

## Am I Forsaken?

### Psalm 22 (NIV)

*For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David.* <sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? <sup>2</sup> My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. <sup>3</sup> Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. <sup>4</sup> In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. <sup>5</sup> To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. <sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. <sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. <sup>8</sup> "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." <sup>9</sup> Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. <sup>10</sup> From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. <sup>11</sup> Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. <sup>12</sup> Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. <sup>13</sup> Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. <sup>17</sup> All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. <sup>18</sup> They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. <sup>19</sup> But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. <sup>20</sup> Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. <sup>21</sup> Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen. <sup>22</sup> I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. <sup>23</sup> You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. <sup>26</sup> The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever! <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. <sup>31</sup> They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

Last Sunday, we were reminded to interpret everything that happens to us in light of the cross, that since God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? What good would God possibly withhold from us? Nothing. Today we walk through how a Christian deals with prayers of deliverance that go seemingly unanswered.

David cries out, "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) We've prayed this. Deliver us from financial stress, meaningless work, bad relationships, health problems, persecution, grief, anxiety, depression, and the list goes on. These things wear us out, make us tired, and just want to go home. We need a rescue, and so we rightly plead to God for it.

But without a response, we feel like God has turned his back on us, as if he is holding out on us. That can't be true in light of Romans 8 from last week. What does David do as he is working through his unanswered prayers? His next thought is: "Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises." (verse 3) I know that you have the power to help me, power to end my suffering, power to rescue me. You reign over all things. You can help. So we acknowledge along with David, "Yes, God can help me with this."

Then David remembers that God has helped in the past. "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." (verses 4-5) Like David, we've heard the stories too. God rescued Noah and his family in the ark, rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt with the 10 plagues. God used Judges like Othniel, Gideon, Ehud, Deborah, Jephthah, Samson, and more to rescue the Israelites from their oppressors. And if you haven't heard of these people, it's time to read more of the Old Testament.

Amazingly, we get to say along with David that these are "our ancestors." David was not directly descended from most of these people, but he claims ownership of them along with the rest of those who put their trust in God, much like how Paul tells us in Romans that Abraham is the father of all who believe, that we are a part of a spiritual family, which is more important than our physical family. In this way, we claim the same heritage, the same spiritual ancestors, and the same God who delivered them. You did not forsake them, God. So, I'm clinging to that for a reason why you will not forsake me now.

Even while remembering these past deliverances, David still feels the current pain as his enemies taunt him, scorn him, make him feel like a lowly maggot of a man. They jeer David that if God really loved him then God would rescue him. People do that to us as well. "If your God is so powerful, why isn't he saving you? Why do you keep suffering? You have a stupid made-up God."

Though they hurt, David doesn't concede to those taunts and insults. He goes back not to what God has done for other people and to what God has done for him. God had always taken care of David, from his conception to now. David was always helpless, and God had always been his helper. He recognizes that he has always had to rely on God, even as he got older. So he is relying on him again.

A lesson that we ourselves come back to. We too acknowledge the pain of unanswered prayers, especially as people use them to try to undermine our faith. Part of the reason that God gives us things that we can't solve or figure out on our own is to strip us of our self-reliance. In life, we will always run into things that we cannot overcome. We need people. We need God. God took care of you as a helpless baby, used your parents to feed you and change you, provide with shelter and love. He gave you the abilities and the strength to get educated, to work, opportunities to get hired, and employers who wanted you. In your old age, God provides people still to help you as you can't do the things that you used to do, everyone from family to caregivers to people from church. God has been there the whole time throughout my whole life and yours, always as we were helpless and needed him, sometimes helping you through people, other times helping you directly. And so we come right back to him just as David does. I trusted you before; I trust you again. "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help." (verse 11)

We need that help even more as we see these powerful enemies. Evil has surrounded us. The spiritual exhaustion has also made us mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted, that our heart have melted, our bones feel out of joint, our mouths are parched, and we feel like we're going to die. We can't keep up this fight God. My God, I feel forsaken. I can't hold out. I'm calling to you again. "But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me." (verse 19)

Some of you know that my wife organized a series of field trips for our Catechism class, our junior high and high school kids who are receiving biblical instruction to become confirmed members of our congregation. These fields trips have us observing worship in other Christian denominations and the religious services of other world religions. Having gone to four of them, it takes a toll. It's not that they are outright evil. They all have been fairly nice and glad to have you there. You can tell that they want you to join them, that they think they have the best faith and worship to offer people. At the same time, though, we have seen service after service turn God and life into a divine to do list. The good news of what God has done for us is either absent or almost unrecognizable.

As I debrief with my family and others who attend with us, it is exhausting. It always helps me appreciate what we have here, because here we are filled with what God has done for us, with the message that we are forgiven, that we are made perfect, that we are complete and whole by what he has done for us, how he has, in fact, delivered us, just as he has our faith ancestors. We are not forsaken, not because we completed a list or did the right things, but because my God, our God, delivers.

This is why we come back, like David, and praise God in the assembly, as we gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ, just as our faith ancestors have before us. We praise him because God has listened to our cries. It wasn't always immediate answers, but when we come back here, we're surrounded by a God who has not hidden his face from us but has listened to our cries for help. We came here as the forsaken, or at least feeling forsaken, to then be wrapped up again in his deliverance of us. While we are praying fervently for deliverance, we keep coming back to worship the Lord together because he delivers all of us, helpless as we are. This is why all of us praise him. This is true for everyone to the ends of the earth. We are not forsaken.

As we have gone through these moments of feeling forsaken like David did, ready to give up, we come back to what God has done for our faith ancestors, what he has done for us in the past, and then tell the next generation because they too are going to have so many times in life when they feel forsaken, that it feels like God is not answering their prayers. The past has shown us, our lives have shown us, that he does indeed answer our prayers and satisfy us. He takes in the forsaken to never forsake us.

Why are we never forsaken? Because, as David ends, "he has done it!" (verse 31) As you heard the words of Psalm 22 written 1000 years before Jesus, we as New Testament Christians can't help but see all these verses fulfilled so explicitly in Jesus. God really did give up his Son for us. These were his words of beings forsaken for us while he was on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (verse 1) He was insulted for us. His hands and feet were pierced for us. He had his bones on display, pulled out of joint for us. He suffered the debilitating dehydration on the cross for us. He had his clothes divided up among the Roman soldiers through gambling for us. He was laid in the dust of death for us. He was forsaken for our sins so that he would never forsake us.

This journey of David, of Jesus, of us, of Lent, is not only one of feeling forsaken. Jesus, like David, continued to trust in God for his deliverance even when he actually experienced what it was to be forsaken by God. Three days later after laying in the dust of death, his deliverance came as God the Father raised Jesus, his Son, from the dead. Jesus' prayers were heard, just as David's were, just like our faith ancestors were. This means that our prayers for rescue and deliverance will too always be answered. God will not forsake us to evil but will rescue us. This is why we continue to trust in our God, worship him, call to him in prayer, knowing that he does deliver us every single time, no matter how bad it gets. With God, we are never forsaken! Amen.