's instruments (Acts 2:23).<sup>3</sup>

**Surrounded by evil men** (16) as Christ's enemies waited for His death.

**Pierced hands & feet** (16) Some Hebrew manuscripts translate **pierced** as *like a lion*, but it's impossible to make any sense of that. Calvin argues that the rabbis changed the text to escape the obvious reference to the cross. The LXX (200 BC) translates it as **pierced**. Two other OT passages refer to Messiah being pierced as well (Is 53:5; Zech 12:10).

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<sup>3</sup> A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools & Colleges, p 118

**Count all my bones** (17) from being stretched out on the cross.

**People stare** (17), it's a public crucifixion.

**Divide my garments & cast lots for my clothing** (18) which is a very specific prophecy of the activity of the soldiers around the cross of Christ. Clearly, this is all prophetically looking ahead to the crucifixion of the Son of David. But David himself was going through difficult times as he wrote this. & yet we see David's hope in the earnestness of his prayer for relief. He knows that God can help, & he turns to God as the only One who will help: **19**

We must never stop praying, even in our deepest distress. John Calvin concluded that a sense of being forsaken by God, far from being unique to Christ or rare for the believer, is a regular & frequent struggle for believers. He wrote,

*There is not one of the godly who does not daily experience in himself the same thing. According to the judgment of the flesh, he thinks he is cast off & forsaken by God, while yet he apprehends by faith the grace of God, which is hidden from the eye of sense & reason.<sup>4</sup>*

We must not think that living the Christian life is easy or that we'll not have to bear the cross daily (Lk 9:23). We do & we will. But David's description goes far beyond his own personal experiences.

This psalm comes to its fullest realization in Jesus. Jesus knew this psalm & quoted its opening words to identify with us in our suffering, since He bore on the cross our agony & suffering.

**Therefore, since the children share in flesh & blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same,**

**that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death** (Heb 2:14). Jesus

does deliver us by becoming our substitute & the sacrifice for our sins. Ps 22 describes how He felt

as He hung on the cross while the Jewish rulers snorted their ridicule & threw their false accusations at Him. Spurgeon put it this way,

*The priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, rulers, & captains bellowed round the cross like wild cattle, fed in the fat & solitary pastures of Bashan, full of strength & fury; they stamped & foamed around the innocent One, & longed to gore him to death with their cruelties.<sup>5</sup>*

That's just a glimpse of Christ's suffering as seen prophetically by David 1,000 years before Jesus'

time. His great suffering shows us our great salvation & how we must respond. How should we

respond to Christ who suffered for us?

<sup>4</sup> [www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom08.xxviii.i.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom08.xxviii.i.html)

<sup>5</sup> *Treasury of David*, Ps 22:12

1) We should see both the greatness of our own sin & the greatness of Christ's love. Our sin put Him on the cross. His love made Him willing to go there. **God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us** (Rom 5:8). Rembrandt did a painting of the crucifixion. The focus of it is Jesus on the cross. But he also painted the crowd gathered around the cross. Standing there in the shadow at the edge of the picture, Rembrandt painted himself. He saw himself as a participant in the crucifixion. Do we? We need to join Rembrandt by putting ourselves there. We need to make it personal. It was *my* sin which put Jesus on the cross. It's easy for many of us to think we're not as bad a sinner as others. But the more we grow as Christians, the more we discover how utterly wicked our heart is. The way to holiness isn't thinking more highly of ourselves, but realizing how sinful we are which drives us to cling more tightly to the cross, where we receive God's mercy. It's not popular in our day to emphasize our sinfulness. Many popular preachers never mention sin, not wanting to make people feel bad. But without the bad news, the good news of the gospel doesn't make sense. If you think you're a pretty good person & God just had to give you a little help to get you into heaven, you won't love Jesus much. But if you recognize the truth, that you were lost in your rebellion against God & that He saved you from hell in spite of your sin, & that you've been forgiven much, you'll love Him much. As Spurgeon put it,

*He who has stood before his God, convicted & condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, & to live to the honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.*<sup>6</sup>

This glimpse of the cross should impress upon us the greatness of our own sin along with the greatness of Christ's love.

2) We must submit to & trust Him who ordains suffering to come into our lives. Note vs 15 again: **You, God, lay me in the dust of death.** The Hebrew verb for **lay** has the nuance of ordain or appoint. Although evil & godless men crucified Jesus, they did it in accordance with the predetermined plan & foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). In one sense, it was the sovereign plan of God which put Jesus on the cross. Vss 3-5, 9-11, 19-21 show not only David's response in suffering, but also Christ's response to the Father. Did He malign God or shake His fist at God for ordaining this awful

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<sup>6</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:54

suffering? No! He affirms the holiness of God & uses it as the basis for His plea (3). He recalls God's faithfulness with others in the past & in His own experience (4-5, 9-10). & He calls out in faith to God for deliverance (19-21).

3) We must continue to trust God when our prayers go unanswered. Jesus prayed for deliverance, but God didn't answer Him at that point. God did answer in the resurrection, but Jesus had to go through crucifixion & death before He received the answer to His prayers. & yet He continued to call God, **My God** (1-2, 10) & **My Help** (19). Sometimes God will answer our prayers in a better time according to His sovereign perspective. We may not understand it but we have to trust Him as our God through it. We've all prayed diligently for something we believed to be God's will, but it seemed as if things couldn't have gone any worse if we hadn't prayed at all. It's easy to begin doubting God when you pray & He doesn't seem to answer. At such times, we must come back to the miraculous prophecies of this psalm & let them bolster our faith. If God's Word could accurately describe crucifixion hundreds of years before that kind of execution was ever practiced & predict the specific details of Christ's death, even down to the words His enemies would say & the gambling of the soldiers for His robe, it's solid evidence that we're dealing with a divine book. We can trust in God & His Word, even when, especially when, we're going through trials & our prayers seem to be unanswered.

The climax of the 1<sup>st</sup> part of Ps 22 & the turning point comes in vss 19–21, as the suffering Savior finds His communion with God restored. Yet the change is abrupt in spite of the progress from despair to trust. Vs 21 ends with the words, **You answer me** which could be translated, *You have heard me*. This is a cry of triumph, not despair. It marks the moment at which the period of darkness passes & Jesus, having suffered alienation from the Father as punishment for our sins, becomes aware of God's presence & favor once again.<sup>7</sup> Knowing that Jesus fulfilled this prophetic Psalm, it's fair to wonder when He experienced these words, **You have answered Me**. Perhaps, though impossible to say for sure, it was while He still hung on the cross after the mysterious, glorious transaction of bearing the sin of mankind. Perhaps it was after the triumphant

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<sup>7</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary*, p 196

announcement, **It is finished** (Jn 19:30 or in the words, **Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit** (Lk 23:46). Those words point to a re-established sense of fellowship replacing the prior sense of forsakenness. Note that He calls God **Father** & not **My God** here. Jesus was heard. At that point the curtain of the temple was torn in 2 from top to bottom, signifying that full atonement for sin had been made. Before His death He was already assured His Father heard Him, that His atonement was accepted, & that untold generations of people would be saved & would become His brothers because of what He suffered.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, **I have made Your name known to them, & will make it known** (Jn 17:26). Those words, prayed in the shadow of the cross, can be understood as a deliberate desire to fulfill Ps 22 when David writes, **I will tell of Your name to My brethren**. Jesus understood that His work on the cross would bring great glory to His Father, declaring the greatness of His **name**. We may say that this section of Ps 22 reflects the *primary* reason Jesus went to the cross: to glorify & obey His God & Father. Vss 1-21 show us how Christ suffered on the cross for our salvation. But the psalm doesn't end on the defeat of the crucifixion. It goes on to the victory of the resurrection & the glories which follow.

**2. Ardent Praise** The mood & tone of this psalm changes dramatically. Agonized prayer turns to ardent praise. We move from suffering to glory, from prayer to praise. In vss 1–21, Jesus **endured the cross**, but now He enters into **the joy that was set before Him** (Heb 12:2; cf Jude 24). He'd prayed to be delivered out of death (Heb 5:7), & that prayer was answered. Jesus sang a Passover hymn before He went to the cross (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26), & according to Heb 2:12, the risen Christ praised God in the midst of His people after His resurrection. Note that in this psalm, our Lord deals with the expanding outreach of the atoning work He finished on the cross.<sup>8</sup> **22-31**

David calls on his brothers to join him in praise: **You who fear the LORD, praise Him** (23). This praise is for the success of the cause of God. The failure that at the beginning of the psalm seemed certain is now swallowed up in victory. This success won't just be personal or individual but will be worldwide. The psalmist proclaims the name of God, particularly in terms of His saving mercy: **24**

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<sup>8</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., "Be" Commentary Series, p 92



Such proclamation is vital to the mission of God in the world. Those who've experienced God's mercy must tell others about it. The praise rests on the abundant promise:

**All the ends of the earth will remember & turn to the LORD, & all the families of the nations shall worship before You.... All the prosperous of the earth will eat & worship, all those who go down to the dust will bow before Him (27, 29).**

After suffering comes the glory of a worldwide kingdom. God's success will not only affect the whole world, but will also span the generations: **30**

The picture here isn't of a brief time of success for the cause of God, but the assurance that the time of suffering will lead to a time of great spreading of the knowledge of God throughout the earth. &, since Pentecost, we've seen the fulfillment of this promise. All around the world today, Jesus is known & worshiped. Even while suffering continues in this world, we've seen Christ's promise realized: **I will build my church; & the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Mt 16:18)**. This success is the Lord's doing, **for the kingdom is the Lord's & He rules over the nations (Ps 22:28)**. He's the One who ultimately gives victory. The Lord achieves His triumph through the instruments He uses. & David sees himself as an instrument especially in his proclaiming the goodness & mercy of his God: **I will tell of your name to my brothers (22)**. Jesus also is the speaker in vs 22, as we're told in Heb 2:11-12. Heb 2 quotes Ps 22:22, referring the vs to Jesus. The author of Hebrews is teaching the superiority of Jesus to the angels. Jesus is superior because He's God's Son & not merely a servant, as angels are. He's superior because He's been appointed Ruler of an everlasting kingdom. All things have been subjected to Him. Now, having stressed His superiority, the author shows that Jesus has also become the Savior of His people by becoming like them & making them members of His own family. This is the point at which he quotes Ps 22. **For both He who sanctifies, that's Jesus, & those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE"** (Heb 2:11-12). Jesus' words after He rose were the 1<sup>st</sup> time He called the disciples **brothers**. He said to Mary, **go to My brethren & say to them, 'I ascend to My Father & your Father (Jn 20:17)**. Ps 22:22 is yet another prophecy Jesus fulfilled. This psalm ends with this firm certainty: **He has performed it (31)**. The emphasis isn't on what God's children

have done but on the fact that God did it all: **He has performed it, He has done it** (ESV). Very similar to the, **It is finished**, that Jesus cried from the cross (Jn 19:30).

While this psalm doesn't clearly say Jesus rose from the dead, several things indicate the resurrection took place between vss 21 & 22. At the end of vs 21 there's a sudden note of confidence, **You have heard** or **You answer me**. The results described are things that resulted from Christ's resurrection. They obviously go far beyond David's personal experience. They are:

**1) Fellowship** (22) We're His brothers. He declares God's name to us, meaning God's character & attributes.

**2) Praise** (22-23) If Jesus only suffered & died, there's no place for praise. We'd still be in our sins (1 Cor 15:17). But He is risen & we must praise Him.

**3) Testimony** (24) God didn't abandon His holy One to the grave (Ps 16:10). He listened to His cry & raised Him from the dead. Now we can testify to God's deliverance of us through Christ.

**4) Vss 25-26** picture a Hebrew **thank-offering**. When God answered his prayers, a worshiper would offer a thank-offering at the temple. The poor would be invited & there'd be a feast giving thanks to God. The worshipers would greet one another with, **let your heart live forever!** (26). In the same way we have a feast of thanksgiving, the Lord's Supper, where we gather to offer thanks & praise for God's gift to us in Christ & the deliverance we have from our sins through His death & resurrection.

**5) World-wide evangelism** (27, 30-31) The good news of the risen Savior will be proclaimed beyond the Jews to all peoples & to succeeding generations. There is no good news if the Savior is dead, but there is wonderful, life-giving news if He's risen. The psalmist bursts all bounds, so intent is he on stressing the universal value & world-wide proclamation of the gospel. He speaks of Jew & Gentile, those who are near & those who are far off. He's embraced the poor (26) & the rich (29). & untold generations of people to the end of time. We're included in that number, if we've trusted in Jesus & His death for us. Since this is what Jesus seems to have been thinking of while He hung on the cross, it means He was thinking of us before He committed His spirit to the Father. That's a wonderful thought & it should move us to an intent love for & devotion to Jesus Christ. We were in

Jesus' thoughts at the very moment of His death. It was for you & me & for our salvation from sin that He was dying.

**6) Kingdom Rule (27-28)** This part hasn't yet been fulfilled, but it will be. Jesus will return to crush all opposition & to rule the nations with a rod of iron. Every knee shall bow before Him. Just as the other prophecies have been fulfilled, so this one will be. We can count on it.

So the message of this psalm is because Christ suffered on the cross for our salvation, we must proclaim Him to all nations. 3 quick applications:

1) Put the cross at the center of your walk with God. When we focus on His death for us, our hearts are filled with joy & thankfulness for God's priceless gift. The cross keeps us aware of our own sinfulness, so we don't trust ourselves, but cling to Christ. Focusing on the cross helps us resist temptation as we remember we were redeemed with nothing less than Jesus' death. How can we sin against Him who loved us so much?

2) Know God's heart for the lost & pray you might have it as well. He wants **all the ends of the earth** to turn to Him & worship Him (27). That means if we're not actively focusing on missions, we're too self-focused & not in tune with God's purpose to be glorified in all the earth. We have His command to go (Mt 28:18-20) & His promise that **all the families of the nations will worship** the Lord (27). How can they worship Him if they've never heard? How will they hear if we don't give, send, & go? (Rom 10:14-15).

3) This psalm is a model prayer for us today as we call on God in the midst of our pain & suffering. The confidence & joy expressed at the end can give us hope, as the psalmist moves towards God rather than staying mired in disappointment & discouragement.

It's a wonderful thing to know that Jesus died for sinners. It's amazing to study a prophetic picture of Christ's suffering & death. & yet, the person who hears all this can still perish because he hasn't trusted in Jesus personally. Have you? As you put your faith in Him you'll find that Jesus has made full atonement for your sins. He was forsaken so you might never be forsaken. He bore your sins so that you might not have to suffer for them. Jesus alone is the Savior. He alone shed His blood on the cross in order that we might be saved from sin. Having done it, He has set His seal on that

perfect & completed work by the declaration, **It is finished**. *But what, then, we ask, is left for us to do?* Nothing, except to believe God & trust Jesus. Jesus, when asked, **What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?** replied, **This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent** (Jn 6:28–29). Do you believe?

It's striking that this psalm both opens & closes with a word of Jesus from the cross. **My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?** (Mt 27:46). &, as He cried with a loud voice just before He died, **It is finished!** (Jn 19:30). All is done. There's nothing left to do. As Peter writes, **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life & godliness** (2 Pt 1:3). Is that not tremendous? What a psalm! What a prophecy. & what a fulfillment in Jesus. Do you know Him?