

Singing when suffering

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 May 2024

Preacher: Andy Lloyd

[0 : 00] Good morning all. Good morning. Morning in the expensive seats up there. Nice to see you. We turn to Psalm 22.

As we begin, let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you on this Pentecost Sunday for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I pray now that as I speak, your words would speak through me.

And as we listen, your words would be heard clearly in our brain but also in our spirit. Change us, please, by what we hear today.

In the name of Jesus. Amen. So you know, of course, that as we read earlier, the narrative of the Pentecost Sunday is the first recorded episode of cricket being played.

Peter stood before the 11 and was bowled. How did Ken's groan get more of a laugh than my joke?

[1 : 20] There's a thing. Let's read Psalm 22. No, no, you've had it now. You've had it now. Psalm 22 from the New International Version.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer.

By night, but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One. You are the one Israel praises. In you our ancestors put their trust.

They trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved. In you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

All who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord, they say. Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.

[2 : 28] 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 on you. My mother's womb, you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there's no one to help. Many balls surround me. Strong balls of Bashan encircle me.

Roaring lions that tear their prey, open their mouths wide against me. I'm poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax, is melted within me.

My mouth is dried up like potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircle me.

They pierce my hands and my feet, all my bones are on display. People stare and gloat over me.

They divide my clothes among them, and cast lots for my garment.

[3 : 29] But you, Lord, do not be far away from me. You are my strength. Come quickly to help me. Deliver me 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. I will declare your name to my people. In the assembly 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 is not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one.

He has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help. From you come the theme of my praise in the great assembly. Before those who fear you, I will fulfil my vows.

The poor will eat and be satisfied. Those 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 the families of the nations will bow down before him.

[4 : 38] 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, declaring to a people yet unborn, he has done

it.

What a psalm. What a psalm. And the theme that goes with the psalm in our series on psalms, if you're visiting us, we're doing a series of psalms.

We're not doing all of them. We're going and picking a number of them. And today we're doing Psalm 22, and the theme is the soul song, Singing When Suffering.

Just to clear up a couple of bits of terminology to start with, if I may, the bulls of Bashan. What on earth are the bulls of Bashan? It's worth just a quick little look.

[5 : 46] The plain of Bashan was a large and fertile plain, and it was a really good grazing place for all sorts of animals, but bulls particularly, in the northern part of Israel.

It was famous for rich pasture and used for raising well-fed cattle. So the cattle raised on Bashan were known across the nation as big, strong, and self-contented.

These are big, scary beasts, basically. The bulls of Bashan were big, scary beasts, and they were going to, they're a bit scary to look at.

So that's the bulls of Bashan that the psalmist was referring to. In pots, just for those who don't know and I didn't know, they're broken pieces of baked clay. They're basically broken pots and shards and things like that.

So it's part of that sort of, ugh, hurt your hands, hurt your feet, hurt your mouth, if you chose to put them in your mouth.

[6 : 56] Okay. Now there's a really interesting mix of moods in this psalm. And we need to hear all the moods, but first of all, we need to recognise that the psalmist is foretelling the suffering of Jesus.

And part of this psalm, and I want to move, to sort of use both parts of it, is the first bit that we need to look at is the foretelling of the suffering of Jesus.

A prophetic psalm. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It opens, echoing, of course, the words of Jesus. On the cross.

He was mocked by His enemies. They pierced my hands and my feet in verse 16.

They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. Verse 18. And then these feelings, these agonising feelings that we've spoken about so recently through Easter, abandoned by friends, separated from Father God, facing injustice.

[8 : 22] And they're things which Jesus suffered for us. They're things that people, that Jesus suffered so that we might know forgiveness.

We might know eternity with the Father God. We might know salvation. salvation. And whatever else we talk about and whatever else we do and think about in this psalm, we mustn't lose sight of that reference to and that foretelling of the suffering of Jesus.

Because when we talk about our suffering, we need to reference it against the suffering of Jesus who gave his very life for each of us.

And whatever else we are feeling today, that's just something which is context but also important.

Context because it helps us think about our own suffering and it's important because it gives us the freedom to be children of God.

Okay. So what about our own suffering? Let's move on could we please? Thank you. I want to suggest there are a number of things that we need to do when we suffer and I suppose that it goes without saying but I will say it anyway because that's what preachers do that we will suffer.

[9 : 57] We will suffer through our life. We will suffer physically. I might drop something on my toe and it will hurt or I might trip over and hurt myself.

We will suffer emotionally. We will be sad about things. We will be upset about things. We will be scared about things. We will be confused about things. We will struggle and things will happen which will make us feel like that.

That is just part of the human condition and we are not able to free ourselves from it. Suffering comes.

Suffering happens. and we will suffer spiritually. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me? So far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day and you do not answer by night but I find no rest.

[11 : 03] The psalmist is saying to God, where are you? I feel like you have gone. Now the bigger picture of course is we know that Jesus never leaves us but it can feel, I can certainly feel, in a very lonely place, a very barren place, a very isolated place.

place. So suffering is something that happens. What do we do? Trust. We trust the truth of who God is. Be honest about your anguish and tell God how you really feel. The psalmist there is telling God how he really feels. Where are you? I have cried out to you by day and by night and you have not answered me. What is going on? And sometimes I think that we try to measure our feelings because we don't want to offend God. And maybe it's me, maybe the rest of you don't. I don't want to offend God by saying, whoa, hang on, what's going on here? But God's really big. Talked about that last week. God's really big. He understands. He knows. We can be really honest about our anguish. And we can get on our knees before Almighty God and we can say, this is just horrid. [12:42] And I don't feel your presence here. God, what can I do? How can I move with this? Jesus, please make yourself down to me.

What about when the situation feels unclear? The situation feels, I have no idea what to do. And there are lots and lots of things that you could do and there are lots of voices saying, do this, do this, do this. And you go on the internet and you get 101 different pieces of advice from 100 people.

And it's really hard. What's the right thing to do? Trust God. Number 96 in Youth Praise, which for those of you who aren't old enough to know about Youth Praise, was an orange book. Youth Praise was orange to 150 and then green. Oh no. Other way around, was it green and then orange after 100? Right, okay. Suffering.

[14:00] Do you see? Suffering. Number 96 in Youth Praise, book one. When the road is rough and steep, fix your eyes upon Jesus.

There we are. There's one for those of you who are more than 400 years old. When the road is rough and steep, fix your eyes on Jesus. On Jesus. We can trust God when the road feels very, very unclear. Job 13, Though he slay me, yet I will trust him.

That's quite a bold statement, isn't it, from Job. God might well slay me. He might kill me. I might die. But even in that, I'll trust him.

My trusting God is not about my circumstance. It's about knowing what he has done for me and knowing that as he does what he, as he has done for me before, he will do for me again.

[15:08] His word is true, his word is trustworthy, his promise is sure, and my salvation in him is assured. Though he slay me, I will trust him.

And then verse 3, after the psalmist has said, whoa, I don't know where you are, God, you've left me, I'm completely abandoned, you are enthroned of the Holy One, you are the one Israel praises. get yourself back to being able to say to God, I trust you. Feels really horrid, feels really scary, feels really unpleasant, feels really alone, but God, I trust you.

I will trust you because you are the enthroned one, you are the Holy One. Next slide please. Comfort in your suffering.

Even if everyone else is mocking you, you can still find comfort in God. God will never mock you. He will never laugh at you.

[16:26] He will never come at you and say, ha, you think you're clever, but you're not. No one likes you. They're not words that Jesus uses.

Even if everyone else is mocking you, even if you feel socially and emotionally and spiritually isolated, you can still find comfort in God.

God is our constant suffering. Before time, now, until the end of time. The alpha and the omega. The beginning and the end. From my mother's womb, you have been my God, says the psalmist in verse 10. God is our constant who will comfort us in our suffering.

And you're not on your own. You're not on your own in your suffering. And that can be a comfort. David, Jeremiah, Job, and Jesus.

[17:35] Suffering is part and going to be part of our experience as Christians. And that's not a great thing to hear because we don't want to suffer.

But it is just the situation and the truth. Next slide, please. God is our protection. Again, God is our constant presence.

He's with us. And we can turn to him for protection. There's lovely verses in Psalms, isn't there, about running into a strong tower. The enemies can't get me because I've run into the strong tower of the safety of God.

Verse 19 of this Psalm, of Psalm 22. But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You're my strength. Come quickly to help me. And those come quickly to help me prayers are really important, are really useful prayers.

They're not the sort of, I need to prepare myself for my prayer time. I need to allow myself to know, you know, and get on my knees or do however it is that you choose to pray.

[18 : 51] Get to my particular favourite chair or whatever, and read some scripture and get myself into the mood for prayer. This is the, whoa, God, help me. And those prayers are wonderful prayers.

Because, and I will speak personally rather than as a generic, if I pray one of those quick, help me God prayers, I very often see, wow, that was quick.

when I said please help me, I didn't mean immediately, but thank you very much. Thank you very much. Because God changes the situation.

Sometimes if you're in a threatening or scary situation, sometimes if you're in a meeting at work, or an experience in your neighbourhood, or whatever, and you don't feel safe, God, keep me safe, God, help me, thank you.

That was very useful, that was very good, that was very kind. And then this wonderful verse in Psalm 118, the Lord is with me, I'll not be afraid, what can mere mortals do to me?

[20 : 05] What can mere mortals do to me if God is with me? Well, they can do quite a lot, they can physically hurt you, they can spiritually hurt you, they can emotionally hurt you, but they cannot destroy you, they cannot destroy you.

And it's always instructive, isn't it, reading the biography of martyrs, people who have given their lives for the gospel.

John's read a couple of times, my hearing, the story of the, I think, the Vietniam family, who were killed, a little boy ran into the bush, and his father said, come back, we'll die together, and be in heaven together.

Reading the story of Corrie Ten Boom, reading all sorts of other stories, it was her sister, wasn't it, who went to the gas chamber, reading stories of people who said, you can do what you want to me, because you can't take me away from my God.

The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid, what can mere mortals do to me? Next slide, please, Josh, or is it Shelley doing, are you driving today?

[21 : 35] Thank you. Praise in your suffering, God. This is one of those ones, if I was sitting with you, say, yeah, nice one, Andy. This is the bit where you say, I've just broken my leg and I've got to get up and dance with joy.

Hooray, I've stubbed my toe. Hallelujah. Now, I thought about this point on the slide quite carefully. Even when in the middle of suffering and trial, we should praise God. And I kept on changing it to can praise God or might praise God or we might choose to praise God and then I changed it back to should.

Because I think that Scripture is clear and it's hard and it's a challenge. Even in the middle of suffering, we should praise God.

I will declare your name to my people in the assembly. I will praise you. And this isn't what's known as cognitive dissonance.

[22 : 44] This isn't hooray, I've stubbed my toe, I love being hurt, thank you God for hurting my toe so much. I think it's marvellous. This is saying despite my pain, I will continue to praise you.

Despite the struggle I'm in, despite the challenge and the danger and the mess that I find myself in, I will take myself out of it and I will praise God.

And I will thank God for who he is and what he's done. Because praise is a powerful weapon against the enemy. And this little bit from 2 Chronicles 20, you can have a look at the whole context, it's the whole of 2 Chronicles chapter 20, but the first verse and then the 22nd verse.

After this, the Moabites and the Ammonites with some of the Mehunites came to war against Shehoshaphat. I picked a really good verse, didn't I there?

As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Shea and they were defeated. As they began to sing and praise, God acted to change the situation, to defeat the enemy.

[24 : 03] Please don't get into a position where you're thinking I have to thank God for being hurt, but do get into the place of saying despite my pain, despite my anguish, despite the struggle that I find myself in, God I thank you and I praise you for who you are and I thank you and I praise you

that you have got this situation.

And what can mere mortals do to me? They can take my life, they can't take my eternity. So praise in your suffering.

And then next slide please, perseverance. Oh, perseverance, what a menace of a word. I've done it, now carry on doing it.

Yeah, I've done it twice, no, no, no, carry on doing it. Stickability, that awful word, resilience, whatever word you want to use.

Our suffering may be part of God sharpening us to be more effective for him. Oh, I wish it were easier.

[25 : 22] But actually, sometimes, I need to be changed, miraculously changed by God to make me become somebody that is more useful for him.

Knocking off the rough edges, it's sometimes called. Smoothing things around, allowing me to become more God-like and less me-like.

And so, sometimes, the suffering is a little bit about, let's just make this, make you a bit better. When I was a late teenager, and I was always late as a teenager, but when I was 16, 17, 18, I had really difficult struggle with ingrown toenails.

And you only know how painful a toe can be if you've had an ingrown toenail, because they really do hurt. And in the end, the doctor said, I'm fed up with this, we're going to take your growing bed out, so you're going to take the nail off your toe, and so I have no toenail on my toe, on my big toe.

[26 : 37] I'll just tell you that. You know, you try really hard up here, and just sometimes.

No. And it really hurt. Yeah, no, thank you, it really hurt. It hurt more than that. And for a little while, I was hobbling around, and on a stick, and on a crutch, and all sorts of stuff, and I had to go and get the bandage changed, which hurt, and in those days, they didn't have bandages, they just had hot coals that they put in it.

but actually it's better, because once it heals, I don't get ingrown toenails anymore, and I'm not permanently hobbling, and permanently in pain from that.

Silly example, silly example, but maybe God, through your suffering, is turning you into somebody more like Him, because He's got a job for you to do, that's a bigger job than you have at the moment, and He needs to sharpen you up.

Or, it might be that our suffering is part of God's fulfilling His wider, sovereign plan. Well, that's a rip-off, isn't it? I suffer, so somebody else benefits.

[28 : 05] Jesus. Jesus suffered for my benefit. There was absolutely no reason that Jesus had to die because of Him.

He died because of me, and He died because of you. He suffered to fulfil God's wider plan. God's love.

And maybe sometimes in our suffering, it's because others will benefit from what we have been through. That feels hard, but that is again part of the deal, part of who we are as brothers and sisters in Christ, children of Almighty God.

God. James 1, verse 12, blessed, blessed, chuffed to bits, is the one who perseveres on the trial, because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Hooray! your suffering might be a gift to me. I thank you very much for it.

[29 : 26] Next slide, please. Thank you. That was good. And so what? And so what? What does this psalm tell us? It tells a whole lot more than this, by the way. Go back to Psalm 22 and have a read through it for yourself.

we will face times of suffering. It's just part of who we are, part of how it works. And when we do, we can tell God how it feels, and the fact that we just feel abandoned.

Cry before God. Say that you feel lonely before God, isolated before God, broken before God. He's big enough to hear it. We can then be encouraged that God is with us.

He'll protect us, and He'll deliver us. And because of that, even in our pain, we can rejoice. Amen. Amen. Amen.