

Forsaken to Never Forsake

Psalm 22 (NIV)

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David. ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. ³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. ⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. ⁵ To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "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 on 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 that tear 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 within me. ¹⁵ My mouth 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 surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. ¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. ²⁰ Deliver me 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. ²² I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly 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 scorned 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 I will fulfill my vows. ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied; those 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, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (verse 1a) Why have you turned your back on me? Why are you nowhere to be found? Why are you not helping me, saving me? Have I believed in you in vain? Is my faith in you worthless, my hope in you for nothing?

Who of us can say that we have never thought these thoughts or something similar at least at some point in our lives? Maybe some of us have spent a majority of our lives thinking that God cares nothing for me, that he turned his back on me a long time ago. So, why should now be any different? Maybe you have been a Christian pretty much your entire life, from infancy until now, but at some point, some moment, when everything was going bad, you silently wondered, "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." (verses 1-2)

Certainly David, who wrote this psalm, had those moments in his life. Many times he was on the run for his life from King Saul, who wanted to kill him. God had anointed David to be king in place of Saul, but that relentless pursuit no doubt made David feel like the God who had chosen him had also abandoned him, turned his back on him.

How about for you? When have you felt abandoned by God? Maybe you can think of a specific time in your life when a prayer for healing and relief went unanswered, at the sudden death of a loved one, or a time of financial shortfall. And right now, who of us haven't been tempted to think that maybe God has turned his back on us and that is why the coronavirus rages? We've prayed in church multiple times that the disease would end. We've done our social distancing and stayed home to stay safe. We've given up gathering together in person here at church. But the numbers of infected and those who die still climbs daily. C'mon, God! Where are you? Don't you care? Have you given up on us, turned your back on us? Do you really want nothing to do with us? God seems so silent, so distant, to our cries for help. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (verse 1a)

For David, it only got worse from there. People knew that he had trusted God, but now he was seemingly forsaken by God. You hear his pain: "I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. 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.'" (verses

6-8) He felt like wild, vicious animals had encircled him, trapped him, ready to gore him, maul him. This was the end. God had forsaken him. There was no more hope of deliverance. Should he give up and forsake God in turn?

We know that temptation to forsake God must have been strong because we've been at the same place. Maybe we've even forsaken God ourselves. We gave him up because he gave us up. He did not help in my time of need, my time of distress. Instead of crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (verse 1a) I said, "God, I forsake you and you know why."

Has God forsaken you? If you are hearing these words today, then it is absolute truth that God has not forsaken you – no matter who you are, no matter where you are, no matter what you've done. Why? Because God has forsaken someone else so that he would not forsake you.

The more you hear of Jesus' words from the cross tonight and compare them to the words written here in Psalm 22, the more you realize how prophetic, how inspired and breathed out by God these words truly are. Even though David wrote these words 1,000 years prior, you can't help but see Jesus' crucifixion all throughout Psalm 22, and that's by design. David wrote: "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." (verse 8) The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders of the Jewish people taunted Jesus on the cross with these words verbatim. "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth..." (verse 15) Jesus, showing his true human nature, called from the cross that he thirsted, mouth dried up, tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. "They have pierced my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me." (verses 16b-17) is exactly what you would have seen on Calvary at the foot of the cross looking up at Jesus. "They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." (verse 18) The Roman soldiers took Jesus' clothes and literally cast lots for one of those pieces so that they wouldn't have to tear their bounty from the crucified into pieces. And, of course, soon before he gave up his spirit, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (verse 1a)

Jesus was forsaken by God. But Jesus is God. He is the Immanuel, the God with us, the God made flesh, the God through whom all things were made, born of a virgin, is my Lord. How exactly did God forsake himself on the cross? This is a mystery of our incomprehensible triune God. Our point is not to understand how God who created us is able to forsake himself on the cross but simply to take in the truth of it. Jesus while being true God from all eternity and also true man born of a virgin was forsaken by God on the cross. God turned his back on Jesus. He did not listen to Jesus' cries of anguish. He let Jesus be mocked and insulted. He let his enemies have him. He did not help him.

This state of being, having God forsake Jesus, there is only one other thing that we know of that can compare to it. Being forsaken by God is to be cast away from his presence, from his help, from his undeserved love. Being forsaken by God is hell. Yes, it is a place described with fire and brimstone, weeping and gnashing (grinding) of teeth. It is a place where people long for and seek death but cannot find it. It is pain without comparison and without end, let alone any relief. It is a place devoid of all mercy, of all grace, of all love – because God is all these things. To be forsaken by God is to have all of them taken away.

When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (verse 1a), it was not hyperbole. He's not exaggerating. He is suffering hell. He suffers hell being forsaken by God because he is taking our punishment for our sin on himself. The complete punishment for our sins, an eternity in hell for every single one of us, is suffered by the eternal God who is also man on the cross. Jesus is forsaken, and God's justice over our sins is satisfied, as Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" Because Jesus was forsaken, God does not forsake us.

This was David's hope: that God would not forsake him. He felt as if God had turned his back on him, but it was not true. David continued to trust in the Lord, and his trust was well placed. "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." (verse 24) God rescued David time and time again. There was never a time when God did not hear David's cries for help. There was never a time when he had actually left David to fend for himself, that he had turned his back on David. No, he heard David, and he answered him at just the right time. God did not forsake David, and David in turned praised the God for rescuing him.

During this life, God does not forsake us either. Why not? Because Jesus was forsaken by God in our place. This means that God always hears us when we cry out to him. This means that God will always rescue us in the end, even if we suffer before he does. The final and total rescue comes when the Lord calls us home. This is the message that is for all of us, for future generations, for people yet unborn. This is our hope: Christ was forsaken in our place so that God will never forsake us. Amen.