Singing in the Dark

Psalm 22

Jesus

Session 5 · October 30, 2025

Epiphany Seattle

Psalm 22 — Read Together

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest."

Psalm 22:1–2 (NRSV)

Notice where the psalm turns. Notice what changes between the first half and the second.

CONTEXT

When, Where, and Who

BOOK

DATE

AUTHOR

TYPE

CONTEXT

When, Where, and Who

BOOK

Book I (Psalms 1–41) — the most personal and Davidic book. Psalm 22 is its emotional center: the deepest descent before any psalm in the Psalter.

DATE

Attributed to David in the superscription. Likely composed 10th century BCE. The specific occasion is unknown — illness, imprisonment, and military siege have all been proposed.

AUTHOR

David — "To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn." The musical note suggests liturgical performance. The suffering is individual but the psalm became communal.

TYPE

Individual Lament — the fullest, most developed lament in the entire Psalter. Uniquely, it does not end in lament but pivots to praise, to mission, and to cosmic scope.

POETIC STRUCTURE

How the Psalm Is Built

Form

Movement

Sounds Like

Notice

How the Psalm Is Built

Form

Classic lament structure: address, complaint, expression of trust, renewed complaint, petition, vow of praise. But Psalm 22 breaks the mold: the praise section (vv.22–31) is not a brief closing flourish. It is a third of the psalm, and it grows to cosmic dimensions.

Movement

Three-part arc: Lament (vv.1–21a, framed by "you do not answer" in v.2 and "you have answered me" in v.21); Praise (vv.22–26, the congregation gathered); Expansion (vv.27–31, all nations, all generations, all the dead).

Sounds Like

Psalm 22 echoes and is echoed by Isaiah 53 — the Suffering Servant. Both carry themes of abandonment, physical torment, scorn, and ultimate vindication. The two texts read each other across the canon.

Notice

The pivot at verse 21b to 22 is one of the most dramatic in all Scripture. No reason for the turn is given. One moment: "Save me from the mouth of the lion." The next: "I will tell of your name to my brothers." Something happened. The text does not explain.

WORD STUDY

Four Words Worth Sitting With

Azab

v.1

Rachaq

v.1

Ka'aru

v.16

Anah

v.21

WORD STUDY

Four Words Worth Sitting With

Azab

v.1

Forsake / abandon / leave. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The word does not mean annihilated or destroyed. It means left — specifically, left in a place of danger without protection. God has not ceased to exist. God has, in the psalmist's experience, gone.

Rachaq

v.1

Far / distant / remote. "Why are you so far from helping me?" The word of spatial absence. It pairs with azab: the God (Elohim) who has left is also the God who is far. Distance and desertion together describe the felt experience of the cross.

Ka'aru (i)

v.16

"They have pierced my hands and my feet." One of the most contested phrases in the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretic Text reads ka'ari (like a lion); the Septuagint and a Dead Sea Scroll read ka'aru (they have pierced). One letter. The whole controversy turns on a waw vs. a yod.

Anah

v.21

Answer / respond / rescue. "You have answered me" — the NRSV margin note. The pivot of the entire psalm. At verse 21b, something shifts. God has answered. The text gives no reason, no explanation. The turn is given, not explained.

INTO THE TEXT

The Shape of the Psalm

vv.1–11	**Lament and Trust Intertwined**
vv.12–18	**The Body Under Attack**
vv.19–21	**The Petition**
vv.22–26	**The Vow of Praise**
vv.27–31	**Cosmic and Eternal Scope**

The Shape of the Psalm

vv.1–11	**Lament and Trust Intertwined**	*The psalm opens with abandonment, then pivots to trust (vv.3–5), then returns to abandonment (vv.6–8), then trust again (vv.9–11). The* ***oscillation*** *is not weakness. It is honest prayer — holding both realities at once.*
vv.12–18	**The Body Under Attack**	*Bulls, lions, dogs, a company of evildoers. The imagery is visceral and physical: bones out of joint, heart like wax, tongue dried up, hands and feet encircled. The body is the site of the suffering.*
vv.19–21	**The Petition**	*"Do not be far from me." Three times the psalmist calls for God's nearness against the lion, the sword, the dog. Then at verse 21b: the turn. "You have answered me."* ***No explanation. The rescue simply arrives.***
vv.22–26	**The Vow of Praise**	*"I will tell of your name to my brothers."* ***The sufferer becomes the witness****. The congregation gathers. The poor eat and are satisfied. This is not private relief but public testimony in the assembly.*
vv.27–31	**Cosmic and Eternal Scope**	*All the ends of the earth. All families of nations. Those who sleep in the earth. Those yet unborn. The psalm that began with one person's cry expands to encompass all of history. The rescue of one becomes the proclamation to all.*

What in this psalm *provokes you?*

Psalm 22 — Coverdale Translation

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? *
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?
O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer; *
by night as well, but I find no rest."*

Psalm 22:1–2 (BCP, Coverdale)

Coverdale: "the words of my distress" vs. NRSV: "the words of my groaning." Which feels closer to what Jesus cried from the cross?

The asterisk (*) marks where cantor and choir exchange verses in choral recitation.

How does this psalm speak to the world in which *we live right now?*

Where do we see Jesus and / or the Holy Spirit *in this psalm?*