

Our God and our Father in heaven, we come this evening to this most holy section of scripture. We feel like Moses standing before the burning bush as we watch Christ burning, as it were, in the flames of hell for our sins. We feel the need to remove our feet and to fall on our faces in worship. Who is he in yonder tree? "'Tis the Lord, O wondrous story, "'tis the Lord of glory." We pray, O Lord, that you would draw near to us and show us your Son's glory this evening as he descends into hell in our room and for our stead. We offer these prayers in Jesus' name, amen. Please take your seats, and if you would, turn with me and your copy of the Word of God to Psalm 22. We enter a portion of the Psalter that is near and dear to every Christian. These three Psalms, Psalm 22, 23, and 24, go together like water and wet. Psalm 22 tells us the cost of redemption. Psalm 23 speaks of the benefits of redemption. The Lord is my shepherd. And Psalm 24 is the prospect of redemption whenever we will die and be raised up with Christ through the heavenly battlements and those everlasting doors open up to welcome us home as they welcomed Christ home. And this evening, as we said, we come to Psalm 22. It's been called the Gospel of David. Alec Mateer, who's one of the great Bible commentators, especially in the Psalms and in the Prophets, he says, if as may be the case, some personal experience of David prompted the writing of this psalm, yet in it, David multiplies his experience by infinity in order to plumb something of the suffering awaiting his greater son. That's what we have here. We're reminded of the oft-repeated observation in our study that the Psalms of David are Christ's songbook before they're ours. He learnt the life of faith as he sang his way through the Psalters, a little boy growing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and with man. And in singing this psalm, he learnt the appalling cost of your redemption and mine. You'll notice as we read the psalm, it falls into two halves. The first 21 verses recount God's great darkness. And then from verse 22, there's a change. We have Messiah's great victory. We'll not use those points in our sermon this evening, but it's helpful to see that distinction. As we read the first section of the psalm, you notice that there are alternating sections of despair and confidence, or agony and confidence. And you find the first section of agony in verse one and two, and the second in verse 68. and the third from verse 12 to 18. And you notice those agonized utterances get longer. It's almost as if the Messiah is sinking into the depths like a drowning man. And each time he sinks, he comes up and gasps for air. and does so sending words of faith and worship Godward, and then he goes down again, this time for a longer time into the depths, before rising again for another desperate gasp of air, and then at last he sinks down into the depths for the longest time of all. It's a terrible picture. And you'll notice also, the psalm begins and ends with the words of the cross. Spurgeon wonders, did Christ, Sing, quote this psalm at least under his breath on the cross in total, because it begins with, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And the last verse, he has done it, is very simply modulated into, it is finished. Who knows, but certainly this psalm was on Christ's heart and mind as he hung in our place and for our sins. Let's read it together to the praise of God. Please listen carefully. This is God's word. To the choir master, according to the doe of the dawn, a Psalm of David, even that title, the doe waking up in the morning and facing the hunters. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day but you do not answer and by night but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted, they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued. In you they trusted and were not put to shame.

Then he was down into the depths again. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me. They wag their heads at me. They wag their heads. He trusted in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, for he delights in him. Yet you are he who took me from the womb and you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. And you were I cast from my birth and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there's none to help. And down again into the depths. Many bulls encompass me. Strong bulls of Bashan surround me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and a roaring lion. I'm poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, it's melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me, a company of evildoers encircles me. They've pierced my hands and my feet. I count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, oh Lord, do not be far off. Oh, you, my help, come quickly to my aid. Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion. You've rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. Now the psalm changes. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him and stand in awe of him. All you offspring of Israel, for he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. He has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried out to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation. My vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied. Those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nation shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship. Before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve him and shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn that he has done it. Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of God Remember, many years ago, Dr. Thomas was talking to me about the time he came to faith, and a minister who was not orthodox in his theological aspirations was talking to him, and Dr. Thomas was sharing with him about his faith in Christ and his hope of salvation. And the minister looked at him with scorn and said, don't tell me, son, you've fallen for the lamb chop theory of the atonement, where the lamb gets the chop, right? And the man was mocking, of course, it's the essence of liberalism. They don't believe that Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins. As Niebuhr famously said, that liberalism can be summed up in this phrase, a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the administration of a Christ without a cross. It's liberalism. and they mock the penal substitution theory of atonement. Dr. MacLeod, who preaches the cross better, or writes about the cross perhaps better than almost any living man in wonderful clarity, has a little book called From Glory to Golgotha, where he has these sermons he wrote in the Christmas and Easter seasons. toward the end of his life, and in one of the sermons entitled, Why Did God Crucify His Son? He's speaking to these liberals who mock our theory of the atonement, and he says, men speak of the immorality of such a theory of the atonement, that the lamb would get the chop, right? Men speak of the immorality of such a theory of the atonement. That is short-sighted. The real immorality lies in the facts. The cross

is immoral. There, the innocent suffers at God's hands. Their God's son is destroyed at God's hands. Let's not sentimentalize it. This is not some green hill far away. It's the scene of the greatest atrocity in history. Calvary is quite literally a shambles. God's lamb is being slaughtered on a garbage heap outside the city in darkness by a brutal soldiery. And God is responsible. Why would God do that to his son? Why did Christ die in darkness, forsaken by God and mocked by men? And the answer, quite simply, is because of your sin and mine. That only such a sacrifice, offered by such a substitute, could satisfy what you and I have done. We have sinned against infinite justice and incurred infinite guilt and face infinite and endless wrath and only Christ is big enough literally in his person as God the son to take the stroke of infinite everlasting wrath and survive and finish it in that moment. And so on this psalm this evening, we see Christ descend into hell. Many people often struggle with those words in the confession of faith, right? He was crucified, died, and buried. He descended into hell. And the confusion comes when they think it's chronological. He was crucified, died, and buried, and then descended into hell. And some men read it that way. But actually, I think that once you realize that the Apostles' Creed, written probably in the second century, when Northicism was on the rise, and every single phrase of the Apostles' Creed is designed to combat Gnosticism. And the thing about Gnosticism is, it doesn't believe the body matters, right? And salvation is escaping the body. And every phrase of the Gnosticism, of the creed stresses the physicality of the creation and the physicality of Christ and the reality of what he received in his body. And so Calvin and many better commentators see the confession or the creed as dividing the physical sufferings of Christ. He was crucified, dead and buried. That's what happened to his body. And then what happened to his soul on the cross? He descended into hell. It's not speaking about the grave. It's not speaking about going to some wasteland where Abraham and the people were before the New Testament. He's speaking about his soul descending into hell, and we read of it here in this psalm, and it's not a theory. It's a reality, and for Christ, it was up close and very personal. Three points quickly this evening. The cross he bore, the faith he showed, and the victory he won. Let's work through the psalm together. First of all, the cross he bore. And you'll see that there in this opening half of the psalm. And we've got four words to hang our thoughts on. Separation, silence, scorn, and slaughter. The cross he bore. Let's think about, first of all, separation. Verse one, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? from the words of my groaning. Here the Messiah begins with his greatest grief. In a few moments he'll speak about the presence of his enemies, and that's bad, it's terrible. These earthly enemies who are more beasts than men. But before he gets to the presence of his enemies, the Messiah mourns his greatest grief, which was the absence of his God. He's been abandoned, far from God. Verse one, verse nine, and verse 18, you'll see the word far repeat. My God, my God, why are you so far from saving me? 1B, verse nine. No, it's not verse nine. Oh, that was, oh yeah, verse 11, sorry. Be not far from me, for trouble is near. And then verse 19, but you, Lord, do not be far off. And that repetition of the word far carries the idea of the Messiah being abandoned to a place of total isolation, a place where there is no light, and there is no mercy, and there is no grace, and there is no warm, comforting, presence of God's love, but only the fiery presence of God's wrath. He's been abandoned from the love of God into the wrath of God and feels entirely broken. Derek Kidner says, it's not a lapse of faith nor a broken relationship, but a cry of disorientation as God's familiar protective presence is

withdrawn and the enemy closes in. In that sense, Christ's whole life was one of progressive abandonment. He came to his own, his own did not receive him. Even at Bethlehem, there was no place for him in the stable, no room for him in the inn, he was cast out. And then Herod's murder squads hounded him and he fled to Egypt. And through his life, it was one abandonment after another until Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him, at last, with a curse. When Peter says, he denied him with a curse, what Peter was saying was, let me be damned if ever I knew that man. And Christ heard him. And remember, they're locked eyes. Across the courtyard. But now, the climax of climax. His father abandons him. My God, my God. Notice it's been observed before, he doesn't say my father, my father. Because on the cross, Messiah no longer saw himself as son. He saw himself only as sin. Luther calls him the greatest sinner ever. Has all of the sins of all of his people. all of the thoughts of sin you and I have had, all of the words of sin you and I have spoken, all of the deeds of sin you and I have done, not just you and me, but every believer throughout history, all of God's elect, all of their sin coalesced on his head and he became that accursed thing upon the cross. His soul was under unimaginable stress, McLeod says, almost overwhelmed, almost destroyed, almost disintegrating, surviving only by the resoluteness of his will and the ministry of the spirit. When Christ uttered these words, men mocked and the demons laughed. And surely the angels of heaven hung their heads and wept. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? This is the reality of what sin is, and what sin deserves, and what sin does to a soul, and it's been done to Christ, so that it'll never be done to you, Christian. Separation. Secondly, slaughter. Sorry, secondly, silence. Verse two, oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Dr. Davis, in his company, says, nothing panics the servant of God like the silence of God. Yahweh is the God who hears prayer. What are we to think when he doesn't? Christ is crying out. He's pounding, as it were, on the Father's door. The door doesn't open. The lights are off, the door's locked, and he's shut out in the street. You remember even in Gethsemane, I'm indebted to Dr. Leahy from Northern Ireland, Fred Leahy, for this insight, but in Gethsemane, he's praying, right, and he said, you know, Lord, not my will, but thy will be done. He's wrestling with the cup of damnation. He's standing on the suburbs of hell. In the psalm, he's in the midst of it, but he's on the suburbs in Gethsemane, and he's crying out, and Leahy makes this comment, priceless comment, that unlike in his transfiguration and in his baptism, there's no voice from heaven. An angel is sent, but only an angel. The creator has already begun to distance himself from the sun. And what began, in a sense, in Gethsemane is now at this awful climax here, as Christ is abandoned to the silence of heaven. Separation, silence, scorn. Verse six, but I am a worm and not a man. Spurgeon writes, how could the Lord of glory be brought to such a basement? as to be not only lower than the angels, but lower even than men. What a contrast between the one who said, I am, and now he says, I am a worm and not a man. All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me, and they wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, for he delights in him. It's amazing the Jews quoted Psalm 23 about the Messiah to the Messiah and didn't realize they were fulfilling prophecy when they did. Again, MacLeod, there he hangs in agony. almost demented, bearing all the marks of a criminal, a vicious, godless blasphemer to whom the pious mothers of Israel might point as a warning to their own sons. That's what happens to evil men, son. And the son of man and the son of God was hellbound. Separation, silence, scorn, and then slaughter. Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me. They open

wide their mouth at me like a ravening and roaring lion, and poured out like water. We say nobody cries over spilt milk. Sometimes children do, but no one cries over spilt water. and poured out like water. And all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It's melted within my breast. When they hung the crucified from the cross over the hours that they hung there, all the weight bore on their shoulder joints and their elbows and wrists. And it would stretch the tendons and ligaments to breaking point. And then one by one with a cruel pop, the joints would dislocate. and poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me, accompanied evildoers, and circles me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. He described his enemies as bulls and dogs, more like beasts than men, devoid of the tender touch of human kindness. They know only how to scratch and bite and pierce and devour. He describes his experience as one of exhaustion, as destitute of vigor as a broken piece of earthenware is of moisture. Dehydration, his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. Degradation, his hands pierced, his body stripped naked. Hands and feet pierced denotes a position of helplessness. He's at the mercy of his tormentors who will show him none, is the idea. And then the death blow comes, verse 15. Who's the one who kills him? There are many bulls around him. There are many dogs surrounding him. We say we have an audience of one. Christ had an executioner of one. You lay me in the dust of death. The deepest stroke that pierced him was the one that justice gave. The death blow comes from God himself. That's the first thing then, the cross he bore for our sins. Secondly, the faith he showed. And you see that all through this psalm as he rises from the depths and cries out to God. Even that first verse, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Even that's amazing. What's Christ doing? Think about it like this. He's not just describing his pain, describing his sufferings, giving you an insight into his soul. He's been abandoned by God. He's in the depths of hell, and what's he doing? He's, if you like, singing psalms to God. He's pursuing God with a psalm in his mouth. Even though God is hidden from him, he will not let God go. He's clinging to God, fighting for him like a terrier with a tug toy, and he's pursuing him and sending his worship Godward with psalms of praise upon his lips. My God, my God, you're still my God. And though you have abandoned me, I'll not abandon you. I will worship you. And that's a wonderful encouragement, Christian. You are justified by the righteousness of this man, a man who's so righteous, even though he was being damned to hell, he still refused to stop worshiping. You and I can barely worship for two minutes on Sunday morning. I don't think I've ever sung a hymn through in my life without being distracted at least once. Not anymore. But I am not justified by the righteousness of my petty, feeble worship on Sunday mornings. I am justified by the righteousness of Christ, who refused to stop worshiping, even when he was crushed by the weight of 10,000 lifetimes worth of sin, and was consigned to outer darkness and the bottom of the bottomless pit. And even there, he still sang psalms to God. That's a wonderful thing. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. He's acknowledging, it's amazing, in all this suffering, he doesn't have any of his own sins to confess. He doesn't mention his own sin, because there's no sin of his own, though he's bearing all the sins of his people. But the first word out of his mouth after he calls out to God are, you are right, you are holy, you are pure. In a sense, he's saying, you are right to damn me because of the sins of

my people. I am their representative, and what you're doing to me now is a reflection of your holiness and the worthiness of your being of worship, enthroned on the praises of Israel. And then, though he can't find God in the present, there's a great lesson here, he can't find God in the present, so what does he do? He goes back to the God of history, the God of the past. In you, our fathers trusted. They trusted and you delivered them. To you, they cried and were rescued. In you, they trusted and were not put to shame. And sometimes, Christian, it'll be like that for you. You'll not be able to find a sense of God in the midst of your current trial. But you can go back to the past and remember what God was for them, the fathers. He will be to me. And you can go back even in your memory as Christ did in the next section to the time in the past when God was with you. And again, you remember he hasn't changed. Yet you are he who took me from the womb. You made me trust you at my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there's none to help." These desperate cries for help They increase, verse 11, verse 19, verse 20. Deliver my soul from the sword, literally it says my only life. My one and only life, it's all I have left. I'm naked, I'm torn to ribbons. My life is ebbing through my fingers. Deliver my life, my precious life from the power of the dog. And then verse 21, save me from the mouth of the lion. And suddenly, in a moment, how simple the prayer and how fast the answer. Save me from the mouth of the lion. You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. His prayers have not been in vain. Now, as we think then of the cross he bore and the faith he expressed, this resolute trust in Jehovah. We should think at least, I think, about the Father in heaven watching all this. We believe in a God without body parts or passions, but that doesn't mean that God doesn't have affections. And it's a controversial subject, but I've heard theologians He described God's impossibility as if he was a cold block of granite. I was debating this with a bunch of young theologians one time and I was talking to them, I said, did the father feel nothing as he watched his son on the cross? One of them said to me, God doesn't have feelings. Now there's much, there are deep waters I haven't got time to plumb here. with you, right? But God describes himself as a God of rich affections. We use the word affections because they're more noble than flimsy, flipsy, floppy feelings, but he's got affections, right? Like think of this in Hosea 11, as he's describing, and here's Israel, ripe for exile. They're wicked and they deserve to be judged and to exile they jolly well will go. But listen to God describe his heart. My people are bent on turning away from me. And though they call out to the Most High, He shall not raise them up at all. I'm going to let them go. I'm going to cast them out, God saying. And then he says. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over to Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim, these cities that were judged in the Old Testament? Oh, my heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. It's a wonderful picture. God here is describing himself. There's mystery here. It's an anthropopathism, as we say. God is using human emotions to describe himself, right? because there's a huge gap between God and us. He is infinite and eternal and unchangeable. There's no ebbing and flowing in his being. He experiences the full thrust of all of his glorious being at once throughout all eternity, right? And yet here he's trying to describe to us, he's trying to, as Calvin would say, accommodate himself to us using baby language. But this is God describing himself

and it's got to mean something. He's not deceiving us. He's not trying to explain that his heart is much warmer than it really is. No, he's looking at Israel on the way to exile. Israel who deserve to be exiled. And on the one hand he goes, they deserve judgment and they're gonna get judgment. And he goes, but oh, how can I give them up? They're my people, I love them. And he's almost beside himself, torn between these two things. Now if God felt that about Israel, what must a father not have felt in the glories of heaven, watching his son descend into hell and be consumed by his wrath? And I wonder who felt it more, the son in the far place crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Or the father hearing his son crying out. And yet because of his love for you, stealing himself not to go to his rescue. And then briefly, the victory he won, so the cross he bore, the faith he showed, and the victory he won. And you see the first section from verse 22 to the 26, he speaks to the people of God, Israel. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. That's Christ in the Lord's day. The book of Hebrews says, Hebrews 2, that Christ comes down in our midst and sings the Psalms with us. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel. For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted and he's not hidden his face from him but has heard when he cried to him. If you connect that to the first part of the Psalm, what he's saying is this. I was forsaken because I was. You, my people, you can know with lock, tight certainty that you will never be forsaken. You'll be afflicted, but when you're afflicted, God won't despise you, he won't abhor you, and he won't hide his face from you, and when you cry to him, he will hear you. From you comes my praise in the great congregation. My voice I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied. Those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever. What are these voices that Christ speaks of here? It was the solemn commitment, we spoke about it in John's gospel, when the father takes the elect, chosen not because they were good, but because he was good, remember? And God gave them to Jesus before the foundation of the world. He says, son, go and save these people from themselves, from their sins, from our wrath. And Jesus says, father, yes, I promise you, father, I will go and I will save them. And that's your security, Christian. It's sealed in a vow made by the father to love these people and give them to his son. And it's sealed by the son's determination to give these people back to his father. fully redeemed, and you are those people who trust Jesus. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and none shall snatch them out of my hand, for my Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and none can snatch them out of my Father's hand. You're locked, you see, in the grip of double-handed, divine, tender omnipotence. The Son's hand, the Father's hand, holds you. And in a very real sense, it doesn't matter what you have done or what you will do, all that matters is what Christ has done. But then, as the Messiah looks forward to his great victory, it bursts the bonds of Israel's little borders. Verse 27, all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nation shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship before him, shall bow down, all to go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. In other words, it doesn't matter how weak you are, when you die, you'll be raised up and bow down before him in the glory. Posterity shall serve him. It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They shall proclaim, They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to

a people yet unborn, that he has done it. He has done it. It's wonderful. I'm much moved by Alistair Begg's wonderful story. Remember he retells the man on the middle cross, but he begins that story by saying that too often we get into trouble with our assurance. How do you know you're going to heaven? When we get in trouble, he says, when we answer in the first person, I. I have believed. I have repented. I am trying to live the Christian life. And that's entirely the wrong way to answer that question. The answer is that way, you leave yourself wide open to the devil to come alongside and go, really? You really think your faith will save you? Your weak faith that's full of so much unbelief? And your repentance, don't talk to me about your repentance, it needs to be repented of again and again and again. You trying to live the Christian life? Seriously, you believe that you trying to live the Christian life is gonna get you to heaven? And that's why you never answer the question of assurance with the first person. You answer it in the third person. He, what he has done. He has regarded my helpless estate. He has shed his blood for my soul. He died in my place. He was raised in my place. He was delivered over because of my condemnation, and he was raised because of my justification. He has done it. And when you answer it in that pronoun, The pronouns of salvation are not them and theirs, they're not me and mine. The pronouns of salvation are his and his alone. He has done it. And when you look there, and when you say that, you only have reason for confidence. And every time I hear, and I hear it often, sometimes in my own heart, doubt. Am I sure I'm going to heaven? Could a Christian really live like this? Believe like this? Repent like this? Really? When I hear doubt, we're always looking to ourself. And true assurance begins by looking away from yourself and looking to him, the victorious him, the Christus victor, who has done. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, this sound is deep waters. I haven't even begun to do it justice. But we bless you for the glory of a savior who saves the dying thief. A man who never attended a Bible study. He never learned to catechism. He was never baptized, never attended church, but he trusted Jesus and he was saved. because Jesus has done it all. May that be the truth for all of us in this place tonight, who might know the joy of resting in Jesus' arms and saying, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. I need no other argument, I need no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me. We offer these prayers in his name, amen.