

Text: Psalm 22:1-11 (Pew Bible, pg.543)

Title: “Faith Sings ... When God Seems Distant”

INTRODUCTION

Easter is just two weeks from today and we have planned a powerful celebration of the resurrection of our Savior Jesus. We will have our regular schedule that day with services at 8:30 and 11:00 and Bible study at 9:30. Remember that the angels said to the people who came to the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning, “Come and see...” And that’s the invitation we want you to extend to your family and friends. And we have available some beautiful invitation cards that feature a hologram of the resurrection of Jesus. This is an attractive invitation and those you give it to will look at it over and over. So grab several of them at the kiosks in the foyer or the Welcome Center.

By the way, the artwork on the card is done by the renowned Christian artist Ron DiCianni. He has just completed the Resurrection Mural, and it is displayed at the Museum of Biblical Arts in Dallas. And next Sunday Ron DiCianni will be our guest in both worship services to talk about his work and to help us prepare for Easter.

Last Thursday I had the privilege of serving as the Pastor of the Day for the Texas House of Representatives down in Austin. Our own Dr. Mark Shelton was our host. I had done this before so I knew the routine of leading in prayer after the Speaker of the House gavels the session to order. But after I prayed, to our surprise, Dr. Shelton stepped back to the podium and introduced House Resolution 1138 which recognized the Travis Avenue Baptist Church for its 100 years of ministry in the city of Fort Worth. It was a wonderful affirmation for our church and I’m grateful for Rep. Mark Shelton for his sponsorship of that resolution.

Now open your Bibles to Psalm 22. To get us started this morning I’ll read vv.1-11.

Now we’ve learned that the Psalms are different from many parts of God’s Word because they are Hebrew poetry. They were written first as songs ... Faith Songs. The lyrics of songs are poetic. And we learned that Hebrew poetry comes in different styles: Wisdom Psalms, Thanksgiving Psalms, Praise Psalms, or Pilgrimage Psalms (like last weeks “Song of Ascents”).

Well, the psalm we have before us today reflects two different styles of psalms. First, this is what is called a Lament Psalm. The psalmist is singing the blues. Things have gone poorly for him and he is bringing his complaint before God. Now we’re not sure exactly what circumstance in David’s life caused him to feel the way he does on this day, but whatever has happened, God seems so far away ... so distant.

It’s as if David is speaking for us. If we were to be gut honest today we’d have to admit that there are times that God seems distant. Even this morning, as you were singing, perhaps you felt like you were going through the motions of worship because you felt like you were just singing to yourself. You’re not alone. In fact, David pegs two experiences where we are prone to think that God is so very distant. God seems far way...

1. WHEN OUR PRAYERS ARE NOT ANSWERED IMMEDIATELY (vv.1-2)

Psalm 22:1 - 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?

Someone has said that Psalm 22 is “A Psalm for All the Days of the Week that End in Why.” Lord, why does it seem that You are so far away?

Psalm 22:2 - O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

It’s okay to be honest with God, as long as we are humble about it. We all know that saying, “If God seems far away, guess who moved?” We all know that often God seems distant because we have moved away from Him. But sometimes, as far as we know, there’s nothing wrong between you and God ... but He still seems far away.

When heaven is silent we often wonder:

- Is there something wrong with me? Is God not speaking to me because He’s mad at me for something I’ve done?
- Is there something wrong with God? Does He not hear me because He is busy with other things?
- Is there something wrong with prayer? Prayer just doesn’t work.

God seems distant when our prayers are not answered immediately. But also, God seems distant ...

2. WHEN OUR FAITH IS NOT REWARDED IMMEDIATELY

Now David believes the right things about God.

Psalm 22:3 - Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

And David knows that God has been faithful to others in the past.

Psalm 22:4-5 - In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

This is David’s faith speaking. “Lord, our ancestors trusted You and You came through for them. They prayed, and You didn’t disappoint them.” But you have to wonder if behind these words is yet another complaint: “God you did it for them; why don’t you do it for me? Lord, they trusted You and You came through. I trust You, but I don’t think You’re working for me like You worked for them.” Ever felt that way?

Well, this is why we have these Complaint or Lament Psalms in our Bible. We are not alone when we feel this way.

But there’s another dimension to this psalm that we cannot see without reading it through the lens of the New Testament and the sufferings of Jesus Christ revealed there.

ILLUSTRATION – Today 3-D (three dimensional) technology is going crazy. Just a few years ago, 3-D technology was a novelty. There were special shows down at the Omni Imax Theater where you would go. And they gave you these weird glasses to put on to watch the movie. And everything looks different. It's not just pictures on a screen. It's like you are in the middle of everything on the screen.

Now it's everywhere. We went to Disney World over Christmas and one of the shows we went to featured several Disney characters like Beauty and the Beast. It was all in 3-D. And the cups and saucers and tea pots were swirling around us like we were sitting on the stage. It's fun to watch people jump and dodge and duck.

Well when we put on the 3-D glasses of the New Testament and then read Psalm 22, we see something that is truly amazing and beautiful. We see details in Psalm 22 that we would not see otherwise. We read it in standard definition 2-D with just our Old Testament glasses on, we see plenty of good stuff. But when we read this psalm with our NT 3-D glasses on we see another dimension altogether.

We see that this psalm is actually a Messianic Psalm ... that it is describing more than just David's experience of feeling that God was not near. The psalm is actually more graphically describing what our Savior Jesus endured when He was crucified for our sins on Calvary's Cross.

This means that David used many poetic expressions to explain his own sufferings, but these poetic words became literally true of the suffering of Jesus Christ at His hands of His enemies.

As we read the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, it is very clear that Jesus had Psalm 22 on his mind and in his heart as He endured the agonies of the events surrounding His crucifixion. The NT Gospel writers looking back through history with the Holy Spirit 3-D glasses on could see that David was really not just writing about himself. He was writing about Jesus. He was pointing forward to things that would be fulfilled in Christ.

So let's just put our NT glasses on and take a look at these verses again. And as we do we see how our Savior suffered for us?

1. OUR SAVIOR SUFFERED SPIRITUALLY.

Just look at the spiritual sufferings our Savior endured on the Cross.

Psalm 22:1 – 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?

Now we know that Jesus had this psalm on His mind and on His heart as He suffered.

Matthew 27:46 - About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The OT passage is written in Hebrew, but Jesus quotes it in Aramaic here. From the Cross, Jesus is thinking about Psalm 22 and he uses the words of the psalm to make His plea to the Father, “My God, why have You abandoned Me?”

Psalm 22:2 - O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

So if you are ever in a place in your life where you feel that God is distant, you need to know that Jesus understands what it means to feel that way. And He shows us how to think and how to pray our way through these times when God seems distant.

When we look at these verses with our NT glasses on we see what sustained Jesus, and what will sustain us ... faith.

Psalm 22:3 - Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

Here is the “yet” of faith. “God you seem so far away, yet this I know about you ... you are holy.” The word “holy” here means “righteous, just, and pure.” It’s what allowed Jesus to pray, “Father, if there is any way this cup of suffering can pass from me, let it be so. Nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.”

And we need to learn to let your YET do the talking in our praying:

I feel forsaken, YET You are holy.

I feel like you’re not listening to me, YET You are holy.

I’m crying during the day and I can’t sleep at night, YET You are holy.

I’m in a storm, YET You are holy.

I can’t find a job, YET you are holy.

I can’t pay my bills, YET You are holy.

My mate left me, YET You are holy.

Psalm 22:4-5 - In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

“Lord, You are always faithful. You have a track record of faithfulness down through the ages that cannot be denied. Your people through the ages have put their trust in you and cried out to you, and they were not disappointed.”

And this is faith is what sustained Jesus through the dark sufferings He endured on the Cross.

Note: There is something different about Jesus’ sufferings. The sufferings of David may have had to do with the King Saul’s hatred and pursuit of David. But the sufferings of Jesus were not anything He deserved. He was taking upon Himself our sufferings.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In that dark moment, God was heaping the sins of all humanity on the shoulders of Jesus. And when Jesus said, “My God why have you forsaken me?” He was responding to the act of God in judging our sins through the death of His own Son.

So our Lord suffered spiritually. But also...

2. OUR SAVIOR SUFFERED EMOTIONALLY.

David talks about his suffering, but whether he knew it or not, he was really talking about what the Suffering King endured in His sufferings.

Psalm 22:6 - But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.

He felt like a worm ... low, defenseless, and stomped on by others. You don't get much lower than a worm.

Note: The Hebrew word for “worm” indicates a particular kind of worm. The *coccus* worm is the source of a very rich scarlet dye used in making special garments, like the garments worn by the OT priests. But the only way that dye could be produced is for the coccus worm to be crushed.

And our Savior Jesus was crushed for sins, producing the scarlet blood that would make us clean.

Psalm 22:7 - All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

Jesus suffered emotionally from the taunts and the insults of His enemies at the Cross.

Matthew 27:39 (NIV) - Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads

See again how our NT 3-D glasses help us read Psalm 22 with more detail than we could otherwise see.

Psalm 22:8 - “He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”

Matthew 27:43 (NIV) - He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”

And we come down to v.11.

Psalm 22:11 - Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

O the emotional loneliness our Savior endured upon the Cross. As He carried this burden alone as the single sacrifice for the sins of all the world.

So we need to understand the spiritual suffering and the emotional suffering that Jesus endured. But also...

3. OUR SAVIOR SUFFERED PHYSICALLY.

Now crucifixion would not even come into existence as a form of execution for several hundred years. But David, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit saw the physical sufferings of Jesus in the Cross.

Psalm 22:12-13 - Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.

The raging bulls and roaring lions are really people who are intent on destroying him.

Psalm 22:14 - 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.

Psalm 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.

And we remember the Gospel of John records:

John 19:28 - Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

Psalm 22:16 - Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.

Remember again the Gospel accounts of Jesus being nailed to the Cross at His hands and feet. Remember also how to insure that Jesus was dead one of the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus with a spear.

Psalm 22:17 - I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

The Gospel of Luke says...

Luke 23:35 (NIV) - The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One."

Psalm 22:18 - They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

And this is what happened to Jesus:

Matthew 27:35 (NIV) - When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Jesus suffered physically. In all that is happening to him, the sufferer continues to confide in God. Jesus had these words in His mind and heart hanging upon the Cross:

Psalm 22:19 - But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.

So we see that the Savior suffered spiritually, emotionally, and physically. But the Good News is that ...

4. OUR SAVIOR SUFFERED SUCCESSFULLY (vv.22-31).

The Bible tells us that Jesus endured the Cross, “for the joy set before Him.” And that’s what Psalm 22 shows us.

Psalm 22:22 - I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

You have to be alive to do this. Jesus knew that He would come out of this dark moment, and on the other side He would declare the praises of His Father.

So from this victory He exhorts us.

Psalm 22:23 - You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

Psalm 22:24 - 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.

Did God seem far away? Yes. Did I feel alone? Yes. But God was totally righteous and gracious through it all.

Jesus took our spiritual death upon Himself. He took our emotional death upon Himself. He took our physical death upon Himself. He suffered in every way one will suffer in Hell apart from Him. God heaped on Jesus everything that we deserved in the way of judgment. And in Christ, God heaps everything on us that Jesus deserves in the way of life.

And He did all that so that we could also experience the victory of the resurrection in our lives.