

Advent in the Psalms: Grief

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] My reading for today is taken from Psalm 22. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

! Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? O 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.

[1 : 11] You made me trust you at my mother's breast. 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 patience surround me. They open wide their mouths at me.

Like a ravening 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 portrait. 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.

[2 : 13] 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.

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.

He 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.

[3 : 14] 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. He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship.

Before him shall bow all who go down to 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. Here ends the scripture reading. Thank you very much, Joan.

Whenever we think of a Bible character who has experienced unimaginable suffering and grief, I believe most of us, and perhaps all of us, tend to think about Job.

[4 : 31] But in Psalm 22, we find a man whose sufferings by far exceed Job's sufferings.

From the title of Psalm 22, we know that the psalmist David wrote it. But Psalm 22 is a perplexing psalm. What makes Psalm 22 perplexing is that in all the accounts of David's life that we have, in 1 and 2 Samuel, in 1 Kings, and in 1 Chronicles, there are no events to which we can link these horrific sufferings and the unmitigated grief that we find David lamenting about in Psalm 22.

But David wrote Psalm 22. We don't know the specific circumstances under which he wrote Psalm 22, but he faced circumstances of suffering and grief to cause him to pour out his heart to the Lord, as is recorded in Psalm 22.

But I think what makes Psalm 22 even more perplexing is that anyone who is familiar with the Gospels, anyone who is familiar with the accounts of the crucifixion that we find in the Gospels will quickly recognize that in Psalm 22, there are almost exact words and exact actions that are found in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion that we find here in Psalm 22.

And so what then are we to make of Psalm 22? And more importantly, what are we to make of Psalm 22 at Advent, which is the commemoration of Christ's first coming to earth as Savior and the anticipation of his second coming to the earth in the clouds as judge.

[7 : 07] By God's grace, this morning I hope to answer both of these questions in this morning's sermon. But first, let's pray. Amen. Father, we come to your word this morning.

And Lord, there's a sense in all of our hearts that we've come to an aspect of your word that affects us in ways that are difficult to communicate with words.

Lord, would you help us to draw near to your word this morning with open and attentive hearts.

We ask, Lord, that you speak to us. I pray, Father, that you would especially draw near to me. I ask for your help, Lord, to faithfully handle this perplexing portion of Scripture.

Would you guard me from casualness, would you help me, oh Lord, to stay within the four corners of your word and to faithfully proclaim it to these who are gathered this morning.

[8 : 54] Help me in the preaching and help us all in the hearing of your word this morning, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Psalm 22 is a psalm of lament.

And it has two distinct sections. Verses 1-21 and verses 22-31.

And so I've structured the sermon around these two sections under two headings. And the first one is present suffering. This is what we see David experiencing in verses 1-21.

In verses 1-2 we have his opening words of lament to God. He cries out to God and says, 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.

[10 : 10] And by night but I find no rest. In these opening words, David cries out to God with two convictions.

He's resolute in these two convictions. First, that God is his God. And second, that God has forsaken him.

David is sure that he belongs to God. He is sure that God is his God three times in these opening verses. Two times in verse 1 he calls God my God.

And then in verse 2 he calls God my God again. and then even further in verse 10 he again for the fourth time calls God his God. And yet this God that David has served and who he claims is his own has forsaken him.

but even David knows that this God whom he has asserted is his God has forsaken him but there's no wrongdoing in him.

[11 : 34] In verse 3 he says to God yet you are holy he's saying God there's no blame in you there's no fault in you there's no sin in you there's not a hint of wrongdoing in you you are holy and you are enthroned in the praises of Israel.

in verses 4 and 5 David affirms that in the past God has rescued and delivered his people he rescued and delivered his people who cried out to him look again at what he says in you our fathers trusted they trusted and you delivered them to you they cried and were rescued and in you they trusted and were not put to shame David's point is but God you're not always silent in the past when our fathers trusted you you answered them you delivered them when they cried out to you but God my experience is different in verses 6 to 8 he points to his different experience he says 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 what graphic language

David is saying God you have forsaken me and everyone has scorned me and despised me clearly this is a prolonged situation that's evident to those around David both his family and others and also his enemies enemies and yet despite the forsakenness that David is experiencing once again we see him in verses 9 and 10 affirming that God is the one who brought him into this world and God is

the one who made him to trust in him look again at what he says yet you are the one who took me from the womb you made me trust you at my mother's breasts on you was I cast from my birth and my and from my mother's womb you have been my

God this is David's way of saying to God God all my life I have served you God before I could remember myself from the time I was on my mother's breasts I've been faithful to you all my life and yet David is experiencing indescribable grief and suffering and I think brothers and sisters this is a good reminder to us that suffering is not always connected to sin and sometimes when we experience suffering or others around us experience suffering in our sinfulness we tend to think well what sin might be involved the truth is that suffering is a part of living in a broken and a fallen world and even those who follow Christ are not exempt from the suffering that we face in this fallen world and that is an undeniable reality and another undeniable reality is that sometimes when we as God's people face suffering

God is silent sometimes when we cry out to him as David did day and night there is no answer to our cries for help indeed this is one of the great mysteries of life life when the great mysteries of life is that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper one of the great mysteries of life that the Lord never promises that he will explain to us not in this life nor in the life to come we see in verse 11 the psalmist cries out to God and he is in absolute isolation he says to God be not far from me for trouble is near and there's no one to help he's totally isolated he's suffering all alone in verses 12 to 21

[16 : 54] David uses graphic language to describe the violence that he faced I know we just read it a moment ago but let's hear it again starting in verse 12 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 pot shirt 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 count all my bones

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 oh lord do not be far off oh you my health 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 have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen again brothers and sisters when we consider these words in psalm 22 we have to conclude that what David describes in these verses by far exceeds anything that is recorded in scripture about him and about what he experienced but when we consider the record of the life of

David's greater son the Lord Jesus Christ we find exact descriptions of his sufferings recorded in the gospels that correspond to these sufferings that we find in psalm 22 in some cases word for word and David wrote psalm 22 about a thousand years before the Lord Jesus Christ was born and so bearing this in mind let's quickly review some of these key verses that we have already looked at in psalm 22 so far the first and most obvious is in verse one in the gospels both in Matthew's account and Mark's account we have these words of abandonment that

David uttered in psalm 22 these were the words of Christ's cry of abandonment on the cross both gospel writers tell us that from from the hour of six to nine the ninth hour to the sixth hour to the ninth hour which would have been 12 known to 3 p.m.

there was utter darkness across the whole land both gospel writers tell us this and then at 3 p.m. in the afternoon of the ninth hour both gospel writers tell us that there's this cry that Jesus screams out on the cross these exact words that David utters in the opening verse of p.m.

[21 : 00] 22 Matthew's account records this at about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying Eli Eli Lema sabachthani that is my God my God why have you forsaken me in verse six we see David speaking of the widespread scorn and derision of all the people did David really experience this widespread derision of all the people was he really scorned by all mankind and despised by all the people David wasn't but his greatest son was the New Testament confirms to us that Isaiah the prophecy of

Isaiah is the prophecy about Christ's crucifixion and in Isaiah we find very similar language about how Christ was despised and rejected Isaiah 53 verse 3 says he was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not in verses 7 and 8 David refers to people mocking him and wagging their heads at him and he quotes the exact words that these people said to him and I think

this to me is one of the more perplexing verses of this psalm the other aspects of the psalm are words that we can connect to David and

Jesus so Jesus would say particular words that David said but here David is quoting words of the people around him and these are the words of the people around Jesus said a thousand years before Jesus ever lived he also says that they sold they took his garments they divided them among themselves they cast lot for his clothing he says that in verse 18 look at what Matthew records in Matthew 27 about the crucifixion he writes in verse 35 and when they had crucified him they divided his garments among them by casting lots and those who passed by derided him wagging their heads he trusts in God let

God deliver him if he desires him for he said I am the son of God do you think the people who were crucifying Jesus went and read Psalm 22 and said let's say what David said the people around him said no but they said exactly what David prophesies that they would say about his greater son the Lord Jesus Christ when we read David's description of the sufferings that he endured in particular from verses 14 to 17 I think it's fair to say that David had to have been writing poetically and figuratively because if these things literally happened to David he would have died if David's bones were literally out of joint if his hands and feet were literally pierced if his bones were such that he could count them they were so exposed that he could really count them

David would have died if what he describes what was going on in his heart experiencing something like heart failure David would have died one of the other reasons he would have died is because clearly if there were people doing these things to him they would have been sure that he died brothers and sisters what David describes in these verses poetically happened to Christ literally it's literally happened to him as he hung on the cross if you are halfway familiar with the gospel accounts of the crucifixion and what Jesus experienced on the cross you would begin to see incredible parallel between what David describes that happened to him and what actually happened to

[26 : 14] Jesus on the cross what David describes was experienced by his greater son even though it was not experienced by him so how can we understand what David has written in psalm 22 which clearly was beyond just his own experience and which clearly points to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross I think the best way to understand what we're seeing here and this connection to Christ his greater son is that David as he a prophet as he was experiencing some very difficult hardship in his life some deep suffering some prolonged suffering and as he wrote about his own suffering the Holy

Spirit moved upon David and at the same time caused him to prophesy about the sufferings of Jesus Christ and David prophesied a suffering that he would never endure a suffering he would never have to go through because his greatest son would be the one who would go through that suffering and brothers and sisters the same for us what David writes about in Psalm 22 the suffering that he writes about in Psalm 22 none of us have experienced it and none of us will experience it because there was only one to experience this and this was David's greatest son and he was not experiencing it because of something he did wrong he was experiencing it because this was what a holy God required as the punishment for sin this is what sin required this is what the satisfaction for sin required so what we have in Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm we have a psalm that speaks beyond

David to David's greatest son the Messiah it points to the redeemer of God's people it points to his sufferings that he would endure on their behalf as a substitute for their sins verse 15 of Psalm 22 is very easy to overlook notice what David says in the last clause of verse 15 he says you lay me in the dust of death notice that up to this point David is referring to his enemies in third person plural he is referring to them as they but here in verse 15 he uses second person singular he says you lay me in the dust of death something is going on in these verses when we consider that this last clause of verse 14 or verse 15 sorry is connected to verse 14 because it's one compound sentence verses 14 and 15 is one big compound sentence and the same one who lays him in the dust of death is the same one who's pouring him out like water who's causing his bones to be out of joint who's causing his heart to melt like wax who is causing his heart to melt within his breast who's causing his tongue to be so parched it's swollen to the sides and it's stuck to his jaws it would be a bad reading of these words to think that the enemies are at work in verse 14 and up to the very last clause of verse 15 and then only in verse 15 that it's referring to this one who is you you lay me in the dust of death the crucifixion of Jesus on one level was at the hands of the

Romans and the Jews but on the ultimate level the crucifixion of Jesus was at the hands of his own father who slayed his own son as a substitute for sinners who in his love and mercy had his son to come and take the place of sinners the place that you and I deserve and what our sins deserve Jesus bore them all Jesus paid the price for them all and his father required it of him as an expression of his mercy and grace that undeserving sinners like you and me would benefit from that that's the first part of psalm 22!

psalm 22 psalm! psalm! psalm verse 21 represents a turning point in the psalm look again at what it says save me from the mouth of the lion you have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen we see David concluding his prayer and finally he is asking God again save me from the mouth of the lion but he seems to be remembering that there was a time when God delivered him from the horns of the wild oxen and here again David is speaking figuratively and the picture is that he realizes he's at the point of death he realizes!

[33 : 02] that he's in the very jaws of the lion but he remembers there was a time I was on the horn of the oxen God you delivered me and what we're able to see is starting at verse 22 David's despair and suffering is transformed to hope in deliverance and his focus moves from his present suffering to his future rejoicing and that's what we see in verses 22 to 33 and this is my second and final point future rejoicing!

so what! what brings about this abrupt change from lamenting in the first part of the psalm to praising in the last part of the psalm?

psalm? psalm? psalm? what brings it about? we're not told specifically in the words of psalm 22 but I think it's fair to say that something happened something brought David from the lament that he was experiencing in the first 21 verses 1 to 21 to the rejoicing that we see him writing about in verses 22 to 31 I don't think it's reasonable to say that David just got delivered that God just intervened and changed his circumstances I don't think that's reasonable to conclude that that is what has happened I think what's more reasonable to conclude that it happened is that God drew near to his servant David who was in deep despair who thought

God had forsaken him and God assured him I have not forsaken you and God assured him this is not going to be your death this is not going to be the final word of you and David begins to hope in this assuring word that God gives him that he is going to stand in the congregation of the brethren once again and that is what we see him transitioning to starting in verse 21 verse 22 sorry look again at what it says he says I will future 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 again what a contrast to the first 21 verses of this psalm but again there's more going on in these verses than what meets our naked eyes the writer to the Hebrews helps us to see what is going on in these verses in Hebrews 2 11 and 12 the writer to the Hebrews attributes these words ultimately to David's greatest son not to David himself but to David's greatest son here's what he writes for he meaning Jesus who sanctifies those who are sanctified sorry for he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source that is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers saying

[37 : 15] I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise these words of David in Psalm 22 the writer to the Hebrew says these are the words of Jesus these are the words of David's greatest son but he says these words about his brothers about brothers and sisters the brethren the congregation of God's people whom God himself has sanctified and set apart as his own and together we'll sing the praises of God we don't have it recorded in the gospel writings but we should not think that when Jesus cried out on the cross my God my God why have you forsaken me that Jesus somehow died believing that

God had forsaken him eternally forever and he really didn't know what was going to happen once he closed his eyes that's not the witness of scripture the witness of scripture is that Jesus went to his grave knowing that God would raise him up David again in another messianic psalm earlier in psalm 16 David says these words in verse 10 and Peter uses these words on the day of Pentecost when he gives the case for the resurrection and he attributes these words to Jesus himself this is what it says for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption the Lord Jesus saw a day beyond his crucifixion a day when he would be in the midst of the congregation of God's people those who were his brothers and sisters sanctified by

God Jesus knew that he would not be abandoned in death he knew that death was not the last word for him in verse 24 David speaks of his experience in affliction now and this is what he says for he he's declaring this to his brothers and sisters in the congregation he's encouraging them and he's saying to them this is what he says I will do in the future for he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted and he has not hidden his face from him for he has heard when he cried to him this is David's experience that he is convinced has been his reality this one that he said had forsaken him this one whom he said had turned his face away from him

David is now saying no he will not do that 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 that's what David spoke to his brethren and brothers and sisters that's true for us as well God does not despise or abhor the affliction of our afflictions when we are afflicted he won't abhor us when we are afflicted he will not hide his face from us he will hear us when we cry to him but this was not true for David's greatest son David's greatest son on the cross experienced what

David said he didn't experience and to all of his brethren that they could expect not to experience God did hide his face from his son God did on the cross forsake his son and he did it because he had to do it it was what sin required it was what was necessary to satisfy sin it was necessary that God treated Jesus that way because that's the way you deserve to be treated that's the way I deserve to be treated and God treated him that way so that he will never treat us that way we will never be able to say with any degree of truth God you have forsaken me because God forsaken his son as a substitute for sinners our worst sin our darkest hour will not merit

[42 : 47] God hiding his face from us because he did it to his son who stood in our place you see this is where Psalm 22 especially breaks down for David and his greater son because David experienced a deliverance that his greatest son did not when he hung on the cross as a substitute when he endured the wrath of God the sinners who deserved to be treated the way Christ was treated so that we can be treated now the way we don't deserve to be treated with grace and mercy that's everlasting and it's never ending in verses 22 to 31 there's a fascinating progression of praise that we see in verses 22 to 26 it begins with praise from the one whom

God delivered to the people in the congregation so it starts with David who is now in the presence of the congregation and he's calling them to praise the Lord and then in verses 27 to 31 we see that this praise goes out to all the ends of the earth even to people yet unborn and what we see is that this is speaking about more than just David's deliverance if this is just about David's deliverance there's no way that David being delivered from that was going to all the ends of the earth of people yet unborn these verses more accurately speak and point to Christ's reward for his suffering in his resurrection the proclamation of the gospel to the nations and the conversion of people from every nation tongue and tribe and the exaltation of

Christ as king of the nations these verses more accurately speak to the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus that an untold number of people are now praising God to the ends of the earth that he is king Jesus is king of the nations and even this goes out to people yet unborn it is marveling to think that when David penned these words he talks about people yet unborn brothers and sisters all of us who belong to Christ we included in those words when David wrote these words we were unborn we were among those all of those who would come to Christ were envisioned in this deliverance that David refers to but has global reach and effect the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 12 verse 2 tells us that when Jesus was on the cross when Jesus was enduring the shame of the cross the writer to Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the cross and he despised the shame for the joy that was set before him I believe the joy that was said before him is this joy that the prophet David points to this joy of an amazing harvest of souls an amazing harvest from the nations it was this joy that was said before Jesus when he was on the cross that he could despise its shame it's about David's greatest son but David writes both in his present suffering and his future rejoicing

And so brothers and sisters Psalm 22 speaks to us about Advent because this is Christ in his first Advent this is why Christ came as wonderful as the ideas of Christ being born in a manger as sentimental as that is brothers and sisters let us not forget that he was born to die his first Advent was about his death yes about his living but also about his dying and Psalm 22 also points us to the future it points us to the fulfillment of this amazing harvest that Christ one day will return to receive unto himself as a people of his own possession purchased by his blood he will one day split the skies and he will return as king of the nations and he will gather his people to himself and as sure

as his first

[49 : 00] Advent was prophesied and fulfilled his second his second Advent that is also prophesied will be fulfilled and what a glorious day that will be what a glorious day that will be that we will have our salvation full and completed when our Savior returns and we will be with him forever and ever before I pray let me just say one thing to us when I was younger although I was I was a believer the Lord mercifully saved me at age 13 and yet

I used to be terrified about the return of the Lord I used to be terrified about the return of the Lord because I was more aware of myself and the many ways that I fell short of being the person God called me to be and I also grew up in a church that taught me that whether I was going to make heaven or not really depended on me depended on how I lived what I did what I didn't do and so being reminded of the coming of the Lord didn't bring joy to my soul it brought fear to my soul because I thought somehow maybe I won't make it and perhaps some of you might be thinking like that when you hear about the return of the

Lord you may be thinking more about yourself and your many failures more than thinking about our Savior who has taken our place who's paid for all of our sins all of them and all we have to do is wait for his return and he knows his own he has sealed his own and he will receive his own when he comes and that should bring us joy it shouldn't bring us fear and if you would say that you belong to Christ and that's bringing you fear I want to say to you this morning you look in the wrong place don't look to yourself but look to the Savior look to the one who's the perfect sacrifice before holy God God accepted his sacrifice and gave proof by raising him from the dead he's ascended to heaven he's seated at the right hand of God until his enemies have been made his footstool he will one day return and he will receive all who belong to him without exception and that is our blessed hope brothers and sisters let's pray happy father we are grateful for the sufferings of Christ because they are sufferings that we deserved to experience and Lord we thank you that because he suffered we will never suffer in those ways we thank you Lord that you forsook him on the cross so we will never be forsaken you turned your back to him you turned your face to him but we will forever see your face and Lord I pray that in this season of Advent that the joy of his return would truly occupy our hearts that unless you come sooner if we don't die we will behold the face of our

Savior when he returns in the clouds we thank you for your mercy and your grace and enjoy us to all generations praise in Christ's name amen you