

God's Silence in our Suffering

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Date: 25 July 2010

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[0 : 00] Ian's going to read from Psalm 22, which is on page 554, the first 21 verses, and then Jürgen is going to pick up from the end. Thank you.

Psalm 22. 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? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, and by night, and I am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One. You are the praise of Israel.

In you our fathers put their trust. They trusted, and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved. In you they trusted, and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord. Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him. Yet you brought me out of the womb. You made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me. Strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. 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. 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. Dogs have surrounded me. A band of evil men has encircled me, and they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. People stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and cast lots from my clothing. But you, O Lord, be not far off. O my strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouths of the lions. Save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my brothers. In a congregation I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you descendants of Jacob, honour him. Revere him, all you descendants of Israel. For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one. He has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help. From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly.

[2 : 46] Before those who fear you will I fulfil my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied. They who seek the Lord will praise him. May your hearts live forever. All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship.

All who go down to the dust will kneel before him. Those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him. Future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, for he has done it.

Judge Jean-Laure Jo Assam. Thank you, Alex. Thank you, Alex. Great for Alex and for us as we look at this together.

Father, again, we thank you so much for the Psalms, for all the things we have been learning from them, primarily about you and your son. And we thank you for Alex, for the time that he has put in preparing this.

We pray that you would fill him now with your spirit, as we ask that you would fill us with your spirit, that we may hear your words to us. May it change us and transform us to see your world and life from your perspective.

[4 : 28] And may we be better equipped to follow you as we live in this world. Encourage us all this morning and we pray. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, thank you all for your prayers during the week.

As I've been working my way through this Psalm, it's been an encouragement and it's been a challenge. And it's only been through God's spirit at work that it has been able to be that for me. And I'm afraid that as we look at this Psalm 22 this morning, it'll be encouraging and challenging as well for you, as well as you listen to it. As many of you know, over the last year, we as a wider family have had health issues.

Many questions have been asked of God, like why does he allow suffering when he's meant to be a loving God? Why does this happen to good people? A friend of mine recently told me that his son had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

[5 : 43] And in this past year, we have all experienced, either firsthand or by association, the realities of the economic collapse and the effect on jobs and employment.

We have heard of corruption and inequality in world politics. Every week we seem to hear of celebrity or normal people, marriage breakups or relationship breakups.

We have heard of yet more natural disasters, not to mention their horrific car crash up in Donegal recently. We have heard of Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, being captured, tortured and sometimes killed just for saying that they followed him.

On a daily basis, some of us or people we know struggle just to get out of bed. They can't think of a single reason why they should even continue to live. I paint a bleak picture, I know, but this is the reality of life.

This is the way it is. There is nowhere in the Bible or anywhere else that says that life as a follower of Jesus or not will be easy. There is no self-help book.

[6 : 57] There is no secret mantra. There is no special tea cocktail. There is no secret password. There is no religion can promise us or deliver a pain-free or suffering-free life.

Suffering is part and parcel of life whether you are a Christian or not. And if you are not sure about that, just look around the room. I am sure we have all stubbed a toe.

Our text this morning, Psalm 22, Paints and 30 blue pits for two. David is at the stage where he is either king-in-waiting or anointed king.

And so has every reason to be joyful and celebratory. But the reality is the tongue-lofters. He is in deep turmoil and anguish. Let's read it.

First one. 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.

[7 : 58] Here David is crying out to God in a brutally honest way. It's not obvious from the psalm why exactly he is feeling like this. But it is safe to say that he is suffering deeply, psychologically.

He feels abandoned, hopeless. Look at the end of verse 2. Or even at verse 2. Oh my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer.

By night, and I'm not silent. He can't even sleep, he's crying out to God so much. But there is some indication as to why he is suffering.

You do not answer. God is silent. David is calling out to God day and night, continuously. And God, the same God, who commanded Samuel in 1 Samuel 16 to anoint David as king over Israel.

This God is silent. David rightly feels abandoned by God. We too can feel abandoned by God when we face yet another uphill battle in our life.

[9 : 03] And we must face it with a seemingly silent God. We are reminded of Jesus' suffering on the cross in Matthew 27, verse 46, where he says, also, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus himself feels abandoned by God. I'm sure at some stage we have all cried out like David. Maybe not those very words, but still, it's been a cry of anguish called out to God.

The reality of our lives is that very often we feel like God either isn't there, or if he is there, he just doesn't care, or he is silent and can't actually do anything to help us anyway.

Does that sound familiar? Can you think of times in your own life when you felt like that? Well, surely, surely that's not what the passage is saying. Is it?

When we look at the passage we get a very different, we get very different pictures of David and of God. Look how David sees himself in verse 6. But I am a worm and not a man.

[10 : 16] Scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads, saying, He trusts in the Lord. Let the Lord rescue him.

Let him deliver him, since he delights in him. How different that is from the people of the past who put their trust in God. Verses 4 and 5.

In you our fathers put their trust. They trusted and you delivered them. They cried out to you and were saved. In you they trusted and were not disappointed. poor, poor David.

He sees that in the past those who trusted in God and cried out to him were rescued and saved. But yet when David does the same thing, where is God? A further contrast is in verses 9 and 10.

Yet you brought me out of the womb. You made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you. From my mother's womb you have been my God.

[11:20] David acknowledges that God controls life. He is sovereign. But the verses that follow show David in dire straits. He is fearful for his life and he is spent.

We get the feeling that he is ready to give up. We'll get to those verses in a minute. But first let's just recap. David is feeling completely overwhelmed. He is crying out to a faithful God who now, when David seems to need him more than ever, seems to be silent.

Let's look at verses 12 to 16. Many bulls surround me. Strong bulls of fashion encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.

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. 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. Dogs have surrounded me. A band of evil men has encircled me. They have pierced my hands and my feet.

[12:30] I don't think this literally means that David is surrounded by wild animals. But we get the feeling a little bit like David is a gladiator in a ring where everybody just wants to see him killed.

David sees his only outcome as being destroyed. Death. The obvious thing at this stage is to just give up, isn't it? Reject God and take his chances with the wild animals who want to kill him.

But what does David do? Let's read on. Verses 19 to 21. But you, O Lord, be not far off. O my strength, come quickly to help me.

Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions. Save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

He asks God for help, for deliverance, for rescue. How can David possibly ask God for help when he has no reason at this stage to believe that he is even there?

[13:43] David is a man in desperate times, but he is also a man of very deep and very real faith. Turn with me, please, to Hebrews chapter 11.

Somebody get the page because they shouted out. 12.09. 12.09. 12.09. 12.09. 12.09. So the writer here in Hebrews is describing faith and he says, now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

This is what the ancients were commended for. And then the rest of the chapter in Hebrews gives us examples of people of faith in the past in difficult times including David.

And then we get to the end in verse 9, 39, where it concludes, These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

It is with this faith which goes against everything logical at times that David continues in the psalm praising God. Let's look at a few examples of that.

[15:09] Verse 24. For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one. He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

It's a direct response to his initial cry of anguish in verses 1 and 2. Do you think David has been released from his suffering at this point?

I don't think so. But here David is looking to a future hope. Head down to verse 26. The poor will eat and be satisfied.

They who seek the Lord will praise him. May your hearts live forever. Again, David is speaking of the assurance that he has of a future where there will be satisfaction and plenty.

In verse 31, they will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn for he has done it. This speaks of the hope that David has that future generations will not only hear about the Lord but they in turn will proclaim it.

[16:22] Their faith will be such that they will be telling others about this faithful God. In this context, David's faith is incredible because it was always looking forward to a future hope.

with only the experience of God's faithfulness to him and to his forefathers behind him. Abraham had been promised great things back in Genesis and as we journey through the Old Testament we hear of leaders trying to lead God's people to God's kingdom but that kingdom was never reached

and here we have King David in a bad way but yet is still praising God.

Where is this kingdom that David hopes for? Where is this kingdom? Where as verse 26 says the poor will eat and be satisfied. Where as verse 27 says all the families of the nations will bow down before the Lord.

And verse 29 where the rich will feast and worship and all who go down to the dust or the poor will kneel before him. Verse 24 again reminds us that God has not been silent but has heard the cry for help.

God hears the prayers of the faithful and answers them just not always how he would like them answered. He sent his son Jesus to be a man like David who would suffer like David.

[17 : 49] Let's look at the psalm again in verse 6 and let's look at it from Jesus' point of view. Jesus was hated.

Jesus was mocked and insulted in verse 7. He was surrounded by mobs wanting to kill him like the imagery in verses 11 to 13. In verse 15 his strength too was dried up like a fragment of old pottery. That's what a potchard is archaeologically speaking. I hope that's correct Juergen. Jesus too was left to die and saw his clothes divided up by his executioners.

Jesus God's own son Christ the king would cry out to God just like in verse 1 My God my God why have you forsaken me?

And it would appear that God didn't hear him or answer him because Jesus died. And that's where the twist is. That's where the paradox is.

[19 : 02] the apparently contradictory statement it is here on the cross on which Jesus died that God answers our cry for help. We have seen the power of the cross.

We have heard the testimony of the lives that have been changed by faith in Christ Jesus throughout the New Testament. How much more faith should we have than David?

We know how God has heard our cry for help. David's hope was not just for immediate protection. He was looking at the bigger picture. Verse 26 Lives or hearts that live forever.

David, yes, is in a bad way but still he remembers God's faithfulness and is urging others to acknowledge him. David's predicament and the faith he showed in it eventually results in many people having faith in the Lord.

Jesus' suffering and death leads to many people being saved from eternal death and separation from himself. in the midst of our toughest trials when we feel our world is falling in around us we too can have hope that God will use it to bring many people to himself.

[20 : 22] It's a counter-cultural hope that says that God is in control. The God who gave us life verses 9 and 10 is in control whether our fear is cancer or MS or car crashes or poverty or just the unknown we all fear death.

My friend and his son fear death. Jesus when he said my God my God why have you forsaken me he feared death but it is at that very moment in time when he was hanging on the cross that death lost its fear.

John chapter 19 verse 31 says it is finished Jesus' words on the cross. Psalm 22 verse 31 says he has done it because it was then that Jesus died so that we don't have to.

We can have hope if we're trusting in the Lord Jesus. There is light at the end of the tunnel and it's not an oncoming train. Verse 24 again says he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one.

He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. If you are here today and you do not have faith in Christ then there is no reason to have hope.

[22 : 03] There is not the security or the promise of eternity with Christ. Only the Bible is promise of separation from him. But if you do have faith in him then you are still going to suffer.

Sometimes it might be only short term sometimes it might be lifelong suffering. But if we have faith then we know that Christ has been there before. That doesn't make our pain any less real but it gives us hope that one day it will end.

How do we like David turn our despair into praise? We pray and as we pray we remind ourselves of God's faithfulness in the past.

we remember that he sent his son Jesus as an answer to our cries for help. Suffering will come. Some of it may not be relieved this side of eternity for either believers or those who don't believe. But we like David in verse 22 where he says I will declare your name to my brothers in the congregation I will praise you. We too need to declare his name to our neighbours and tell them

about the light at the end of the tunnel.

[23 : 21] Not just agree with their grumbling about the state of the world or their own situation but point them back to the light. Some tunnels may be longer than others but the light is eternity with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you going to turn your despair into praise? Where do you have your hope? Let us pray.

Father God thank you that we can have hope and faith in you. Thank you that you hear our cries for help and that you haven't ignored us.

Thank you that you sent your son Jesus to live like us and to suffer like us and that when he died he died in our place. Thank you that when he rose again from the dead he rose so that we can have hope.

That our suffering is known and experienced and experienced and experienced by you. Please help us in times of rejoicing and in times of suffering to always cry out to you honestly in praise.

[24 : 43] Remind us of how you have been faithful in the past. Encourage us that one day it will end and convict us to tell people of the hope that we have in you.

Thank you for your faithfulness and help us as we remember it. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.