

Songs of the Spirit | Using the Psalms to Connect With God

Messiah

Psalm 22

May 6, 2018

*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.
2 O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest. 3 Yet You are holy, O
You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. 4 In You our fathers trusted; They trusted and You
delivered them. 5 To You they cried out and were delivered; In You they trusted and were not
disappointed.*

*6 But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people. 7 All who see me
sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 8 "Commit yourself to the LORD;
let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."*

*9 Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother's
breasts. 10 Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother's womb.*

*11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help. 12 Many bulls have surrounded
me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. 13 They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening
and a roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like
wax; It is melted within me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my
jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has
encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I can count all my bones. They look, they
stare at me; 18 They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.*

*19 But You, O LORD, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance. 20 Deliver my soul from
the sword, My only life from the power of the dog. 21 Save me from the lion's mouth; From the horns
of the wild oxen You answer me.*

*22 I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. 23 You who
fear the LORD, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you
descendants of Israel. 24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has
He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.*

*25 From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. 26
The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live
forever! 27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the
nations will worship before You. 28 For the kingdom is the LORD'S And He rules over the nations. 29 All
the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, All those who go down to the dust will bow before
Him, Even he who cannot keep his soul alive. 30 Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to
the coming generation. 31 They will come and will declare His righteousness To a people who will be
born, that He has performed it.*

We're looking at TEN THEMES in the Book of Psalms. So far we've looked at Psalms of Creation and last week Psalms about Torah (God's written words to His people) and today Psalms of the Messiah.

There are some Royal Psalms that focus on the coming of the Messiah King and others that focus on a suffering Messiah...WHICH was an idea totally foreign to the people to whom Jesus Christ came – the disciples and the others JUST COULD NOT imagine a Savior of the World who would come in weakness and would suffer and die.

Before the First Century this particular Psalm (22) was NOT considered a Messianic Psalm..."It can't be because the character suffers and THE MESSIAH CAN'T SUFFER"... Little did they see that the Messiah would conquer through weakness, would bring life through death and that's the POINT of this Psalm.

Christians want to jump right to the fact that Jesus Christ quoted v.1 when He was dying...and that's amazing because it was written almost 1000 years before the Crucifixion...and it predicts His abandonment, His thirst, His being surrounded by a crowd of hateful people (like bulls/lions/dogs)...how they wagged their heads and gambled for His clothes and as He quoted verse one the crowd (who had all basically memorized the Psalms) they must have been unnerved by the number of corresponding details.

But before we get to scene this Psalm predicted, WE HAVE TO GIVE HEED to its first meaning – this is a believer in God (David) who feels totally abandoned and forgotten by God...and maybe YOU have too. So let's let this Psalm go to work on us. Let's see:

- 1) A Dark Meditation on Despair (Bad News)
- 2) Good News on Despair from This Dark Psalm
- 3) How YOUR Despair Can Be Redeemed

The bad news about despair in this poem is that... it's coming for YOU. And I'm sure, for most of us, it's already come – we've had brushes with real difficulty and stuff that's so overwhelming that YOU JUST CAN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

I mean there are times when the right thing to do is to just "stay on the ride" (Patty Griffin) and if you can hang in there and make the right moves you can kind of fix the damage...sort of manage the crisis.

BUT THAT IS NOT what's facing this poet. He's got NOTHIN'! The opposition is so overwhelming and the only thing that can save him is a miracle...from God. The great thing is: he does know God and yet... Elvis has left the building! God is nowhere to be found.

“My God, my God – WHY have you forsaken me?...I cry day by day but YOU do not answer and night by night but I get no help!”

This seems to be the main problem. He alternates in the first six stanzas (notice the use of “but” and “yet”):

- I am rejected by God/people – God is able but He won’t help
- I have LOST all credibility (I’m a worm/pest that people want to kill)
- You (God) have known me from my mother’s arms – But I’m surrounded by enemies who want me to die and they’re VERY dangerous (bulls, dogs, lions) and they’re already dividing my clothes like I’m dead already ... but God...where ARE You?!

And IN this back-and-forth, his only request is for God to show up (vv. 11, 19) “Be not far from me...be not far away... rescue me...come quick... save me...”

And all this adds up to a crisis that just cannot be managed...We don’t know the exact circumstances. If you know the Life of David, you know this could describe several situations. Unless God shows up – ALL WILL BE LOST. He stacks up the dangers and difficulties so there can be NO DOUBT: he’s totally overwhelmed and God is nowhere to be found.

Now, I don’t want to be a bummer or a pessimist but if you haven’t BEEN in this kind of situation – you will be... I’m NOT saying that your worst nightmares will materialize...but even if everything else goes well eventually you’ll be what Paul Zahl calls “the man on the ceiling” – you’ll be looking down on your own body as you hear the heart monitor let out one last sustained tone... AND only a miracle will save you.

Here’s the GOOD NEWS in this dark Messianic Psalm: let me mention FOUR GIFTS – 1) This is one of many Psalms that make it clear that other people (beside you!) actually hurt...and that people who believe in God...even really strong believers...even (what we might call) “heroes of the faith” (e.g. David) can sometimes feel abandoned by God when they face overwhelming difficulty in their lives. Doubt happens.

And therefore if you HAVE experienced this Divine Silence, this Divine Absence, and if YOU have concluded: “I must be weird...I must be different...I am shaken and I just feel NO CONNECTION to God right now...I’m NOT like other believers, I’m different!” Well...don’t flatter yourself...you’re NOT as different as you may think.

In fact ... often times, real believers, strong and spiritually developed people of faith FEEL this sense of forsakenness... that’s why these psalms are there.

2) These Psalms of DISORIENTATION give voice to our own troubles. They teach us that we’re NOT alone (everybody hurts!) and here’s how to talk about it when you’re IN IT! These amazing expressions of openness and raw honesty. Some of them are easy to remember – Psalm 22, 44,

66 and 88 – wonderfully dismal Psalms... They make me realize that I probably sugarcoat most of my prayers (as if God doesn't know what I'm really thinking!).

I love Psalm 44: "You sell Your people cheaply, and haven't even profited by the sale...We're a joke!" (12)

3) WHEN you are in this place and you realize "I got nothin'", in this moment you get the clearest picture of who you really are. For a moment you see yourself as totally dependent and needy and NOT IN CONTROL. All the illusions we work so hard to maintain of our being large-and-in-charge and savvy and strong and pretty and agile and industrious and influential and prepared...they all evaporate.

And I am exposed – like in the Recovery Movement (AA/NA etc) "We admitted we were powerless over _____ and that our lives had become unmanageable." And even though it's the VERY LAST place we want to be... when you are overwhelmed by forces and circumstances and even by people and you find yourself shocked – THIS is where God can be discovered. (A.W. Tozer : "God has nothing to say to the frivolous man.") So, being overwhelmed and despairing of hope may be the best thing that ever happened to you.

4) Last – the brightest beam in this dark Psalm is the darkest moment in all of human history when it was quoted by the Messiah Himself. Hanging on the cursed Tree (Gal 3.13; Deut 21.23) Jesus Christ was the forsaken Man and His quoting the first verse, "My God, My God why have you forsaken Me?" would have triggered in the crowd an immediate remembrance of the whole Psalm... and the spectators would have seen themselves as the bulls and dogs...wagging their heads and gambling for His clothes.

He always prayed to the One He called "Abba" (Father...Papa) ... but on THIS one occasion He loses the right to call God "Father" and addresses Him instead as "My God..." – He's giving to US the right to call God "Abba". He's giving away the rights of **sonship!**

In this moment, Jesus the Messiah is actually abandoned – God the Father is withdrawing His special presence from the Son so that He, Jesus the Christ, could experience the full despair of this fallen world... He became accursed. Hell and Justice come down on Him...and in some mysterious way (the Deeper Magic) the GodMan is actually shunned as a sinner – "God made Him who knew no sin to BE sin on our behalf...so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2Co 5.21)

He was ACTUALLY forsaken and was feeling the weight of guilt (my guilt) and the displeasure of the Father whom He now addresses only as "My God".

A great exchange is taking place: He is charged with MY crimes and I am credited with His beauty and godness and spotless obedience and love.

Now, what to do with this? How does believing this Psalm and the Messiah to whom it points – how can this transform our own experience with despair?

When I'm believing this, I can know that any separation from God I THINK I feel is only a feeling at best and temporary at worst. There may be times when God withdraws and let's me get my way and allows me to delve into absurdity and independence so I feel the weight of the world...realize I can't bear it and come running back to Him ... but because of the Messiah, any separation is only a feeling or only momentary and... FOR MY GOOD.

And when I think of my own nightmares... (and I DO have my nightmares!) but when I'm believing the Good News of the Messiah who was forsaken so that I would be embraced...even my nightmares sort of get in line... And I can know that they can't really do harm to the real me. Sorrow becomes a teacher to make me a deeper/richer person... Sorrow and loss CAN (and often DOES) make a person bitter...but believing the Gospel changes that!

In fact, my sorrows and losses and even the things I fear the most...ALL THINGS must work together for my ultimate good... the bulls and lions and dogs that strike fear into me are all under the control of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me...He's the Lion-tamer! He transforms my fears.

The Psalm ends with this widening circle of praise (22ff.) not only does this have individual, emotional benefit as I come to trust that because Jesus Christ was forsaken, I NEVER will be... but there's also an assurance that the God of Israel will also be the God of all nations.

Isn't this foreshadowed when Jesus Christ says these dying words from the Cross and the Gentile soldier recognizes Him for who is really is, "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God!'" (Mar 15.39)

The Messiah is King AND the Messiah suffers – He humbles Himself and is exalted over all nations...and the great result is NOT ONLY that all my dreams will be unimaginably surpassed... and all my sorrows and nightmares cannot finally destroy me... but even the world itself, Jew and Gentile, low and high, rich and poor will come to the King who suffered for His subjects...and feast with Him...under His perfect rule.

The Psalm ends with a reminder of these other words of the Messiah spoken from the Cross: "It Is Finished" ...(QUOTE) "All nations will come and will declare His righteousness to a people not yet born, that God has done it." (31)