

Psalms

Week 3: From Suffering to Trust -- Psalm 22

It is the most famous cry of abandonment in human history, and it came from the lips of the Son of God. Hanging on a Roman cross, the sky gone dark at midday, His strength draining into the wood, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Those who knew their Scriptures would have recognized the words at once. He was praying Psalm 22, a thousand-year-old song of a suffering man, and in praying it He was telling the world what was happening inside that darkness. The psalm that David wrote out of his own anguish had been waiting all along for the day it would be prayed by great David’s greater Son.

Read Psalm 22 slowly and the hair on your arms may stand up. A man surrounded by enemies who mock him and wag their heads. Hands and feet that feel pierced. Bones out of joint. A mouth dried up like a broken piece of pottery. Garments divided by the casting of lots. These are not vague poetic miseries; they read like an eyewitness account of a crucifixion written centuries before crucifixion was practiced. The Gospel writers saw it. They quote this psalm again and again as they tell the story of the cross, because they understood that what David felt in part, Jesus endured in full.

But here is what we must not miss. Psalm 22 does not end in the dark. Right in the middle, the cry turns. The sufferer who began with “why have you forsaken me” ends with a congregation gathered in praise, with the ends of the earth turning to the Lord, with a declaration that God “has done it.” The psalm travels the whole distance from the agony of the cross to the triumph on the other side of it. It is a single, unbroken journey from suffering to trust, and from trust to a worldwide family of worshipers.

So this week we walk that road with the Suffering Servant. We will not rush past the darkness, because Jesus did not. He felt the full weight of forsakenness so that we would never have to. But neither will we stop in the dark, because He did not stop there either. Read these verses as the prayer of your Savior, and let them teach you how to carry your own suffering toward the God who, in Christ, has already carried the worst of it for you.

Group Discussion: Jesus prayed the opening words of Psalm 22 from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 1; Matthew 27:46). For many people the idea that God’s own Son could feel forsaken is startling, even troubling. Why do you think Jesus chose these particular words in His darkest hour, and what comfort might there be for us in knowing that our Savior entered into the experience of feeling abandoned?

Personal Reflection: The sufferer in Psalm 22 keeps praying even while feeling forsaken; he cries “my God” twice in the same breath as “why have you forsaken me” (v. 1). When you have felt most alone or abandoned, did you keep talking to God or did you go silent? What would it look like to bring God your sense of abandonment instead of carrying it away from Him?

Study Questions

1. The psalm opens, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” (v. 1). David wrote these words out of his own suffering, yet Jesus made them His own from the cross. What does it mean that this prayer belongs both to David’s experience and, more fully, to Christ, and how should we read an Old Testament psalm that the New Testament applies so directly to Jesus?
2. The sufferer says, “I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest” (v. 2). When have you prayed and prayed and heard only silence? How did that silence affect the way you thought about God, and what did you do with the waiting?
3. In the middle of his anguish the sufferer remembers, “Yet you are holy... In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them” (vv. 3–5). What does it teach us that he steadies himself by recalling God’s faithfulness in the past, and why is the remembered history of God’s saving acts such an important anchor for faith in the dark?
4. The sufferer is surrounded by people who “mock me... they wag their heads” and say, “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him” (vv. 7–8). Have you ever felt your faith mocked or dismissed, openly or quietly, by people around you? How did it affect you, and where did you turn?
5. The psalm describes the suffering with stunning detail: “they have pierced my hands and feet... they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (vv. 16, 18). The Gospel writers saw these very things at the cross. What does it mean that this psalm, written long before crucifixion existed, describes the death of Jesus so precisely, and what does that tell us about God’s plan of salvation unfolding across Scripture?
6. From birth the sufferer says, “you have been my God” (v. 10), tracing God’s care all the way back to the womb. Look back over your own life. Where can you trace God’s hand holding you even before you were aware of Him, and how does remembering that history strengthen you for what you face now?
7. At verse 22 the psalm turns completely: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” The suffering gives way to praise in the gathered assembly. Hebrews 2:11–12 puts these very words in the mouth of Jesus. What does it mean that the risen Christ stands among His people leading their praise, and how does this connect the cross to the life of the church?
8. The rescued sufferer cannot keep the news to himself; he tells of God “in the midst of the congregation” (v. 22) and among “those who seek him” (v. 26). When God has carried you through something hard, do you tend to testify to it or keep it private? Who in your life needs to hear what God has done for you?
9. The psalm ends in worldwide triumph: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord... future generations will be told about the Lord... they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it” (vv. 27–31). On the cross Jesus cried the opening of this psalm; with His last breath He said, “It is finished.” How does Psalm

22 carry us from Christ's atoning death, through His vindication and resurrection, to the gathering of the nations into His church, and what does "he has done it" mean for how we are saved?

10. Look back across the whole psalm, from the cry of forsakenness to the song of a worldwide family of worshipers. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through His own prayer in Psalm 22. What is the single truth from this psalm that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 27:35–46, the cross scene that quotes this psalm at almost every turn; Hebrews 2:9–12, the risen Christ unashamed to call us brothers and leading our praise; Isaiah 53:4–6, the Servant pierced for our transgressions; Philippians 2:5–11, the descent into death and the exaltation that follows; Revelation 7:9–10, the great multitude from every nation gathered before the throne.