

“How Jesus Allows us to Ask God ‘Why?’”

Psalm 22:1-21

If we have a habit of not reading the Old Testament very often (a bad habit by the way), yet the one part of the Old Testament we will always read is the Psalms. Why is that? While the majority of Scripture is someone (prophet, patriarch, apostle or God) speaking from God to us, the Psalms are Holy Spirit inspired words spoken through people to God. Prayers, praises, sorrows and songs spoken back to God from the context of real-life experiences.

Even Jesus used the psalms to speak to God on His behalf. The most notable is found here in Psalm 22. While Jesus will quote v.1 to God Himself, there are many other parts of the psalm that He experiences on the cross and identifies with David. If we make the mistake of seeing Psalm 22 as only prophetic pointing to Jesus’ crucifixion we miss the opportunity of how it ministers to us in our own suffering and struggles. Because David wrote from an historical real-life struggle that we have no details about, using metaphors to describe his suffering, the psalm also gives us our voice to God to praise Him and pray to Him from our own life situations. And if Jesus applied them in His own life situations He means for us to apply them also. Even asking God, ‘Why, Lord?’ when God seems silent.

[pray]

The title to the Psalm says it is for the director of music and sung to the tune of ‘The Doe of the Morning’. Anyone remember that tune? No, because we have no clue what that tune is. And its one of many psalms attributed to David. We would call it a lament psalm but a lament psalm is never totally about a complaint or lament to God, it often has a statement or section of praise and hope as well, which we will look at next week.

We have no indication about the historical event that David is describing in his life. A time when his enemies were tormenting him and believed that his death was imminent. In the psalm David cries to God for help who had yet to answer David with deliverance. So he begins with a cry to God for help and that’s fine. There’s nothing wrong with that.

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?*

² *O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night and am not silent.*

While we often focus on the words forsaken, groaning, cry out or silent, the most important words are “my God”. Only those who have a relationship with God can legitimately ask God for His help. So if we find ourselves in similar situations where our prayers seem like they go unheard, be assured that

We Can Cry Pray Confidently to God in Suffering as We Grow in Trusting God (22:1-10)

David cries out to the only One who can help him. The false gods of his day are no help anymore than the false gods of our day. God is ‘our’ God. He created us, He loves us, He makes promises to us, He makes us secure in Him. He alone is our hope. So, like David and Jesus we can pray confidently to God,

Even when God seems absent ... (vv.1-2)

The pain is one thing but the feeling of God's absence is another. David prays for relief, particularly from the ungodly who want nothing more than to see David and those like us who follow Jesus, silenced or removed from society. Jesus of course would use David's own words to voice to God and for us who hear His words, about God's temporal absence from Jesus when He looked away as Jesus took our sin upon Himself. Jesus literally experienced God's temporal absence so that we will never experience God's absence. This is the purpose of the crucifixion. Jesus experienced God's absence so we never will. God never leaves nor forsakes us. But David knew that too because he writes in vv.3-5,

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.*

⁴ *In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.*

⁵ *They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed*

If you circle or underline words in your Bible, underline the word "Yet" in v. 3 and v.9. David prays for deliverance but then he reminds himself of what he knows is true about God. We can pray confidently to God in suffering even when God seems absent,

But remember those times when He showed up (vv.3-5)

He prays to God because He knows God. God is not like the false gods the world trusts in. God is 'holy'. He's distinct. He is Israel's God. He made promises to their forefathers, covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David. David is trusting God's word and he has seen God work in his life just as he knows from God's word Abraham, Moses, Joseph, etc., had cried out to God for deliverance and God heard them. They trusted in God and were ultimately not disappointed. And David can look back at his own life when God showed up and answered prayer.

God is not absent, we know that. But He does not answer our prayers immediately and sometimes His answer is not what we asked. But even then, is holy and fully trustworthy and ultimately has plans we can't see.

David returns to lamenting and voicing his complaint to God in vv.6-8

⁶ *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.*

⁷ *All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:*

⁸ *"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*

David describes himself as a 'worm', a description of valuelessness and unimportance. The persecution has made him feel worthless. As Jesus takes upon Himself these very words on the cross we see the same intent by the religious leaders, who were overjoyed at His demise. They mocked Him on the cross (an absolute cowardly act) and one has to wonder if they purposely quoted v.8 as an intent to demoralize Jesus as the supposed son of David/Messiah or were they spoken ignorantly at the time only to haunt them later on after He rose.

Isn't this so like the unbelievers who enjoy demoralizing Christians, who ignorantly think God doesn't exist because we are in a moment of weakness? One day when this life ends their very words of devaluing mockery to God's children will come back and convict them of their sinfulness and rejection of Jesus, God's Son. They will regret those words for all eternity.

However, in our moment of abuse this knowledge may not comfort us because it seems so far away. Like David we want relief now. Notice the “Yet” once more in v.9. So,

Even though the unsaved mock us (vv.6-8) ...

Remember God’s hand is on your life (vv.9-10)

⁹ *Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast.*

¹⁰ *From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.*

¹¹ *Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.*

“Yet You...” Possibly the two most important words in this psalm. David depends on biblical knowledge to keep his head and heart together in difficult times. When we find ourselves asking God ‘Why, God’ because of what’s going on in our life, we always have to trust Him based on what is true. ‘God, it looks like you’re not listening and you’ve abandoned. Yet, Your Word says You never leave me nor forsake me. Your Word says I can trust you with all my heart. Your Word says I am loved by you.’ He recalls God’s hand has been on his life since birth and while he doesn’t give us details, I’m sure David is reflecting on specific times when God was clearly guiding his life. And we must do the same so we don’t lose hope.

As we reflect on Jesus’ use of this psalm we see this attitude clearly in His last words on the cross, after He said, ‘My God, my God why have you forsaken me!’ And then we read shortly after He reassured the repentant thief on the cross that today he would be with Jesus in paradise [good theology] in Luke 23:46

⁴⁶ *Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

Do you know how painful it was for Jesus to cry out in a loud voice at that moment? He must have used every ounce of strength He had to say that loudly, that He was trusting His life in God’s hands at that moment. By the way, Jesus was quoting Ps. 31:5, another psalm of David when he was going through difficult circumstances again. We won’t say to God at the end of our lives ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’ if I don’t say that every day with confident trust.

David flip flops back and forth from pain to trust in this psalm. In vv.12-18 we see David describing his situation with very descriptive terms comparing his attackers to the way animals behave when attacking their prey. And yet, Jesus will experience this even greater than David. Listen:

¹² *Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.*

¹³ *Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.*

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.*

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.

¹⁵ *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*

¹⁶ *Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*

¹⁷ *I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.*

¹⁸ *They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

Sometimes we are reluctant to go to God like this. We might think this is a sign of weak faith. But it’s just the opposite.

Crying Out to God is Not a Sign of Faithlessness **but Trust** **(22:11-18)**

David cries out to God because God alone can deliver us from very difficult situations. We pray to God when

People treat us cruelly (vv.12-13, 16-18)

David is writing in poetic form here. In vv.12-13 he describes his attackers ['They, they']. In vv.14-15a he describes how he feels. In vv.16-18 he goes back to his attackers, but in the middle, v.15b, he talks about God's control. So, we cry out to God in faith as a sign of trust and strength when the enemy attacks us. And people can be cruel can't they. In v.12 they are like the bulls of Bashan, known for their size and strength, who surround him. In v.13 they are like ravenous lions ready to devour their prey. In v.16 they are wild dogs who sense death is near and they will bite and pierce his hands with their teeth.

Yet, what David describes metaphorically. Jesus will experience the fullness of humanity's depravity and cruelty who attack him when He is completely unable to defend Himself. Rather, completely trusting God to defend Him and redeem Him later at His resurrection. He will pray for their forgiveness from the cross because they don't realize Jesus is hanging there for the very sins, they are committing in crucifying Him, along with all of our sins too.

'I can count my bones', a sign of emaciation. 'They stare at me' in disgust and shock. 'They divide my garments' a sign that the victim is left for dead and they might as well take his very last possession on earth. Again, David is most likely describing his situation with 'It feels like this, Lord' and yet the Son of David will literally experience these things. People are cruel because they are sinners who need Jesus.

They make us feel worthless (vv.14-15a)

"poured out like water"; I am drained Lord. Physically he is without strength. 'Bones out of joint' [especially for a cross victim] and my heart is like wax; I have no will left. 'My tongue cleaves to my jaws'; totally drained of liquid. Again David describes how he feels with graphic metaphors, unaware that he is writing words that His Lord, the Messiah will one day literally experience. But look at the second half of v.15;

you lay me in the dust of death.

God is there. He is sovereign. This is not out of His control.

This is why crying out to God is a sign of trust. David is acknowledging here that

God is using this for purposes he can't see now (v.15b)

Somehow this is part of God's plan 'You lay me in the dust of death'. God's ways are not our ways. He has a higher purpose than what we can see and know at the moment. This is why we must trust Him. God is always doing two things in what we experience. 1) He is wanting to bring Himself glory through our difficulties so we acknowledge His hand and timing and purpose; and 2) He is always, always, always helping us conform to the image of His Son Jesus. While we may not know any more details than that at the moment, those are two large hooks to hang on to while going

through something hard. And we might pray something like this; 'Father, I don't understand why You are allowing this to happen right now. But help me to bring you glory by trusting You no matter what and help me to submit to your conforming me to Jesus.'

At this point in the psalm David starts to turn more in trusting God. The psalm is far from over and we'll stop at v.21, picking up the rest on Easter Sunday. But see how he is turning more to God here:

- ¹⁹ *But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.*
²⁰ *Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.*
²¹ *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*

'Be not far off'; 'come quickly'; 'deliver my life'; 'rescue me'; 'save me'. David has not given up. He turns to his only hope. And here's where we need to be encouraged,

Don't Give Up on God Because He has the Final Word **(22:19-21)**

David prays once more for God to come quickly and rescue him now! Notice again the repetition of oxen, lions and dogs. Most English translations have 'wild oxen' in v.21 but the KJV version has unicorns. Nine times the KJV mentions unicorns in the Old Testament. It's actually not wrong. It's just that we understand unicorns as a fictitious pure, white magical and mythological animal. However, the literal translation is 'one horned' beast, most likely referring to an extinct predecessor of the rhinoceros called an auroch. Known to have existed with man, the auroch was a one horned, large type of ox that was massive and very strong. David describes his attackers as one-horned aurochs that man could not tame. That only God can deliver him from.

But there's another translation tidbit that's even more interesting here. Many commentators suggest that the last part of v.21 is not a prayer to rescue David, but that God answered David's prayer. Here's the KJV,

²¹ *Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

²¹ *Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.* [NKJV]

²¹ *Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!* [ESV]

²¹ *Save me from the lion's mouth; From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.* [NASB]

The point? God will answer our prayers and deliver us from the painful trials we experience in life, but the answer may be death. Remember what we're looking at, what the prophets longed to figure out that we read in 1 Pet. 1:10-11

¹⁰ *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.*

Sufferings always precedes glories (1 Pet. 1:10-11)

David survived what he went through and continued to live a while longer. Praise the Lord when that is God's answer. Jesus would die before God answered this prayer. But when He did, glory! Life is not perfect – it will be one day – but not on this earth. That's on the new earth. We all like this life. We want to live as long as possible. But do we want a long life because of the things we want to do or the things that God wants to do through us? Sometimes God brings hard things into our life. Can be a disease. Can be loss. Can be at the hands of cruel sinners. But if we know God and His Son Jesus, these things are not the end. He is our hope. He is our strength and joy. We can get through what we face and we know we have a secure future. Because we haven't finished the Psalm yet. Sunday's a coming. Easter Sunday.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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