

Comfort in suffering is found in the God who suffered

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Date: 07 January 2024

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[0 : 00] Good morning church family. Today's reading is from Psalm 22, so will you turn to Psalm 22 in your Bible or your app? So this is to the choir master according to the dough of the dawn, a Psalm of David.

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. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads.

He trusts 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, you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

[1 : 11] On you was 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 is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, it is 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 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. But you, O Lord, do not be far off. O you, my help, come quickly to my aid.

[2 : 13] Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion. You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen.

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, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried 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 nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

[3 : 21] 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. It 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.

I wonder if I asked you the question, what the worst time in your life is, what you would say.

Have a think back. What is the worst, what is the thing that you would point to as the worst time in your life? I think I have a few contenders.

One might be when the band Evanescence split up. Half of you are probably like, who on earth is Evanescence? The other half are probably like, Matt, they got back together.

[4 : 24] Yes, I know. It's not the same. Maybe it's the time, and this one still hurts. KFC took wicked wings out of the zinger box.

This half of the room knows what I'm talking about. Everyone else says KFC is terrible. You shouldn't eat it, Matt. Yes, that's true. But now I go into KFC, I'm just lost. I'm like, what do I, it used to be such an easy decision.

Now what do I order? I don't know. Maybe it's anyone over the last 15 years who supports a Newcastle-based team. The Jets, the Knights, there is a lot of suffering there, if you're anything like me.

That's been painful. Maybe it's the time I broke my arm when I was eight. I rode a bike into the back of a garage. I didn't break my arm that time, so I did it the second time, and that's when I broke my arm.

That was quite painful. I don't know why I repeated it again. You'd think I'd take the warning from the first time. Maybe it was COVID recently. COVID was a pretty tough time for a lot of people.

[5 : 38] It was tough for me in some ways. I'm sure for some people here, varying impacts of suffering there. Maybe it's the time I found out I was being made redundant.

I had just had Arthur. My son's about eight years old. The week he was born, my company shut down, the whole company. Now, having a new baby, first baby, that's a pretty stressful experience, I'm going to say.

Maybe it's the time that a good friend of mine in Bathurst died. There's a guy that I had built a relationship with. He was about 80. We were great friends. I saw him multiple times a week, and he passed away.

Thankfully, he was a Christian, but that was a pretty painful time. Now, that was something that I didn't enjoy going through. Maybe it was that time that my dad died when I was six.

Maybe it was that time that my daughter died a year and a half ago. It's a fact of life, isn't it? If you live past a certain age, you will have suffering in this life.

[6 : 44] And, in fact, it seems like the older you get, suffering doesn't get any easier. The list just gets longer. I'm sure there's people in this room who kind of be like, Matt, we can spend the whole day, and I can tell you about the myriad of things that I've been through in my life.

But I wonder how you deal with suffering when it comes. When you are going through those deep, dark places, where do you go for comfort?

Who is it that you look to? Where do you find comfort in suffering? If I'm honest, I think I'm someone who probably actually tries to ignore it and pretend like it's not there.

If I don't think about it, I won't have to deal with it. Hopefully it'll go away. I won't have to deal with the pain. That's my kind of normal reaction. But there's people who are at the complete other end of the spectrum.

Like, all they can think about is the pain and suffering that they're in. Every waking moment is thinking about it. They're consumed by it. And for some people, that becomes their whole life, and their personality is thinking about the suffering they've been through.

[7 : 58] For some people, it's drugs and alcohol. For some people, it's pushing hard into work. For some people, they might tell one single friend, one family member and confide to them, you know, actually what?

You know, it might look like I'm doing well, but I'm actually really struggling. For others, they'll cry on any shoulder that they can find with their suffering and communicate with those people and tell them how hard things are.

Where do you go and what's your reaction in suffering? Where do you find comfort when you're thinking about suffering? Today we're going to look at Psalm 22, and it is one of the deepest expressions of suffering in the Bible.

It is one of the deepest expressions, the most heartfelt expressions we see of someone going through suffering. But the question I want you to think about is, where do I find my comfort in suffering?

When things are really hard, and of course I'm not talking about KFC Wicked Wings, when things are properly hard, where do you go in suffering? I'm going to pray, and then we'll get into the meat of the talk.

[9 : 10] Dear God, I just pray that as we're here today, I pray that you would challenge us through Psalm 22. I pray that you would speak to us, that we would be challenged. I pray that you'd help me

to speak clearly.

And God, I pray that we would be drawn to your glory and majesty in suffering. Amen. Okay, so if you've got your outline, the first point on the outline, David's words tell us that true comfort in suffering is found in God alone.

See, Psalm 22, it's probably written by David, it says by David, that's probably who wrote it, about 3,000 years ago, and it's actually a song. I don't know if you realise that, kind of says to the choir master, it's to the tune of Doe of the Dawn, which to be honest, sorry, yeah, that's what it is, isn't it? Yes. Doe of the Dawn, which sounds like a bit of a boring tune, to be honest to me, but I'm sure it was amazing. We actually have no idea what this tune sounds like. So if someone wants to make up a tune, and put the words into this, go for your life, no one can tell you it's wrong.

I won't try, it'll be like barbara black sheep or something, that I'll fit it into, it won't work at all. But a look at Psalm 22, confronts us with this horrible picture, of David going through this intense, intense suffering.

[10:29] He's in the deepest, darkest place. Let's read through some of what David says in Psalm 22, if you've got it open. Psalm 22, it's what Beck read for us before, we're going to start at verse 1.

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. But I am a worm and not a man, in verse 6, but I am a worm and not a man.

In verse 14, I am poured out like water. In verse 17, I can count all my bones. I think it's fair to say here, that David is not having a good time.

This is someone who is expressing, the deepest of agonies. He's in a world of pain. So much so that I, I don't know about you, but I almost get the feeling like, these words don't properly, they just cannot possibly, express what David is really feeling, at this moment.

[11:35] I am a worm. I am scorned. I am despised. I am mocked. There's definitely something going on here, where people are kind of after him, and, and, you know, really oppressing him.

I don't know if you can, can connect with these bits. All my bones are out of joint. I don't know if you've ever had a dislocation. That's pretty bad on one place.

All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, and my tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. So this is someone who is describing the lowest of lows.

Someone who is totally at the end of everything. He can just not see the end. It is black. It is dark. And I think that's something that's true of suffering, isn't it? When you're in proper deep suffering, it can feel like there is just no way out.

And so what does David do in this terrible place? What do we see in Psalm 22 that he does when he's going through this terrible suffering?

[12:44] Well, he speaks of the character of God, doesn't he? David, in Psalm 22, tells us that true comfort in suffering is found in God alone.

And the temple of this psalm, it's quite interesting. I don't know if you picked it up, this kind of back and forth. Three times it happens where he goes, wow, this is terrible. I'm going through this immense, terrible thing.

But God, you are great. But this is just, I cannot handle this. This is just too painful. But God, you are amazing. You are good. And it happens three times. And it kind of, as you go through, the bits get longer and longer, where the third explanation of suffering is this long passage.

And then the third explanation, dwelling on God's goodness, is the longest of all. And it's kind of like David's battling. If you've gone through suffering, you might even recognise this tempo.

When you're in suffering, it kind of feels like it comes in waves. You have this really dark, difficult place when you're just in despair. And then it'll go to hope for a little bit.

[13:53] And then you'll come back to despair. And it kind of, there's no rhyme or reason for how long you're in each one. But that's kind of what we see here. And we're going to read some of it. Mainly the part where David rests on God.

But we're going to start at verse four. 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. Verse 22. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you.

And then we're going to skip a little bit. For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. And he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried 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.

[14:54] Those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever. Then we're going to skip to verse 28. 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 to the dust. Go down to the dust.

Even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity, which means all future generations, shall serve him. It 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.

See, why does David find true comforting God? It's because God is a good God. God is a good God.

And he's a God that has the power to deliver on that goodness. He's done it time and time again. David can see this throughout all of history. He says it in Psalm 22.

[15:57] My ancestors could see it. The ancestors could see it. I can see it. All future generations are going to see this. God is a good God. He delivers on his promise.

In verse 31, he is a righteous God. The suffering, though, it's still just as sharp, isn't it? In fact, the suffering throughout Psalms, it's not like it kind of gets less until it's gone and he's going, actually, this is great.

It gets, in fact, if anything, worse and worse. But a completely good God with complete control means that there is a good plan behind suffering.

Even if it doesn't seem that way, even when the suffering is terrible like it is in Psalm 22, God has a good plan. I wonder how many of you, when you're thinking about buying stuff, look at review sites. Do many people do this? A couple? Google? Facebook? YouTube videos? I do it all the time. If I am trying to buy something, probably over a couple hundred bucks, I will look at it as much as I possibly can.

[17:09] I think what I'm trying to do is work out where does the realm of public opinion sit with this brand or product or company. I did it recently with a couple of things.

I've done it with, actually, these pair of shoes. I watched far too many YouTube videos of people cutting open this particular brand of shoes to see what was inside.

Where does the public opinion sit on this brand of shoes? Look, that's maybe just a bit of a weird thing. Maybe you're just like, man, honestly, you're talking about Google and Facebook. But I look at heap of review sites.

I want to see what people have to say. I think what I'm trying to do is establish, essentially, a track record of the company or the product. Is this something that people have had a good experience with? You know, how does it go over time?

What was the service like? Another one was I had to get a driveway redone. Our driveway was destroying our car. So we had to get a new one. So I went onto Facebook, Google, trying to understand, you know, is this concrete going to turn up?

[18:09] Are they going to do a dodgy job? Are they going to, you know, give me what they said they're going to give me? So I did a lot of that. But again, same thing. I'm trying to establish, what is the track record of this company?

Is it going to, you know, based on the weight of history and what people have experienced, is this what's going to happen for me? And so I love reading review sites. How does David know that comfort in suffering is found in God alone?

How does he know it in Psalm 22? It's because he can see the track record of God, isn't it? He can see that God delivers every time.

He is 100% perfect. He is a good God who every time in history has been good. He is by nature good and he has the power to deliver on that goodness.

He always has and always will be a good God. And so David says, I trust you. I find comfort in you. See, David's words tell us that true comfort in suffering is found in God alone.

[19:24] But it's not just David that we rely on, is it? I mean, don't get me wrong. David is amazing. He wrote a lot of the Bible. I'm not having a diss on David. But there is a lot more that we rely on. You see, Jesus' actions on the cross also tell us that true suffering is found in God alone.

Now, Psalm 22, for those of you who are particularly astute and know your Bible well, should remind you of probably the most great example of suffering in human history.

It's probably one of the most famous sayings of suffering in the Bible. So much so that probably even some people in this room will know it in the original language.

If there was ever a line that should make us feel the gravity of suffering, it's this one that we find in Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And of course, that's what Jesus says is hanging on the cross. It is one of the most famous lines in the whole of the Bible.

[20 : 40] And in fact, the words in Psalm 22, I don't know if you've realized this, they are the exact words that Jesus says on the cross in Mark chapter 15 and Matthew 20, 17.

And that's not a mistake. See, Jesus is pointing at Psalm 22 when he's on the cross and says, this is where I am at. If you want to know what I'm going through and know what I'm thinking and understand my emotions, read Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And it's amazing that a psalm written probably a thousand years before Jesus, I was hanging on the cross is what Jesus points to.

And when you actually start to look at it in that light, I think Psalm 22 starts to take on a bit of a different texture. It's actually quite amazing. When you start looking at it in that way, you go, okay, David's suffering, but actually maybe he's writing about something else here a little bit.

Maybe this is not just about David's particular suffering. Maybe, and in fact, I think this is David also, not that he probably knew at the time, talking about Jesus' suffering.

[21 : 51] And there's a couple of reasons for this. One is the obvious one that Jesus points to it. He clearly references Psalm 22. But there's some other bits in this passage. Let's look at verse 6.

Verse 7. Scorned by mankind and despised by the people. You remember all the people in Jerusalem wanted to kill him by the time that he was on the cross.

Verse 7. All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me. They wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, for he delights in him.

I mean, we know where that's from, don't we? We've seen that. Right before Jesus dies, everyone's making fun of him. Verse 16. They have pierced my hands and feet. Now, I don't know of any time that David had his hands and feet pierced.

They divide my garments in verse 18. They divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots. See, Jesus is saying, this is where I am.

[22 : 57] Psalm 22. The suffering that I'm going through is Psalm 22. It's the deepest, darkest depths of anguish. We can in part understand Jesus' suffering by looking at Psalm 22.

And in that suffering, Jesus tells us that true comfort is found in God alone. See, he finds comfort just as David did in God's character and goodness.

See, he knows his father's track record. Just like David, he knows the track record. He knows that his father is always good. He knows that his father will always deliver him.

His father has the power to ensure that he can deliver on his good plan. So when David says in verse 24, for he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him, Jesus says, that, that is what I know.

And in verse 28, 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.

[24 : 22] Posterity shall serve him. All generations shall serve him. It 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.

Jesus says, that, that is my father. See, Jesus knows that his father is a good God.

Jesus knows that his father is good and that he has the power to complete his good plan. Jesus knows that on the cross, God has a good plan for his suffering.

I don't know if you've ever connected with a song at a time in your life, and it's kind of become an anthem for that period of your life.

I think this often tends to happen in teenage years for some reason. Probably like Black Sabbath or Metallica, or that's like the grungy version. For some people, I'd be like Taylor Swift, One Direction.

[25 : 26] Don't admit to that if that's you. But some people. Maybe it's the Bee Gees. I don't know. Whatever it is. I have a vivid example of this happening in my life that I can remember. It's when I

was moving from Newcastle to Bathurst for uni.

So I was 18, fresh out of home, on an exciting new adventure, and I was staying at a friend's house. I'd just been dropped off by my mum. I was lying in bed at night.

I listened to this one song for an hour, lying in bed. I know that's a little bit of a weird thing to do. But I had these feelings that I was kind of going through at the time, and it was these two almost conflicting emotions.

One was this great excitement and great hope. You know, I was kind of 18, going out into the world, getting to make all my own decisions, kind of, you know, becoming an adult.

I wasn't a kid anymore. And I was kind of excited for this new adventure that I was going to be going on. So there was that emotion. But then there was also this other emotion that I don't have a great word for.

[26 : 27] It's kind of like nostalgic grief almost. You know, I wasn't a kid anymore. I wasn't going to see my school friends very much anymore. I was leaving behind siblings that I'd spent my whole life with.

My mum, who I love very dearly, I wasn't going to, you know, have the same relationship with again. So I had these two kind of contrasting but complementary you.

It was a bit of a weird mix of emotions going on. And I found it expressed really well in this song called The Lark Ascending. Now, it's quite a famous piece of music.

It's a classical piece of music. It goes for about 15 minutes. If you get a chance on the way home to listen to it, you should definitely listen to it. It's by a guy called Ralph Vaughan Williams. And it's this piece of music where this violin kind of goes throughout the whole piece.

And in some parts, it's this really high up in the clouds, you know, amazing soaring piece of music.

It's exciting. It's kind of like a lark, a bird, flapping around happily going, yeah, this is the best.

[27 : 31] But then there's these other points in the song where it becomes really kind of slow and purposeful and almost kind of like someone going through grief.

And I found that night that this was the song that I found could express how I was feeling. And I sat there and listened to it for an hour in bed. And I think if you wanted to know what I was going through at that time in my life, I can point to that song and go, you know, listen to this.

It will tell you everything you need to know. Well, that's what Jesus is doing in Psalm 22. When he's on the cross and he points to Psalm 22, he's saying, that's what I'm experiencing.

That's what I'm feeling. On the one hand, this incredible grief, my God, why have you forsaken me? But also communicating the comfort that he has in the goodness of his father.

You know what I find a bit interesting about Psalm 22 is it doesn't lessen the impact of suffering. I kind of get no sense that in Psalm 22, either David or Jesus have, you know, they kind of reach out to God and then the suffering is instantly gone.

[28 : 50] In fact, we know with Jesus that that didn't happen. He's on the cross. We know what happens after he says this. He dies. But I get no sense that these two reaching out to God means that the suffering goes away.

In fact, it's probably just as sharp as it ever was when we're reading through Psalm 22. I wonder what form you think comfort should come in from God.

Perhaps you've gone through tough times in the past. Perhaps you've been in suffering. Perhaps you've been in dark places. I wonder if you reached out to God. And if you did, I wonder what kind of comfort you expected from him.

I think it's a bit of a pattern that people think that if I reach out to God, if I trust him enough, somehow the pain will go away.

Or somehow the circumstance will be removed. I won't have to go through this anymore. He'll take it away from me. I wonder if that's been you before. Or if you kind of think like that.

[30 : 02] You know, if I really reach, if I properly strive to God, you know, somehow I won't feel this pain. You know, if he truly cared, he wouldn't let me suffer like that.

You know, if he really cared, he wouldn't have let my mum suffer like that. If he really, truly gave comfort, you know, I wouldn't have been in that depressive state for five years.

I wouldn't have gone through that. If God truly cared, my son would not be sick like this. If God truly gave comfort, then I wouldn't be broke.

Come on, God wouldn't want me to go through this. This cannot be God's plan. If he really cared, he would not have let my child die.

What type of comfort do you expect from God in suffering? See, we have no idea.

[31 : 19] We have no idea why we're going through the suffering that we're going through sometimes. I have no idea why God would let you go through that thing that you've been through.

But I know that our God is a good God. He does everything for our good. He has a perfect track record.

He's a good God who has the power to deliver on his good. And so no matter what's happening in your life, no matter what suffering you've been through, you're going through right now, God has a plan and it is good.

You might not be able to see it. But God has a good plan. I mean, imagine for a second if God on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And God goes, actually, yeah, why am I doing this? Off the cross, there you go. Suffering absolved. Imagine where we would be. I'm sure the apostles, you know, standing there watching Jesus die on the cross, I'm sure none of them thought that was a good plan of God.

[32 : 36] I guarantee none of them thought this is what is, yep, fantastic. Loving this. Imagine for a second if God had taken Jesus off that cross, we would be the ones forsaken by God.

See, Jesus and David tell us that comfort in suffering is found in God alone. But the reason we can find true comfort in God alone is because he suffered for us.

Jesus on the cross is one of the greatest expressions of goodness through suffering. It is the greatest expression of goodness through suffering in the whole of human history.

God demonstrated his love for us through this, that when we were still sinners, Jesus died for us on the cross. Romans chapter 5, verse 6 to 8 says, you see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

[33 : 53] While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus willingly suffered being forsaken by God, so that we didn't have to be forsaken by him.

Isn't that amazing? This is the goodness of God. This is the love of God. That although I forsook God, I rejected him, we all rebelled against God.

We wanted nothing. In fact, we said, I would prefer to die than to recognize you as God. Even though we did that, God looked and he said, I will suffer and take the punishment that you deserve so that you don't have to.

See, the worst suffering that anyone has ever experienced pales in comparison to what I've been through.

The worst of the worst torture, the worst of the worst despair, was experienced by Jesus on the cross. Jesus, the son forsaken by God, the father on the cross.

[35 : 02] And so when we hear, my God, Jesus cry out in agony, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We see his heart and mind on display in Psalm 22.

We recognize that pain as terrible. We recognize that pain as just deep and dark. But we will never fully understand what Jesus went through on the cross.

Psalm 22, you can read it a thousand times. We will never properly understand what happened and the suffering that he went through. We won't understand it because Jesus died for us.

He experienced the suffering that we should have experienced. This is the God where true comfort is found in suffering.

In the God who suffered for us and demonstrated his love for us on the cross. We know that we have a good, good God.

[36 : 15] My God, my God, why have you forgiven me? Because of the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. So when you're in the middle of true suffering, find comfort in the goodness of God.

Find comfort in the God who suffered for you. Not through a change in circumstance. It might not be that your pain is relieved in the time.

It might be, but it might not be. Find comfort in knowing that no matter the circumstance, you have a good God who has the power to deliver on his goodness.

He has a perfect track record. He has demonstrated his goodness time and time and time again.

Shown most powerfully through Jesus' death on the cross.

When it feels like you're being crushed by suffering. When it feels like you have nowhere to turn.

[37 : 30] Find comfort in the God who suffered for you. When all is said and done, why am I going through this, God? Why are you putting me in this place?

God, why am I going through this? How can this be? Why would you allow this, God? The answer is, I don't know. I don't know why God's put you there.

But we have a good God who loves us. So much that he would suffer the worst suffering and die the worst death to demonstrate his love for us.

True comfort in suffering is found alone in the God who suffered for us. True comfort in suffering is found alone in the God who suffered for us.