

Psalm 22 “A Song for the Forsaken”
Psalm 22
Hebrews 2

August 28, 2016

Psalm 22 is clearly a song of the cross.

Not only does Jesus quote the opening line from the cross,
but *all four gospels* draw on various parts of Psalm 22.
Matthew and Mark both use verses 1, 7, 8, and 18.
Luke borrows from verses 7, 8, and 18.
John alludes to verses 16 and 18.

So no one will be surprised to hear that the chief voice of this song
is the voice of Jesus singing from the cross.
Jesus is the great singer of Psalm 22.

But as we have seen from Psalms 20-21,
these royal Psalms are always sung by *Israel* in the temple –
not just the king in his private devotions.
The song is not just David singing to God.
This song was designed to be sung in the worship of the temple.
All Israel sings with David.
And even so, the whole church sings Psalm 22 with Jesus.

The first example of this is found in 2 Timothy 4:17.

In 2 Timothy 4:17, Paul says,
“the Lord stood by me and strengthened me,
so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.
So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.”

Paul doesn’t *say* that he’s quoting a bible passage here –
but the *only* two verses in the Bible
that speak of being rescued from the mouths of lions
are in Daniel 6 and Psalm 22.

And Psalm 22 immediately goes on to talk about how this rescue
will enable the singer to go on and praise the LORD to the nations!

So, just as we saw in Psalm 20 –

when is Jesus afflicted? When is the “day of trouble” for Jesus?
Whenever his people are afflicted and troubled by their foes!
That is why Psalm 20 is such a great song for the *church* to sing.
In the same way,
Paul sees *himself* in the forsaken sufferer of Psalm 22.

Because we have been united to Jesus –
we have been united to him *in his suffering* –
so that we might also be united to him in his resurrection glory.

Therefore, *because* Psalm 22 is true for Jesus – therefore it is also true for us.

Sing Psalm 22 (stanzas 1-7)

Read Hebrews 2:3-18

I want to start by saying something very clearly:

It's *okay* to ask God, "Why have you forsaken me?"

Yes, it's true that God has promised that he will never forsake his people.

But there are times when we do not feel his presence.

There are times when we do not experience the nearness of God.

Our Confession of Faith explains why this happens:

"The most wise, righteous, and gracious God
doth oftentimes leave, for a season, his own children to manifold temptations,
and the corruption of their own hearts,
to chastise them for their former sins,
or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption
and deceitfulness of their hearts,
that they may be humbled;
and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence
for their support upon himself,
and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin,
and for sundry other just and holy ends." (5.5)

Why does God forsake us – for a season?

Sometimes it is discipline for our sin.

Other times it is to show us the danger of sin.

Other times it is "for sundry other just and holy ends"!

I love that line.

It reminds us that God has his reasons – but we are not always privy to them!

Hebrews 2 provides us with another of God's just and holy ends.

Hebrews' commentary on Psalm 22 provides the basic structure of the sermon today.

Many have noted that Psalm 22 fits neatly in two parts:

verses 1-21, which focus on the problem and the cry for help;

and verses 22-31, which speak of how the Psalmist

will declare the praises of God to the nations.

So in your sermon outline you will find these two parts described in the language of Hebrews 2!

“Made like his brothers” (v1-21)

and “so that he might help the offspring of Abraham” (v22-31)

But the commentary from Hebrews helps us to see how closely linked these two parts are.

If he had never been despised and afflicted,
he could not help those who were despised and afflicted.

Why did God forsake Jesus?

God forsakes the righteous King—his beloved Son—

because only thus can Jesus stand in the mist of his brethren.

The righteous suffer because it is *only* if the righteous One suffers
that God can be just and the justifier of the ungodly.

In that respect Psalm 22 is very similar to the book of Job.

Job was innocent.

Job was righteous.

“Have you considered my servant Job – there is none on the earth who is like him,
who turns away from evil and does what is right?”

We don’t like that answer.

It offends us that the innocent suffer.

And there is a sense in which we are right to be offended.

They *don’t* deserve it – and we would like to spare them!

But if we lived in a world where everyone got exactly what they deserved,
then there would be no hope –

for “the wages of sin is death.”

The suffering of the innocent is still a *bad* thing –

but without it, there would be no hope for sinners.

The title of Psalm 22 shows us three things:

To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

“to the choirmaster” reminds us that this was designed for public worship;

“according to The Doe of the Dawn” gives us the tune –

and Jerome is probably right to point us to the dawn of the third day –

when this Psalm was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

And “A Psalm of David” reminds us that the *singer* of the Psalm is the Messiah –
the anointed one of Israel.

Israel could sing this song in David – just as we sing this song in Christ.

1. Made Like His Brothers (v1-21)

The first movement of Psalm 22 moves back and forth

between the *problems* faced by the Psalmist,
and his cry to the LORD for help.

Psalm 22 calls us to enter into the prayer of Jesus –
so that as we share in his affliction and suffering,
we might also share in his resurrection glory.

a. My Problem: Why Have You Forsaken Me? (v1-2)

22 *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

My God – my God – O my God!

I will pour out my soul in anguish *before my God.*

I will cry out in agony *to my God.*

There is anger – there is pain – there is despair in this voice.
But there is also faith.

Why have you forsaken me?

If God has truly and finally forsaken you –

if God no longer hears you –

then why are you crying out, “*My God, my God...*”?

I know that God has not *finally* forsaken me.

Rather, the *forsaking* of Psalm 22 has to do with *present* abandonment.

To put it simply, when you are dealing with someone in the pit of despair,
please do *not* say, “Don’t worry, ‘All things work together for good!’”

It is true that there *can be* some comfort in giving someone *eschatological hope*.

Sometimes the *only hope we have* is that God will make this right at the final judgment.

But Paul’s statement in Romans 8:28 – “all things work together for good...”
is talking about the resurrection of the body at the final day.

After all, he has just said in 8:23 that not only the creation,
but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,
groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons,
the redemption of our bodies.”

It’s all nice and good to say that *someday* this will all work out –
but *today* God has abandoned me!

Today God has forsaken me –

and giving me promises about some distant future
sounds like “pie in the sky by-and-by!”

I *know* that you will deal with this *someday* –
but why is this happening *now*!?

I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

The stress is mounting.
The insomnia is getting worse.
God is silent – and I am worn out and exhausted.

Have you ever been there?
Maybe you are there right now.
How do you respond when God is silent?

The Psalmist teaches us – by modeling it for us
and inviting us to inhabit his prayer.

Because the best place to start is by remembering our history –
remembering our fathers – and *their* story:

i. Remembering History: Our Fathers Trusted You and You Delivered Them (v3-5)

³ *Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises^[a] of Israel.*

⁴ *In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

Our prayers have a tendency to slip into a “me and God” mentality.
We need to remember that we are connected to a wider and deeper story.
Yes, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is “my God” –
but the Holy One is *enthroned on the praises of Israel* –
our fathers trusted in him –
and we are connected to them and their story.

Our fathers trusted in you –
Abraham believed your promises, and you delivered him.
When Israel was in Egypt,
the LORD called Moses to lead his people out from under the yoke of Pharaoh.
Throughout the period of the Judges,
when the people of Israel were oppressed by their enemies,

they cried out to the LORD – and the LORD raised up judges
who delivered them from all their foes.
And as we sing Psalm 22, we can keep adding to that story of God’s faithfulness.
Most importantly, our Lord Jesus cried out to God – and God raised him up!
And when the Romans persecuted our fathers, the Lord delivered them.
The martyrs cried out to God – and God saved them!
You might that is an odd example.
The martyrs, after all, were burned at the stake – or torn to pieces by wild animals!

In the second century, there was a faithful Christian bishop named Polycarp
who was burned at the stake for his faith by a Roman governor.
His church wrote a letter to explain the effect of his death:

“He was not only a famous teacher, but also a notable martyr,
whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, for it followed the Gospel of Christ.
By his endurance he overcame the unrighteous ruler,
and thus gained the crown of immortality,
and he is glorifying God and the Almighty Father,
rejoicing with the Apostles and all the righteous,
and he is blessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls,
and Governor of our bodies,
and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.”

(Martyrdom of Polycarp, 19)

Martyrdom is not a loss – but a gain!

We *know* that God has been faithful in the past.
But in another sense, that only makes my problem worse.
Because the stories that I have heard of God’s faithfulness in the past
do not jive with my own experience in the present.

b. My Problem II: But I Am a Worm – Mocked by My Foes (v6-8)

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

⁷ *All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;*

⁸ *“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”*

Notice that he does not say “I think of myself as a worm.”
This is not a problem of low self-esteem.

Rather, the problem is that *others* are treating me as a worm –
“scorned by mankind and despised by the people.”

Scorn and derision have dehumanized me.
It is not easy to kill a man.
But if you can make him seem less than human – it’s a lot easier.

They mock me – they heap scorn and derision on my head.
They also remember the stories of God’s past faithfulness –
and they see my present, and they mock!
“He trusts in the LORD, let the LORD deliver him!!”

Notice that the mockers of Psalm 22 are familiar with Yahweh.
Yes, he is scorned by “mankind” –
but also despised by “the people” –
a term ordinarily used of Israel.
In Acts 4, the apostles comment on this,
“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus,
whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate,
along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.”
All humanity unites against the singer of this Psalm.
They tell him that his trust in the LORD is futile and vain.

That’s what they said to Jesus on the cross.
That’s what they continue to say to us.

How does he reply?
“Into your hand I commit my spirit” –
or in the words of verses 9-11:

**i. Remembering *My History*: You Have Been My God from My
Mother’s Womb (v9-11)**

⁹ *Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.*
¹⁰ *On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.*
¹¹ *Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.*

Remembering God’s faithfulness to our fathers is important –
but it is equally important for me to remember *my history*.
Not only have you been faithful to our fathers –
you have also been *my God* from my mother’s womb.

Don’t leave me here in the midst of trouble?!

Do not abandon me to my foes.
For trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Let those words sink in:
“for trouble is near, and there is none to help.”

I don't think that I can quite grasp that.
When I stood alone in the night with a tiny baby at my side,
wondering if I would ever see my wife again –
there came Andrew and Richard and Eli through the door.
Two skilled physicians were operating on my wife –
and a loving congregation did everything they could to help.

When I spent a summer in Eritrea in East Africa,
I may have been far from everyone I knew –
but between the church in Eritrea,
the OPC mission,
and the US embassy,
I was never far from help.

But for Jesus as he carried his cross to Golgotha
trouble was very near –
and his friends had abandoned him;
his people were calling for his death –
there was none to help.

And so the Psalmist returns to the depths of the problem.
Indeed, verses 12-18 use a rich variety of images to describe the problem.

c. My Problem III: Bulls, Lions, Water, Wax, Potsherds, Dogs – the Cross (v12-18)

¹² *Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*
¹³ *they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*

In verses 12-13 imagine powerful bulls with mouths like lions.
A bull is around 5 times larger than a lion –
so if you imagine a creature combining the strength and size of a bull,
with the ferocity and teeth of a lion,
you will get a picture of what the Psalmist is saying!

¹⁴ *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;
15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

In verse 14 I am poured out like water –
I have no solidity – I am melting like wax –
I can't hold myself together!

In verse 15 the image reverses itself.
Instead of being poured out like water – I have no water!
My strength is dried up like a potsherd –
my tongue sticks to my jaws –
I am parched and thirsty –
You lay me in the dust of death.

*16 For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet^[b]—
17 I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
18 they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

The rapid-fire imagery shifts in verse 16 to a pack of ravenous dogs surrounding me –
stripping off my flesh so that I can see – and count – my bones.
I am a spectacle for them – they delight in my agony.
All throughout human history, you see this over and over again.
People who would normally find such a scene repulsive and horrific
become so drawn into the moment
that they participate and celebrate the torture and death of another.

i. My Plea: You, O LORD, Save Me! (v19-21)

*19 But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!
You have rescued^[c] me from the horns of the wild oxen!*

Verses 19-21 then form the final plea of our Lord Jesus to his Father.

Echoing the images of the previous section – the dog, the lion, and the ox –
he pleads with God:
Do not be far off!
O you my help – come quickly to my aid!
The helper in scripture is one who does for you
what you could not possibly do for yourself.
Deliver me!
Save me!

And then, suddenly at the end of verse 21 –
“you *have rescued me* from the horns of the wild oxen!”

We have switched from the plea,
begging God to do something –
to the past tense – God *has* rescued me – he *has* answered me.

While the change in tone is sudden – and the contrast is almost shocking –
this is entirely in keeping with Israel’s experience of Yahweh.

God often seems to delight in the last-minute surprise.
Just when you think that there is no hope –
God does something that no one expected.
The resurrection of Jesus is perhaps the most obvious example!

But remember that Paul takes over this imagery in 2 Timothy 4:17.
Because this is true of Jesus,
therefore it is also true for those who are united to Jesus.
But also remember the *point* of 2 Timothy 4:17 –
“so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.
So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.”

You can only take the first part of Psalm 22 as your prayer,
if you also take the *second part* of Psalm 22 as your promise!

2. So That He Might Help the Offspring of Abraham (v22-31)

Verse 22 speaks of what will happen when God delivers his Son:

a. Then I Will Tell of Your Name to My Brothers (v22-26)

²² *I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:*

²³ *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!
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.*

And verse 23 marks a transition in the pronouns.

The 'you' suddenly becomes the congregation.

"He" is now God.

Until now, "they" were those who had tormented and mocked "me"
now "they" are those who turn to the LORD.

Notice the themes of part two:

I will tell your name to my brothers

(the quotation used in Hebrews 2).

God has heard him when he cried to him

(a point drawn out in Hebrews 5).

The afflicted will then eat and be satisfied

(Jesus refers to his flesh as the bread that came down from heaven in John 6:51)

All the families of the nations shall worship God because of him (Philippians 2).

This is the story of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And because it is true for him, therefore it is true for us.

If you want God to deliver you from your trouble –
just so that you can sit around and do your own thing –
don't expect God to respond!

²⁵ *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.*

²⁶ *The afflicted^[d] shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!*

We have very much lost sight of the biblical concept of vows.

But it's entirely appropriate to say,

"if you, O LORD, will deliver me from this enemy [name your trouble],
then I will proclaim your great victory in the great congregation."

Our Confession of Faith says that a vow

"is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty,
in way of thankfulness for mercy received,
or for the obtaining of what we want,

whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties:

or, to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto." (22.6)

Beyond my ordination and marriage vows,
I haven't taken many vows – but when I was single
(after many failed relationships)
I vowed not to pursue a romantic relationship with a woman
until those who knew me best approved of the relationship.

I wanted to find a wife – and I realized that I needed the wisdom of others –
so I bound myself not to a “necessary duty” –
(scripture never requires that your friends approve of your prospective wife!),
but to something that I believed I needed (due to past failures).

And in fulfillment of that vow,
I continue, from time to time, to repeat the story – as I do today! –
to bear witness to God's faithfulness to all generations.

When the Psalmist says “my vows I will perform before those who fear him,”
he is referring to the practice of bringing a vow offering.
In the OT, when a person took a vow before God,
(something like, “if you give me victory in battle, I will offer a hundred bulls”)
then if God did what the person asked,
the person would bring a hundred bulls as a vow offering.

The vow offering was a subset of the peace offering.
As such, the vow offering would be eaten
by the household of the one who made the vow.

Hence “the afflicted shall eat and be satisfied.”

We need to see the Lord's Supper as the fulfillment of Jesus' vow offering.
Jesus's vow was that if the Father rescued him,
then he would praise him in the midst of the congregation,
and his body and blood would become the sacrificial meal for all nations.
That's why the theme of eating becomes so important at the end of Psalm 22
(verses 26 and 29) –
and particularly the theme of eating and worshiping.

Because this goes well beyond the particular practices of Israel.
“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD.”

In other words, whereas the Psalmist remembers God's faithfulness to “our fathers,”
the result of what God does for the Son of David
will be that *all the families of the nations shall worship before you.*

b. Then All the Earth Shall Turn to the LORD (v27-31)

²⁷ *All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.*

²⁸ *For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.*

When God brings his suffering servant to glory,
then all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD.
The nations did not turn and worship the LORD in any significant way
until the resurrection of Jesus.

But when Jesus was raised from the dead,
then came to pass what the Psalmist had said so many hundreds of years earlier –
what Israel had sung for so many centuries.

God had promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his Seed.
David began to point in that direction
(after all, you see many Gentiles serving in David's court)
but only in Jesus does Psalm 22 become literally true.

²⁹ *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.*

³⁰ *Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;*

³¹ *they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.*

And you see in verses 29-31 that same focus on future generations –
“a people yet unborn.”

You are called to enter into Jesus' prayer.

You are the posterity – the people yet unborn –
to whom Jesus declares the faithfulness of God.

And as you see the continued faithfulness of God in this generation,
you continue, as the people of Jesus, to bear witness to his righteousness.