

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Petition Psalms, Lament, Psalm 22, Session 16, 6-min. Video Overview

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Let's talk about one of the most famous, most haunting phrases ever spoken, and the incredible story that, you might not realize, is hiding right behind it. You know these words. They were spoken by Jesus from the cross.

And for 2,000 years, they've really echoed as this ultimate cry of despair, right? A moment of what seems like total abandonment at the peak of suffering. I mean, on the surface, it sounds like a true crisis of faith. And honestly, this one line has been so troubling to people that for some, it's been a reason to walk away from their faith completely.

But what if we've only been hearing the first part of the message? What if there's more to the story? So this phrase is known as the fourth of the seven last words from the cross. And taken all by itself, it just seems like a raw, unfiltered cry of someone feeling completely and utterly alone, cut off from everything, even from God. But that's the thing.

That's only if you take it in isolation. Because here's where the whole picture just completely changes. This wasn't some spontaneous, original cry of despair that was just invented in that moment.

No. Jesus was quoting something. He was quoting the very first line of Psalm 22, an ancient song that was written by King David.

Now, for everyone who was there that day, anyone who knew the Scriptures, this would have been instantly recognizable. It would be like someone today starting to sing the first line of a famous song. You'd immediately know which one they meant.

And that is the absolute key. See, in that culture, you didn't have to recite a whole poem or a whole song to make your point. Quoting that first line was like verbal shorthand.

It was a way to point to the whole thing and basically say This, all of this, is what I mean right now. So this begs a huge question, right? What is the rest of Psalm 22 actually about? If Jesus meant the entire song, well, we've got to know what's in it. The first surprise is its structure.

You know, this isn't the rambling, chaotic cry of someone who's lost their mind in pain. It's actually an incredibly organized, perfectly symmetrical poem. It shows the author is processing this deep, deep pain with total clarity and purpose.

The Psalm is laid out with this incredible symmetry, split into three main sections, each 10 verses long. This isn't random at all. It's a deliberate, masterfully put-together work of art that was created right in the middle of agony.

And get this, in that first stanza, the Psalmist perfectly balances his feelings of being abandoned with declarations of confidence. He pairs feeling forsaken by God with

remembering God's faithfulness in the past. He pairs feeling abandoned by people with remembering God's personal care for him since birth.

It's just this incredible display of holding both pain and hope in perfect tension at the same time. Okay, so that's the structure, but let's get to the content because this is where things go from interesting to truly astounding. The details in this psalm go way beyond anything its author, King David, could have ever experienced himself.

See, King David lived about a thousand years before Jesus, but in this psalm, he's writing about a kind of suffering that just doesn't match anything from his own life. Instead, it paints this shockingly clear picture of the crucifixion, centuries before it even happened. The details are just stunningly specific.

That feeling of dislocation, all my bones are out of joint, the public mockery, soldiers gambling for his clothes, and being surrounded by vicious enemies. But maybe most shocking of all is the line, they bore holes in my hands and my feet. And this is the point that you just can't overstate.

Crucifixion, as a method of execution, was used by people like the Persians and later the Romans. It was completely, totally unknown in King David's time. He was describing, with stunning accuracy, a future event he could not possibly have witnessed.

So the psalm starts with this cry of abandonment, and it contains these incredible prophetic details, but it's the ending of the song that completely reframes the beginning. And it reminds me of a famous story about a message from the Battle of Waterloo. After describing all this immense suffering, the psalmist does a complete 180.

The tone shifts from agony to triumph. The writer declares that God has listened, that he has not hidden his face, and he says this message of victory is going to spread to all the ends of the earth and be told to generations that haven't even been born yet. And to really understand the huge difference between hearing just the first line versus knowing the whole message, there's this powerful historical analogy that just brings it all into focus.

Okay, so after the Battle of Waterloo, a message was sent from France to England using a semaphore, which is a system of visual signals. And as the people in England are watching anxiously, the first words start to come through. Wellington defeated.

But then, before the rest of the message could be finished, a thick fog rolled in across the channel, and it completely blocked the signal. So the only news England had was that Wellington was defeated. The whole nation was plunged into despair, believing their army was lost; the war was over.

But then, the fog lifted, the signal operators got back to their posts, and the rest of the message could finally be sent and finally be received. The full message wasn't Wellington defeated; it was Wellington defeated the enemy. An incomplete message meant national mourning.

The complete message, it meant a total history-changing victory. And that, that is the story of Psalm 22. The cry of forsaken is just Wellington defeated, it's the first part of the message, spoken from inside the fog of suffering.

But by quoting it, Jesus was pointing to the full message, a song that doesn't end in abandonment, but in a triumphant declaration that a victory has been won for all people, for all time. So this wasn't a cry of defeat at all, but the opening line to a song of victory. It really makes you wonder, doesn't it? What other important truths might we be misunderstanding, all because we've only ever heard the first line of the song?