

“Jesus Has Been There!”

Psalm 22

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(faith; providence; suffering)

Recently I had a conversation with a person who was describing the difficult times through which they had been going. Two times in the conversation they recited for me words from a contemporary Christian song that expressed so nearly what they were feeling. Songs do that. There are times in our lives, especially the difficult times, when a certain song will express not only the thoughts we are thinking but also the feelings we feel. The 22nd Psalm does that. If you have ever been deeply discouraged, this is a Psalm that will trace the emotions you have felt. If today you are facing a darkness that you can not describe, this Psalm will describe it for you. But God in his grace will not only describe the darkness He will also cast a light so bright that the darkness, though still there, will pale in comparison to the hope that God gives.

The 22 Psalm is introduced with the words, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" When you remember the Psalm was written during the time of the kings of ancient Israel or probably by King David himself you realize that this song tells a story of David's emotions and thoughts. But it is not only David's story. It is also the story of many of you.

A couple of years ago a young father sat in the waiting room of Children's Hospital as they once again took his three year old daughter through a series of painful and destructive treatments, trying everything to stop the cancer in her body. With tears

he described his prayers and his pleading over the past year and then he asked,

"Pastor, where is God?" "Why doesn't He answer?" Is that you too?

Baby-boomers are supposed to be successful, affluent and energetic but you can't make ends meet and the future doesn't seem to hold out much hope. Are you alone in the midst of an impossible marriage? Has life simply piled up and you are out of emotional gas? Life doesn't look exciting only tiring? Are you facing enemies either from outside or from within? Then this Psalm is your story.

But there is yet another story here. It doesn't take a Bible scholar to remember these words from verse one were also cried out by someone else - Jesus. This Psalm is his story as well.

What kind of a story is it? It's a story of the darkest days of a person's life. In a moment I want you to stand with me as I read this passage of God's Word. As you listen to the first 21 verses you will hear the Psalmist go from near despair to a glimmer of hope, back to fear again and then once again reach for hope. That cycle will repeat itself three times. Stand and listen to God's Holy Spirit, using the experience of the David, describe the turmoil of fear and faith battling it out in the human mind.

READ Psalm 22:1-21

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?"

² *O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.*

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.*

⁴ *In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.*

⁵ *They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.*

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

⁷ *All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:*

- ⁸ *"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*
- ⁹ *Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.*
- ¹⁰ *From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. ¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.*
- ¹² *Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.*
- ¹³ *Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.*
- ¹⁴ *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.*
- ¹⁵ *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*
- ¹⁶ *Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*
- ¹⁷ *I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.*
- ¹⁸ *They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*
- ¹⁹ *But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.*
- ²⁰ *Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the*
- ²¹ *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*

Late on the afternoon of March 18, several years ago, Stephanie May was visited by her pastor and his wife. They brought the news that Stephanie's husband 51 year old husband John, her 22 year old son, David (a senior at the Univ. of Texas), her 18 year old daughter, Karla (a senior at Highland Park High School) and her 27 year old son-in-law, Rick, had all been killed in a plane crash near Aspen. Only Stephanie and her married daughter Valarie survived since they had not made the trip.

Stephanie May kept a diary and these are her words over the next few days.

They will sound like Psalm 22.

March 18 Late afternoon, doorbell, Pastor Clayton and the awesome news of tragedy -death plus death plus death plus death equals death.

They rose - I fell! Cut loose to float in a timeless, unconscious yet conscious space beyond, but painfully here. I do remember but I don't.

God please take care of Valarie, I can't.

March 19 Help, Help, I can't stand alone. Where is God?

March 20 Dear Lord of amazing grace and unchanging love, You are all powerful and all knowing here and beyond. Merciful Father, help be bear and comprehend the enormity of my loss. Scooters, skates, tricycles and bicycles, all lost in a myriad of my love. God of the heavens, God of the earth, I am leaning so hard - please don't let me fall! Hear my prayer, hear my plea, send arms of comfort to Valarie and me.

March 21 Cesspool,, whirlpool, black river, cold space, alone, people, questions, rivers of life, and memories, but mostly fear - and of what? I don't know! I don't know where I am - I don't know what I say - twisting pain and grotesque flashes of what I knew to be truth. Oh God, oh God, where are you?

March 27 God, forgive me for my sins. Set my values straight that I might grow in human compassion, love, and service. Show me the reality of eternity and the courage to accept your authority.. God be with me.

March 29 Wondering, wandering, fear, fright, alone, not alone, reaching but into empty space, terror, hell on earth, why not beauty? Oh God,

please be with me - are You there?

April 3 Please God, dear God, hear me, for I am your child, and I am in such pain. My loss is your loss, my pain is your pain, and the answers I seek are all within your kingdom.

April 8 Alight, everlasting, and eternal God, You have taken that which was yours to give and take. Though prostrate and in shock, I do not hate you God, and I am not mad... Grant me peace, double my strength, hold my hand, and light my way.

Do you hear her pain? Do you hear her despair? Do you hear her faith? Do you hear the up and down, the feelings of drowning spaced between times of coming to the surface? But do you also hear the truths about her God that kept bringing her back? That is Stephanie May's story but it sound's like David's story as told in Psalm 22. Listen again to the turmoil of his soul:

22:1 My God, My God, WHY?

This is the questioning of a child who is in fear because the father has been gone too long. This is not rebellion but it is astonishment - a puzzled desperate question: Why are you so far from saving me?

22:2 My God, I can't understand the darkness - the lack of response. I keep asking. What's wrong?

And then in verses 3- 5 we see light coming into David's darkness. It is as if he writes, "When I remember your holiness - your moral excellence - that you are pure, righteous, faithful and supremely exalted - I know it can't be that you have broken your promises. You are the holy one, enthroned - sovereign Lord on high. In fact when I think about it I remember that you are the reason all Israel praises. Your people have a history with you God. For generations your people have placed their trust in you and you have been faithful. Though darkness came you saw them through it.

How many old saints have you heard tell of experiences in their lives that made your heart weak thinking of going through such tragedy, heartache or pain and yet they stood before you and sang boldly "Jesus led me all the way!" David writes, "I know your reputation, God". Who you are and what you've done gives me reason to hope.

But then in verses 6-8 he drops back beneath the surface - into the waters of darkness as he sees what is happening to him:

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.

⁷ *All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:*

⁸ *"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*

In David's case he feels as worthless and as crushed as a worm underfoot.

Enemies have attacked him and they appear to have the upper hand. They mock him, ridicule him and in verse 8 they taunt him to call on his God. But once again David, by God's grace, comes to the surface and recalls in verse 9-10 the faithfulness of God to him personally. Before it was God's reputation with those who lived before David. Now it is God's reputation with David:

"Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰ From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Yes God they mock my trust in you but I do trust in you. You gave me life - from the beginning I was dependent on you and you have never failed me. God, as I think about it, I couldn't have come this far without your protection and care and love.

Then in verse 11 David makes his first direct appeal: *"Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help."* Oh, God, I'm in trouble and there is nowhere else to turn. Even this cry for help reveals a faith even though it is weak.

Then like a drowning man, David goes down for the third time.

In verses 12-18 he describes in graphic detail the utter helplessness he feels. In verse 12-13 his enemies are likened to animals attacking him.

"Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. ¹³ Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.

In verses 14-15 he describes the feelings and emotions that go with fear and hopelessness:

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.

Ps 22:15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

In verse 16 he again describes his attackers as animals.

“Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.

And in verses 17 and 18 he describes what it feels like to be near death -to be treated as having no value at all - even his clothes are divided up.

“I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

And finally in verses 19-21 we hear David making his last appeal for God's help.

“But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. ²⁰ Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. ²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen

But even in this we hear faith expressed: He has not given up. He knows that God is there; He calls out in very personal terms - O my Strength; He expressed faith by asking for God's help - he believes that God hears.

As you read these verses, do you hear the roller coaster of David's emotions, do you hear the ups and downs of his feelings, and do you hear his faith wrestling with his experience? This is David's story.

As you listen to David, do you see not only the lake of darkness in which he feels as if he's drowning but do you see also the ropes of truth thrown to him to pull him up and to safety? These strong ropes of truth are God's reputation in history AND God's reputation in David's own experience.

I said this was not only David's story and possibly your story but that it is also Jesus' story. Let me show you why:

In the book of Acts the author Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls David a prophet. David was writing a thousand years before Christ but even if he didn't know particularly of whom he wrote David knew that God had promised that a son of his would eventually rule on the throne forever - the coming Messiah. There

are times when David is writing the Psalms when he uses language that exceeds descriptions of his own experience and describes something that is yet to come (even if he didn't know it). That seems to clearly be the case in this Psalm. Yes, David is describing his own story but in doing so he is describing another story as well.

In verse 2 we've already noted words used by Jesus as he hung on the cross.

As you reread verse 6 listen to Isaiah's description of the messiah to come:

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised.

As you reread verse 7 listen to Luke 23:35: As Jesus was being crucified *"The people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He save others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God."*

As you reread v 8 listen to Matthew 27:43 : Again as Jesus was on the cross some said, *"He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him."*

As you look at verses 12-13 you can see the people standing around the cross, laughing, sneering, shouting obscenities, and otherwise hatefully wishing him dead.

In verses 14-15 we see Jesus again as he hangs on the cross, his arms outstretched so that the bones pull out of their sockets. His strength is ebbing

away as he continues to bleed and he becomes so dry that he cries for water.

And when you come to verses 16-18, as I said earlier, the language is so perfectly descriptive of what happened to Jesus on the cross that one is almost forced to believe that these words exceeded David's own experience. 1000 years before it happened the story of Jesus is being foretold: His body was pierced, he was emaciated from suffering and his clothes were divided up through gambling.

The apostle John writing about the crucifixion said that when the soldiers gambled for Jesus' clothes "This happened that the Scriptures might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and they cast lots for my clothing." The Psalm is clearly Jesus' story as well.

But at this point in the Psalm there is an abrupt change. There is a distinct change in the mood. There is a change in the attitude. The Psalm moves from an agitated turmoil of the soul to a quiet calm. It is the change that you see in Jesus on the cross when he moves from the cry of the soul: "My God, My God why have you forsaken me!" to the calm of the soul when he prays, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." What we see in David beginning in verse 21 is a flowering of his faith. Faith that had been rehearsing the truth about who God is and how trustworthy he is now takes hold of the truths and stands on them.

Psalm 22:22-31:

"I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

²³ *You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!*

²⁴ *For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.*

- ²⁵ *From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows.*
- ²⁶ *The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever!*
- ²⁷ *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,*
- ²⁸ *for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.*
- ²⁹ *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.*
- ³⁰ *Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.*
- ³¹ *They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.*

Verses 22-23 Oh God, I will declare your name, the Holy One (v 1) My Strength (v 19) - I will declare you name - I will give witness to your faithfulness. And I will call on others to do so as well. BECAUSE (v 24) I know that you are the God who cares for his own. When we cry to you, you listen and you respond.

In verse 25 David says that God, himself, is the theme of David's praise. David's faith is not just in what God does on any particular occasion but it is in God himself. He rests in the fact that his God will not fail him.

And why does David have such confidence? Not only because of the past as David had already rehearsed but now something else. David beginning in verse 27 sees into the future and his faith is now resting firmly in the God who will act. What does the Psalmist see? What does he behold that gives his faith such a rest and calm?

v 27 David sees the whole earth, all people, bowing before the Lord.

v 28 He sees the Lord as sovereign over all things.

v 29 From the poorest to the wealthiest they will bow.

v 30 He sees even future generations bowing before the Lord.

v 31 And in the last line he sees that God has accomplished everything that he purposed. With his feet of faith planted firmly on that truth of God's sovereign control of the future - David can trust God with the present.

Several years ago a Ugandan Christian named Henry was travelling by bus when the bus was ambushed and half of Henry's face was blown away. Miraculously he survived and World Vision paid for him to go to Montreal for treatment. The late David Watson says that when he met Henry, he had many operations to go and Watson flinched when he saw the mask that had once been Henry's face. But his eyes sparkled. Unable to speak Henry wrote: "God never promises us an easy time. Just a safe arrival." (*Watson Fear no Evil*, p 141) With his eyes fixed on the God who controls the future, Henry trusts God for the present!

That's the faith which Jesus had so that the Bible in Hebrews 12 says of him, "Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross." "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me" becomes "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" as Jesus sees the future.

The night of David's experience was truly dark but the light of God's past reputation and God's future promises brought David up out of the swamp of despair and planted his feet on the solid ground of faith - faith built on the truth of who God is and what He will do.

One month after the last entry of Stephanie May's diary from which I read earlier, she wrote, "I awoke in darkness, but I have broken the surface. God loves me- He comforts me - He is near - His everlasting peace abides within me... His hands lifted me

from the black emptiness, and His arms hold me. I now realize God's love and strength in me is greater than my loss. My prayers have been answered, My God is here.

“Though the wind blows, the rain comes and the lightning strikes, I will stand fast. Praise God, for without his love, I have no life. My steps are small but sure, my head is high but weak, my eyes are wet and red, but is God with me.

May 8 “I close this diary. I am not strong, I am not brave. I am a Christian with a burden to carry and a message to share. I have been severely tested, but my faith has survived, and I have been strengthened in my love and devotion to the Lord. Oh, God, my life is yours - comfort me in your arms and direct me in my life. I have walked in hell, but now I walk with God in peace. John, Davin, Karla and Rick are in God's hands, Valarie and I are in God's arms, and His love surrounds us. This rose will bloom again.” (Leadership Fall 1980)

Is the first half of Psalm 22 your story? Does it describe the struggle of fear and faith that you experience? What I want you to remember today is that Jesus has been down that road - he has been there - it is his story also. Like David, he fixed his eyes on God - the God of historic reputation and the sovereign God of future promises. You may not be able to see the road immediately ahead but you can see the end. And as it says in Hebrews, we can fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, we can consider him who endured such suffering and was victorious - so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.

The fear of "My God, My God!" becomes the faith of "He has done it."

