

Psalm 22 - Good Friday

Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:24

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Where is God when life really hurts? Sometimes this is really a hard question. When I was a young teenager, my aunt died. As a ten year old boy, I walked around with the 'why' question for a long time. And when father passed away when I was 13, that same question welled up and I found no answers.

Most times, when we are in real need, when we ask 'why' we do not get an answer from God. This is not only our experience, but we read of many situations in the Word of God where people have grave needs, immense suffering, and they get no clear answer.

David's complaint and trust in God

In Psalm 22, David asked of God, 'Where are you? Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far? Why do you not answer me....' The whole Psalm is a painful cry from the heart in a situation of great need. Enemies surround him and David seems at the point of being overwhelmed, at the point of being killed.

'God why have you forsaken me...' This is a question that can easily well up in our hearts in our times of need. When we lose our job and we do not know how to support our family. When we cannot find work and have to scratch money together.

'God why are you so far?' When we look at the state of our country and the mess we are in. When we have a sick child and things are not well. In relationships that are in a downward spiral and we do not know how to solve it.

'God why do you no answer?' When we feel so inadequate. When we need solutions today and not next week. When we have people making our life hard, at work, or in our building. In moments of depression.

Some people think it is not good to question God. It does not show faith, or it is not humble. Well friends, I think God loves people who ask honest questions.

The 'why' is an acceptable prayer to God for a child of God in distress, who feels unheard, unhelped, unloved, forsaken. Calling to God again and again s exactly what he wants of us in those times.

Sure, questioning God can come from wrong motives. From anger, or unbelief. That is why it is so important that David prayed: 'My God where are you... My God, why don't you answer.'

For David, the questions are not a matter of unbelief, but of faith in the fact that God is his God

– and therefore he does not understand why God seems so far. 'Why are you far from helping me.' This question is not a lapse of faith but a sign of disorientation. Of not knowing what's going on.

David even testifies that although he personally does not experience the presence of God in his troubles, He knows that God sit in his throne, that God can be trusted, and that he saves people from their problems. Psalm 22:3-5:

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.

Fulfilled in Jesus

Of course, reading this Psalm we are reminded immediately of the last days of the life of our Lord Jesus. On the cross he cried our: Eli, Eli, Lama Sabahtani... My God my God why have you forsaken me.'

And if we read how David expressed his life and feeling carefully, we must come to the conclusion that his words do not really fit well with his life. He does not seem to refer to any exact situation in his own life. The Psalm is really about an execution, not just about some illness or a small problem. No Christian can read it without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion of our Lord.

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Proof of the Gospel*, 10.8.491:

The Psalm refers to Christ and no one else, for its contents harmonize with none other but him...'

The early church, from the very beginning, saw in this Psalm a prophecy about the last days of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only 55 days after Jesus was crucified, St Peter preached in Jerusalem and quoted from the Psalms, calling David a prophet. Psalm 22 is quoted more than any other Psalm in the New Testament as predicting how Jesus would die. Or actually, how he felt during that whole process.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, scared of what was going to happen.

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

During the trial of Jesus and while he was hanging on the cross, he was mocked by the people.

>Psalm 22:6-7: 'I am a worn and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All

who see me mock me, they hurl insults shaking their heads.'

He was nailed to the cross.

>Psalm 22:16: 'They have pierced my hands and my feet'

While hanging on the cross, the Roman soldiers divided his garment among themselves and they cast the lot for who would get his best piece.

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

While hanging on the cross, people mocked him saying: He saved others, let God now to come and save him.

>Psalm 22:8: 'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'

On the cross, his body was aching disastrously. Such hanging destroys the whole body in a short time. Think of the pain.

>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.'

No wonder on the cross Jesus cried: I am thirsty.

>Psalm 22:15: 'My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.'

And finally, Jesus died a godforsaken death. He cried on the cross:

>Psalm 22:1: 'My God my God why have you forsaken me

The sun became dark, the land became black, as if God himself was hiding his face. The Son of God was killed. The owner of the world was rejected by mankind. We, mankind collectively, told our own Father and Creator: away with you. We do not want you. We want you and your Son out of our lives, out of our mind, out of our world.

To make it possible for God to save us from this misery

We know this is not the end of the story. In Psalm 22 we also see that the one whose hands and feet were pierced, was rescued by God. Psalm 22:24 says:

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

God did listen to the prayer of the one who felt totally forsaken. And he saved him after three days in the grave.

In the letter of Hebrews in the New Testament, Psalm 22:22 is quoted: 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.' After all his suffering, Jesus would be able to speak of God again – to those he now calls brothers.

And that is where we become involved in this Psalm. Jesus also comes to our congregation today – to offer himself to us. To call us his brothers and

sisters. We are, because we are united with him through faith. Hebrews 2:9-12:

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises."

He tasted death for everyone, for my sins, for yours sins. He took our place.

Quote: Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Son, Theological Oration 4* (30) 5:

Jesus was in his own person representing us. For we were the forsaken and the despised; but now by the sufferings of him who could not suffer, we have been taken up and saved. He makes our folly and our transgressions his own.

Like David in his Psalm, we were Godforsaken and lost. But Jesus became the ultimate lost person – for our benefit. Let me quote some more from the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews 2:14-18:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

When we feel as David in Psalm 22, forsaken, alone, Jesus knows those feelings and comes to you – to be God with you. He does not answer all our question of why this or that happens to us. He does not explain our suffering. But he is simply here, with us, as our great fellow-sufferer.

He knows of your pain because he has been there.

When we fear, he comes to us – announcing the end of fear. He conquered death.

If you are tempted to do wrong things - he can help you to stand firm. He was tempted.

When you feel far from God, Jesus comes to you – to be with you and encourage you: Because of those hours on that awful Friday on the cross, He knows what it means to be far from God and He will be with you – God with us.

When we suffer from our sins, he comes to us – he made atonement for the sins of his people as the perfect high priest. He takes your sins away. He takes your guilt away. He takes your feelings of failure away.

Conclusion

On Good Friday we do not celebrate Holy Communion; we do commemorate his death on the cross, but in order for us to recognize and respect his agony caused by our sins, and through the love of God, effective for the forgiveness of our sins, we postpone all celebrations.

We can rejoice in his love for us; he is so near to you; he embraces you with his wide open arms. You may not get answers to your questions about the problems and the sufferings you experience or see around you. But He has been in the deepest pit, and holds you in his arms as the best answer to all questions we have.

Let us pray...

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.