

Psalm 22: An Introduction by Martin Luther. (Weimar, 1913, v.31, p. 522-523)

There are two parts of this Psalm. The first part describes the passion of Christ, the second part describes his glorification and its benefits, which clearly lay hold of us on account of the passion of Christ. The gospel and its benefits are liberation from sin and death, eternal life, justification, and true praises—that is, a true worship of God. It also describes a new people who when the Old Testament is repealed through the Gospel are born anew.

The passion is threefold: 1. it cries out, because Christ is deserted by God. This is the greatest type of affliction—to feel the wrath of God and to be terrified before God, as if God were to abandon and condemn. These greatest sufferings of hell are often described in the psalms (see Psalm 6[:6–8]). Nevertheless Christ was without sin, and yet he was a victim for our sins, just as Paul says, “he was made a curse for us,” [Gal 3:15] and the scriptures testify that he bore those sufferings, Isaiah 53[:4]: “we esteemed him stricken by God.” Again: He will count his own soul as sin, or for sin. And in 2 Cor 5[:21]: “God made him sin who knew no sin,” i.e. Christ felt the wrath of God, as though he were scorned and condemned like sin. And he bore this wrath without sin, Heb 5[:4], and there was no one besides him.

2. It complains about the judgment of men and blasphemies, etc., because this is sadder than death itself, with respect to which the world plainly thinks that the pious are guilty of the greatest wicked deeds, clearly of impiety and seditions against God, etc. And so he judges that those ones are most justly to be killed. This is the terrible suffering that supports these blameless judgments against the world and the impious, because they are liable to the wrath of God and because their doctrine is finally and mutinously false and reproachful to God. In this trial not only are we distressed about death but also the glory of God, for which reason we are grieved because God does not defend the glory of his own name for his own sake. To undergo death itself would not be harsh without this scandal, but this is the harshest suffering, that we are rightly judged unto death as if guilty of the greatest wicked deeds.

The third type of affliction is death itself or the sufferings of the body. Even the types of persons are described which attack Christ: Bulls, that is, the papists; Lions, tyrants; Dogs, teachers of the law; then the whole multitude.

Further this image of the passion of Christ ought primarily to urge us to repentance. And it must be understood that the mighty wrath of God is against sin, with no acceptable sacrificial offering except the one that was able to placate the divine wrath.

And then the consolation is pronounced to the pious because the magnitude of the passion of Christ covers up the magnitude of our sins and because his example benefits us, etc. May we understand that we are not scorned by God and for this reason we ought not to despair, even when we experience the wrath of God. For since Christ experienced this same wrath, let us rouse ourselves and have confidence in the fact that we must indeed be free, just as Christ is free and resurrected. It is a great consolation to understand this because Christ realized those most terrible sufferings and terrors, and he humbled himself lower than all sinners. Therefore he does not wish to condemn anyone however much they may be unworthy and burdened by sin.

Translated By: Mark M. Taylor.