

Psalm 22 The suffering and glory of the God man

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Have you ever felt like God has abandoned you?

I haven't.

As I've said many times from the front of this church,

I've led a privileged and blessed life.

In the scale of bad things that happen to people in the world,
nothing remotely like that has ever happened to me.

I even had covid a couple of weeks back,

and the worst I could complain of

was a sore throat and some tiredness for a couple of days.

I've had worse colds.

But plenty of other Christian people face all kinds of terrible trials.

I think of my friend Paul

who lived with us on and off for the last four years.

He flew back to Sri Lanka yesterday.

He was basically kidnapped

and forced to fight with the Tamil Tigers from the age of 14.

He risked his own life

and was put in situations that would give most people PTSD.

Many situations like that.

Then when the fighting stopped,

he was a marked man.

The Sri Lankan government somewhat unsurprisingly

regarded Tamil Tigers not as freedom fighters

resisting the unjust oppression of their people,

but as terrorists and murderers.

Now I'm not going to get into the rights and wrongs

of what went on in Sri Lanka.

But it's enough to say that a 14 year old boy

doesn't do an ethics course in the rules of war.
He does what he needs to do to stay alive.
And so when the war ended,
Paul again did what he needed to do to stay alive.
He fled the country.
He listened to the false promises of the people smugglers,
"Pay us some money and we'll get you to Australia
where you'll be able to become a citizen and bring your family out."
So he risked his life on a leaky boat,
only to spend a few years in detention centres on Christmas Island,
Darwin and Weipa.
Then let out into the Australian community on a bridging visa,
he spent 10 years here
only ever seeing his wife and daughter on the phone.
Now the political situation in Sri Lanka has deteriorated so much
that he feels compelled to go home,
potentially to face the music if the authorities are still looking for him,
because it's just not safe for his wife and daughter.
He needs to be there for their protection.

Paul would be entitled to question God's care for him at various times.
But his faith has stayed strong.

We're looking at Psalm 22 today.
Paul's situation has parallels with king David's situation.
Both fled their country
after other people didn't like what they were doing in a war.
So as we did last week,
we'll look at what the psalm meant before considering what it means.

David cries out,
1-2) "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night but I find no rest."
David feels forsaken by God.
He's not.
But his bleak situation makes him feel that way.
And it's OK to express how you feel about things to God.
There's nothing ungodly about crying out from your heart to God,
even if you don't get your theology 100%.
God has heard bad theology before.
He will cope.
Cry out to him.

Then David begins a process of reorienting his mind.
3-5) "Yet you are enthroned as the holy one
you are the one Israel praises.
In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame."
David has a choice.
He can believe his feelings
or he can believe the evidence of what God has done in history.
That's a very good strategy
when your feelings are messing with your head.
Your feelings are a notoriously unreliable guide to reality.
It's good to express them to God.
But it's not good to trust your feelings.
How do you think Jesus' disciples were feeling on Easter Saturday?
And yet God had just about finished defeating death and evil.
What God has done in history is a far more reliable guide to reality.

You can think about God's past goodness to you personally.
Or about how God has looked after his people in history.
They are both great ways to reorient your mind.

David then goes on to outline his situation.

His enemies mock him.

But he has always trusted in God.

His enemies are strong and numerous,
but he is pitifully weak.

And so he pleads with God to help him.

22:19 "But you Lord, do not be far from me.

You are my strength, come quickly to help me."

And then the psalm concludes with David
speaking of how God will be praised when he rescues David.

22:22 "I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you."

All God's people will praise him because he has saved David.

Even people who aren't Israelites will praise God.

Even future generations will praise God.

That's what the psalm meant.

And you could usefully take it and use it as a model
when you feel abandoned by God.

It's a model of how to reorient your mind.

But we cannot, we must not leave it there.

Because when we hear these words in the New Testament,
they are not applied to us,

they are applied to Jesus.

What does this psalm mean today.

Today it tells us about the suffering and glory of Jesus.

And in this case, the application to Jesus is almost spooky.
I mean it's one thing to have the broad brush strokes
about God's chosen King in the line of David pointing to Jesus.
That's what we saw last week in Psalm 2.
The psalm was about God's chosen king,
and we see Jesus fulfilling everything it said about God's chosen king.
But in psalm 22, the fine details come true in the life of Jesus.
And some of them Jesus doesn't make happen,
they are done by people who would never have read psalm 22.
God is working history together so that this psalm is about Jesus.
And as I said, it's almost spooky.
Let's have a look.

22:1 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
These are Jesus' words from the cross.
As Jesus is dying on the cross,
he quotes this psalm as an expression of his abandonment.
Unlike King David who was feeling abandoned
but God had not left him,
The God the Father had actually abandoned the Son
as he died on the cross.
Why?
Because Jesus was taking on himself the sin of the world,
so that we could be forgiven.
He was forsaken that we might be forgiven.

Moving down the psalm,
22:7-8 "All who see me mock me,
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
'He trusts in the Lord,' they say,
let the Lord rescue him,
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

Listen to the words of insult
that the chief priests hurl at Jesus on the cross,
Mt 27:43 "He trusts in God,
let God rescue him if he wants him,
for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'

It's an uncanny resemblance.
And it's hard to believe that the chief priests
would intentionally be trying to help Jesus fulfil the psalm.
God must have been sovereign over the insults of the chief priests.

Going on in the psalm,
22:13 "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth."
John 19:28 tells us,
"Later knowing that everything had now been finished,
and so the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said,
"I am thirsty".
This seems to be the best candidate in the Old Testament
where you could say it prophesied the messiah being thirsty.

And now we get to the most uncanny part of all,
22:16-18 "Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and feet.
All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment."
Jesus had nails through his hands and his feet.
People stared at him and gloated over him.
They divided his clothes and cast lots for his undergarment.

No one has any idea at all what David was referring to in his own life. But the resemblance to the crucifixion of Jesus is so close that I just can't think of another explanation, apart from God was fulfilling the Scriptures.

God made it happen in such a way as the crucifixion of Jesus bore a great resemblance to the words of Psalm 22.

Why does that matter?

Well it shows that God is in control of history down to the finest details. This psalm was written a thousand years before Jesus lived. And yet the details describe Jesus' crucifixion precisely.

If the world seems out of control to you, and when you look around, there's no reason why it wouldn't, remember that God is in control of the fine details.

It's often been described as like a tapestry.

When you look at one side, all you can see is threads tied off and it's a bit of a mess.

That's the world as we see it.

But God sees the other side of the tapestry.

And we will see his perfect plan at the end.

The psalm finishes with the psalmist praising God for his great rescue.

And if the early part of the psalm refers to Jesus' crucifixion, then the last part of the psalm must tell us about Jesus' resurrection.

What is going to happen in the world because Jesus rose from the dead?

Verses 27-28 are very interesting here.

"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations."

Let's be clear,

nothing like this ever happened in King David's life.

He looked forward to a time
when there would be worldwide praise of God
because of his great rescue.
But even with the great rescues in David's own life,
and if you read the stories of his life,
there were many great rescues.
Even then, it was only really the people of Israel praising God.
But in the psalm, David looks forward to a time
when all the families of the nations will bow down before him.
And here we are in Hastings.
We are about as far as you can get from Israel.
And today there are people from Addis Ababa to Vladivostok
bowing down to worship God.
Why?
Because Jesus rose from the dead.
Do you think there would even be a church
if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead?
No way.
People across history have had to be willing
to give their lives for their faith.
You wouldn't give your life for a good moral teaching,
no matter how wise and helpful the teaching.
You would only give your life
because you had good reason to believe that God raises the dead.
And he's promised that he will raise his loyal followers.

A guy died, and he went to the pearly gates.
Peter said to him,
"Do you want to go to heaven or hell?"
He said, "I'm not sure, could I have a look at both?"
So the devil gave him a tour of hell,
and there were people lounging around in what looked like a night club.

Lots of alcohol flowing.
The band was good, the girls were pretty and very friendly.
He took him back to Peter,
and Peter asked him if he was ready to make a choice.
He said, "I'm really surprised.
I thought I was going to choose heaven,
but hell actually looks not too bad.
I choose hell."
So he went down to hell.
And there were people being tortured.
There was smoke and fire.
There was nastiness, depression and hopelessness.
And the guy said to the devil,
"Hey what's going on?
This is nothing like what you showed me!"
The devil said,
"Yesterday I was campaigning.
Today you've voted."

I think that's a joke.
But it's a little close to the truth.
The devil wants people to believe that it's all going to be OK.
But he's a liar and his promises are campaign promises.
God's promises on the other hand are rock solid.
People will praise him in every nation on earth
because of his great rescue of his people.
Jesus resurrection is not just his resurrection.
It's the unbreakable promise
of the resurrection of all who put their faith in him.