

*Why Have You Forsaken Me?* Psalm 22  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
Sunday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019

This morning we have the privilege of studying Psalm 22 together. We're in the middle of a short sermon series this summer, going through several Psalms. Gary and I have chosen 8 Psalms from the first book of Psalms (which is 1-41). Today we're looking at Psalm 22.

And this is a remarkable Psalm, in the way it prophecies of Jesus' suffering, and in the way it connects with us personally in our suffering, and in the way the pain and persecution that's described in verses 1-21, how that pain and persecution leads to praise, in verses 22-31.

We suffer in this life. There are hard times. There are discouraging times. There are times when we feel like God is distant, like He has forsaken us. And the raw angst of those moments can be intense. If He knows about this tragedy, if He knows about this hardship in my life, and if He's truly good, why isn't He doing anything about this?!

But here's the hope. It's twofold. God will not leave us there. He will not leave us in that place of feeling forsaken. He will not leave us in that place of pain, of persecution. That sense of distance between us and God will not last, for true believers. And the reason it will not last, here's the other piece of it . . . the reason we will not remain in that place of feeling forsaken by God is because Jesus was forsaken on our behalf.

As we read this Psalm we can identify with some aspects of it in our own experience. We can apply this to our lives as sufferers in this fallen world. We need to let this Psalm lead us from a place of feeling forsaken to a place of joyful worship. And a key way this Psalm will do that for us, how God's Word will work in our lives to inspire this kind of hope, is by seeing that the prophetic details of this Psalm are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As you see on the sermon outline, the first major heading "Pain and Persecution" encompasses verses 1-21. And later we'll see that the pain and persecution is leading to praise in the second section, verses 22-31. The subheadings, I hope those will help you get a sense of the structure of the Psalm, and give you some things to consider as you reflect on this Psalm. Some of these subheadings I'll expand on more than others. A couple of them I'll expand on very little. But, for what it's worth, there it is for you.

I'll begin by reading verses 1-21. And as I read this section, notice how it shifts back and forth between pain and affirming God's faithfulness. Verses 1-2 is pain, then verses 3-5

affirms God's faithfulness. Verses 6-8 again describe pain and persecution, but then verses 9-11 affirm God's faithfulness. Verses 12-18 again describe pain and persecution, and then verses 19-21 come to a climactic point of celebrating God's deliverance.

So we begin with the pain and persecution, and specifically in verse 1, the pain of being forsaken by God.

## **Pain and Persecution . . .**

### **I. Forsaken by God (vv. 1-2)**

If you're familiar with the Bible, then you will recognize these opening words of Psalm 22, even if you didn't know they're from Psalm 22. These words are well-known to us because Jesus quoted this when He was hanging on the cross. He spoke this in Aramaic, as the Gospels of Matthew and Mark both quote these words of Jesus for us.

Matthew 27:46, "And 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?"

Because of this connection of Psalm 22 with Jesus on the cross, it's appropriate for us to start this morning with the pain and persecution of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, He is the One forsaken by God. He was forsaken on the cross. Recall the context of that Friday, which we call Good Friday.

From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, there is darkness over the whole land. This is from noon to 3pm. What's happening during these three hours as Jesus hangs on the cross is the judgment of God coming down upon His own Son. The darkness falls as a symbol of divine wrath, divine condemnation, judgment, cursing. God put Jesus, the sinless One, on the cross, and cursed Him on the cross, and caused the darkness to fall over Him, so that we don't have to be cursed, so that we can live in the light, so that we can be redeemed, so that we can be counted righteous and thus accepted by God. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

In the agony of this moment, in the emotional anguish of being torn from His Father, being cursed by His Father, crushed by His Father, Jesus cries out this lament. He has been utterly abandoned by all, most painfully, by His beloved Father. He says, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" from Psalm 22 verse 1.

It is not a cry of utter despair, though. Jesus knows the plan. He is enduring this for the joy set before Him. He knows what is to come. He still refers to the Father as *my God, my God*. And, as we'll see as we get to the second part of Psalm 22, the Psalm Jesus is quoting from on the cross, although Psalm 22 begins with the lament of pain and persecution, it leads to

praise. Jesus cries out with a loud voice this lamentation from Psalm 22:1, but it is not without hope. He has not lost His confidence in His Father. He has not lost His joy in their glorious plan of redemption.

Listen, believer, to the hope we have because of Jesus! God abandoned Jesus on the cross so that the redeemed will never be abandoned. So when your life takes one of those turns and tragedy strikes in some way (e.g., the loss of a loved one or a financial hardship or a painful conflict in a close relationship), or if you just feel like the life has been sucked out of you through the ongoing thorns and thistles of this fallen world, whatever it may be, I hope you can look up and see the cross and see your struggle in view of the cross, and pray to the Father in light of the cross. There is hope. You are not abandoned. Jesus was abandoned for you. Trust in Him. Hope in Him.

And I want to this to any unbelievers who are here. Another way to view these three hours of darkness on the cross is to see this as a picture of what hell is. Jesus is under the curse of God, abandoned by God, without any comfort from God. That's what hell is. And that's what many individuals will suffer for all eternity.

Jesus, being the infinite, eternal Son of God, was able to atone for the sins of all His people in a finite amount of time. Being infinite, He was able to bear the infinite weight of our sin in a limited period of time. But for finite creatures, as we are, the penalty is endless, if that penalty remains upon us.

So this picture of Jesus on the cross should bring fear to any who are not sure of their salvation in Christ. Because if you are not trusting in Jesus, if you are not united to Christ, then your sins are not forgiven. And that means that the agony Jesus experienced on that cross is the agony you will experience forever and ever in hell. You will be cut off from the Father. You will be smothered under the darkness of His just wrath. You will be utterly abandoned and alone and without any comfort whatsoever. Be fearful of that. And let that fear bring you to your knees in repentance. May the fear of being eternally separated from God cause you to see your need for Jesus.

## **II. Scorned by Mankind (vv. 6-8, 12-18)**

Moving to the second point, the Psalm laments not only being forsaken by God, but also scorned by mankind. Three of these verses show up in Matthew 27.

There are the scoffers, those who mock Him, in Psalm 22:7, who wag their heads. And one of the ways they mock Him is with the words of verse 8 . . . this is not a complement, but a joke .

. . . this is pure sarcasm and disrespect, when they say, “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him.”

And then there’s the dividing of the garments, in verse 18. How humiliating, that Jesus was stripped of His clothes and the soldiers cast lots to see who would get them.

As we sang earlier in the service, in the song, “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us.” Remember the second verse:

Behold the man upon a cross,  
My sin upon His shoulders;  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers.  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished;  
His dying breath has brought me life –  
I know that it is finished.

What a sobering thought, to know that our lives, our actions and thoughts and attitudes, have been at many points consistent with the mocking and scoffing that Jesus endured on the cross. But praise be to God that Jesus did endure the scorn of mankind heaped upon Him. And He did this to redeem us.

And as His redeemed ones, we too will sometimes face the scorn of mankind. But when we do, we can rest in the fact that Jesus faced that scorn head on, and He triumphed over it in the resurrection. And we will see Him triumph again when He returns.

### **III. Pleading for God’s Presence (v. 2, 11, 19-21a)**

And this leads to the third point. Because when we’re feeling forsaken by God, or when we’re scorned by mankind, we can cry out with the psalmist, we can cry out with Jesus, pleading for God’s presence.

Remember what Jesus said to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane? “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36) That’s very similar to the cries for deliverance we read in Psalm 22. Jesus wasn’t wimping out there in Gethsemane. Quite the opposite. Jesus was determined to obey the Father and follow through in this plan. But it was also quite appropriate for Jesus to express this hesitancy, to express the horror at the thought of being separated from His eternal, beloved Father. There’s nothing easy about that. And neither the Father nor the Son take that lightly. It was absolutely horrendous and painful for both the Father and the Son, to go through with this.

Well, as Jesus pleads with the Father, “Remove this cup from me.” And as we read in this Psalm the pleas for God’s presence . . . This becomes our cry in those seasons when we feel like God is distant. When we’re feeling forsaken by God or

scorned by mankind. We can voice these prayers, like in verse 11, “Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.” And in verses 19-21a . . . read.

These are good ways for us to pray when we’re in distress. These prayers express our desperate need for God, and they highlight God’s power to protect and provide.

And, you know brothers and sisters, this is why we long for heaven. We don’t want there to be these barriers of sin and temptation and pain and persecution that make us feel distant from God. We want to be unhindered, basking in His powerful presence. So when we’re pleading for God’s presence in the midst of momentary struggles in this life, what we’re ultimately longing for is to be with Him in heaven forever. So we can pray for more of His presence now, and we look forward to experiencing the fullness of His presence when we go to be with Him in glory.

There’s certainly application here for us in terms of our own prayers, especially as we think of praying in the midst of suffering. It is certainly OK (it is biblical!) to pray prayers of lament. When you are hurting, when you are depressed, when tragedy strikes, when you feel alone and abandoned, cry out to God like this. Cry out to Him in your pain. He desires that, and you need that. It is appropriate and healthy and good for you to make your lament to Him. But even as you tell Him your troubles and express your pain and plead for help, cry out to Him as “*my* God, *my* God.” And remember that He *is* on the throne. He *is* in control, even if it feels to you like He has abandoned you.

You know that footprints poem? Maybe you’ve seen that poem on one too many decorative wall hangings, that it seems a bit too sentimental for you. But I think there is something helpful for us there. We see one set of footprints in the sand and jump to the conclusion that He has deserted us. When in reality, He’s carrying us. Things are not always what they seem. You may *feel* forsaken by God. But that doesn’t mean you are, in fact, forsaken by God. If you are in Christ, then you are surely NOT forsaken by God. Because Jesus was forsaken in a way that assures you will never be forsaken. So cry out to Him, pleading for His presence. And also affirm His faithfulness . . .

#### **IV. Affirming God’s Faithfulness**

##### **a. You are holy (v. 3)**

Read v. 3. Even if God is not answering the way we desire Him to answer, we must still affirm His goodness and holiness and faithfulness.

**b. Faithful to the fathers (vv. 4-5)**

Read vv. 4-5. When you're feeling forsaken, remind yourself of times you've been overwhelmed by the faithfulness of God. And think of ways that you've seen, and are seeing now, the faithfulness of God in the lives of others.

As I think of our congregation, and as I pray for you all, there are so many examples of God's faithfulness. And there are many situations that we're watching and waiting to see how exactly God will show His faithfulness. There is certainly pain and persecution that we lift up to the Lord and plead with Him to act. And as we do so we need to remind ourselves of His holiness and His faithfulness.

The other day on the radio I heard that song by Laura Story, the song entitled, "Blessings." I was reminded of a couple years ago when our family attended one of Laura's concerts, and she explained the background of that song. You see, Laura and her husband Martin had been married for less than 2 years when they found out Martin had a brain tumor and needed to undergo a serious operation, a risky operation. There were many possible outcomes to the surgery. He might die. He might lose all of his memory up to that point.

Laura shared this in a very meaningful, and also light-hearted way. She described the interaction that happened just as Martin woke up after the surgery. Laura was right there, of course. And Martin recognized her (which was a relief). He knew who she was, but didn't know she was his wife. He said, "Laura Story! . . . what are you doing here?" And then she explained to him, Martin, I'm your wife. We're married. To which Martin responded, "Yes!" She was happy to hear that.

It's been over a decade now since that surgery. Martin and Laura have 4 kids. But Martin is still not fully healed. His brain has not fully recovered from that tumor and the complications of trying to remove it. He continues to suffer from the effects of a serious brain injury, including short-term memory loss, which makes their lives very complicated and difficult. But they recognize the blessings that have come from those difficulties, through those difficulties, that the trials of this life can truly be God's blessings in disguise.

So there's a very real and ongoing life experience that is behind the lyrics of that song. When she sings,  
 "We pray for blessings, we pray for peace  
 Comfort for family, protection while we sleep  
 We pray for healing, for prosperity  
 We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering  
 And all the while, You hear each spoken need  
 Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things

'Cause what if your blessings come through rain drops  
 What if Your healing comes through tears  
 What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know  
 You're near  
 What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise"

When you're suffering from one of life's trials. When you're persecuted by others. Remember to affirm God's holiness and faithfulness and to remember His many kindnesses to you and to others. He has not forsaken you. He is using the pain and the persecution to bless you, and to magnify His Name.

**c. Faithful to me from my birth (v. 9-10)**

In verses 9-10 the psalmist also reflects back to his birth, remembering God's faithfulness to him from his earliest moments.

**d. You have rescued! (v. 21b)**

And then I want to bring us to the final words of this first section, in verse 21. The prayer here pivots in a sudden and surprising way. There has been all of this lament, all of this suffering, all the detailed description of pain and persecution, all of this pleading for God to rescue. And now, the second part of verse 21 says, "You *have* rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!"

This Psalm is walking us through an experience of suffering, and then deliverance! You **HAVE** rescued!!

And this is the hinge that is the transition to the second part of the Psalm. Pain and persecution . . . leading to praise. There is pain and persecution, then rescue! And then praise.

For Jesus, as we know, His pain and persecution was not pointless. He did not remain forsaken by His Father. Jesus was forsaken on the cross, but then His mission was accomplished. He died in triumph. And He rose from the grave, demonstrating His victory!

And it's with that framework that we can understand the remaining verses of Psalm 22, these verses of praise and thanksgiving.

Read vv. 22-31 [By the way, verse 22 is quoted in Hebrews 2:12. And there in Hebrews it's Jesus quoted as saying this. So there's another key connection with Christ from Psalm 22.]

**. . . Leading to Praise**

Well, we've seen the pain and persecution of the first section in Psalm 22. Now we see, in light of the deliverance in verse 21b, this leads now to praise. And there are some wonderful insights here in these concluding verses about praise. I want to show you 4 of them briefly.

## I. Corporate Worship (vv. 22, 25-26)

Do you see the language here of the congregation, in verse 22 and 25. And, telling of your name to my brothers. This is corporate worship. Certainly, we worship the Lord individually. But what a gift it is also to worship the Lord corporately, as a body of believers. Do you recognize what a privilege and blessing this is? To be able to tell one another and share with one another our enjoyment of God.

Micah, our 5 year old son, and I went to see the new Lion King movie in the theater on Tuesday (discount day at the theater). Several times throughout the movie we glanced at each other, sometimes laughing because of the warthog, sometimes just a look to say, "Wow! That's cool!" I don't know how they made those animals look so real, and make them talk. But it was really fun to watch. And Micah and I really enjoyed seeing that movie together.

What's going on there, when we do that kind of thing? When we want to glance over to see if our friend is impressed by the same thing, enjoying the same thing? Or when you're watching a sporting event and you turn to the person next to you and say, "Woah! That was awesome!" What is that?

That's corporate worship. It's a natural impulse we have, to be in awe of something and wanting to connect with others around me who are in awe of it too. It expands our enjoyment of it.

Why do so many people, when they have a really great experience, or visit a really amazing place, they want to post a picture of that on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter? Well, there may be various reasons. But one of them is, and I think it's a good reason, is to expand the enjoyment of that experience by sharing it with others, by inviting others into that experience with us.

And God designed us in this way. He created us to be worshippers. He created us to worship Him above all else. And He created us to worship Him in the midst of a community of believers, as part of a congregation of worshippers.

Michael Wilcock, in his commentary on the Psalms, observes that "it is a people, not just individuals, that the Lord saves, which is a comfort to the lonely, though on the other hand a challenge to loners." Page 84.

That's a great point of application, on both sides of that. Be encouraged by the opportunities you have for corporate worship. If you're lonely, if your personal worship of God is stale or almost non-existent, engage with the body of believers to find encouragement from others. Or if you're a loner-type, who thinks you don't need the church family, you need to be warned and challenged by this. Corporate worship needs to be a priority in our lives, not just something we participate in when it's convenient.

Each of us needs this. We need each other. And God is glorified as we, together, stand in awe of Him.

## **II. Reverent, Awe-filled Worship (vv. 23-24)**

Verses 23 gives another important insight about praise, helping to describe praise by expressing some related responses to God. There's fear, and praise. Glorifying Him. And standing in awe of Him. That's really at the center of what praise is. It's standing in awe of who He is. And when we see God for who He is, as He is revealed in the Scriptures, that awe will include an appropriate fear of Him as well as a joy in Him. Like we saw in Psalm 2:11, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." It's all part of reverent, awe-filled worship.

## **III. Worship and the Nations (vv. 27-28)**

Verse 27 points to the future reality when the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation will be gathered to worship the Lord in heaven, an experience of worship that will not be hindered by sin, and will never get old, and will last forever.

John Piper has a great quote about the connection between missions (to the nations) and worship. He writes this: "Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more." You see, missions is about gathering worshipers. Evangelism and missions is about proclaiming the Gospel with the hope that God will work in their hearts to make them Jesus-worshippers rather than self-worshippers. And we need to understand that one day the task of missions will be complete. When God has saved all those He intends to save, when Jesus' sheep have all come to follow Him and are worshipping Him, then the Great Commission will be achieved. Missions will be no more. But worship will endure for eternity.

Meditate on that, and let it impact the way you think about missions, and the way you think about worship. We ought to be passionate about evangelism and missions, because we want more and more people to experience the joy we have in the Lord. And we want the Lord to be praised, as He deserves, by more and more individuals, from more and more nations. And we look forward to that eternal corporate worship in the midst of the most diverse congregation ever assembled. That's what we'll get to participate in forever.

## **IV. Worship and the Next Generation (vv. 29-31)**

Lastly, an application for the way we think about the next generation. Verses 30-31. Read.

Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Psalms, refers to this entire second section of Psalm 22 as “The Spread of Joy.” The joy of the Lord is spreading among the congregation, spreading among the nations, spreading to the coming generations. What an inspiring vision, to motivate us in our corporate worship as a church, to motivate us in evangelism and missions, and to motivate us in family discipleship, for us to teach our children and pass along to our children a passion for the Lord.

I want to say one last thing about the last phrase of the last verse. Where verse 31 says, “that he has done it.” That phrase makes us think of Jesus’ final words on the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) Brothers and sisters, He *has* done it! He has accomplished this great salvation for us. Jesus endured the pain and persecution of the cross. He was forsaken by the Father. And because of His sacrifice, we are not forsaken. Those who are connected to Christ through faith, we will never be forsaken. Whatever pain and persecution we face, it will lead to praise. Because He has rescued us. He has done it!