Why Have You Forsaken Me?
Psalms of Lament: How Long O Lord
Psalm 22:1-31
Pastor Josh Black
March 25, 2016

Good evening. I would like to join Pastor Phil in welcoming each of you here this evening. My name is Josh Black. I’m the Lead Pastor here at First Free.

We’re gathered this evening to meditate on the death of Christ. We’ve done that through music so far. Now, I’d like to look at Psalm 22 over the next 20 minutes or so to help us continue meditating on the death of Christ. Would you please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 22?

We’ve been in a series on the Psalms of Lament over the last two months. The Psalms of Lament are prayers of protest to God for the troubles God’s people face in life. They’re not only appropriate for us to pray. Even Jesus prayed these psalms when he was facing death. And we shouldn’t be surprised, because these psalms have so many connections with Jesus’ death, especially Psalm 22. Psalm 22 is referenced in the Gospels more than any other passage in the Old Testament. It starts out by saying, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”

Why did Jesus choose Psalm 22 to express his feeling of abandonment on the cross? I believe he chose it because it was prophetic. It gives the startling gruesome detail of his sufferings and the big picture of his sufferings like no other psalm. It not only lets us know what Jesus was thinking when he hung on the cross, it also lets us see how Jesus was feeling when he was crucified. Psalm 22, therefore, is very appropriate to help us reflect on the death of Christ and its significance for us.

Psalm 22 is divided into two main sections. The first section, in verses 1-21, contains protest. The second section, in verses 22-31, moves from protest to praise. Right now we’re simply going to cover the first section. Then before we take communion, I’ll comment briefly on the second section.

PROTEST (1-21)

Psalm 22:1-21

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? 
   Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, 
   and by night, but I find no rest.

3 Yet you are holy, 
   enthroned on the praises of Israel.

4 In you our fathers trusted; 
   they trusted, and you delivered them.

4 Patterson
5 Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.
To you they cried and were rescued;  
    in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and not a man,  
    scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

All who see me mock me;  
    they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;  
    let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

Yet you are he who took me from the womb;  
    you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts.

On you was I cast from my birth,  
    and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

Be not far from me,  
    for trouble is near,  
    and there is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me;  
    strong bulls of Bashan surround me;  
    they open wide their mouths at me,  
    like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,  
    and all my bones are out of joint;  
    my heart is like wax;  
    it is melted within my breast;

my strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
    and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
    you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs encompass me;  
    a company of evildoers encircles me;  
    they have pierced my hands and feet—

I can count all my bones—  
    they stare and gloat over me;

they divide my garments among them,  
    and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O LORD, do not be far off!  
    O you my help, come quickly to my aid!

Deliver my soul from the sword,  
    my precious life from the power of the dog!

Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

This is the Word of the Lord.
As I read these verses, you may have noticed a dance between complaint and confidence. Sometimes David expresses his trouble to God and sometimes he expresses his trust in God. This dance not only helps us see David’s experience; it also helps us reflect on Christ’s experience on the cross. So what I’m going to do over the next 15 minutes or so is to walk you through David’s dance of complaint and confidence and try to show its connections with Christ and its relevance for us.

**Complaint**

In verses 1-2, David starts out by complaining, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”

David feels abandoned by God. God seems so far off. As we'll see, David's surrounded by enemies who want to take his life, and there’s nobody there to help him (v. 11). So he cries out to God for help, but God seems deaf to his pleas for mercy. God seems so far away.

Jesus felt the same way. Jesus felt abandoned by his Father. But why did Jesus feel abandoned by the Father? It's because he was bearing the awful weight of sin. He faced death, which was a contradiction of who he was. Death was the reward of sin. But the Son of God had no sin and was utterly opposed to all that was sinful. Yet he still faced death full in the face.

**Application**

How does this apply to us? I think it applies in this way: When we think about Jesus’ great suffering, expressed so powerfully in Psalm 22, it's important to remember—the reason Jesus had to suffer was because of our sin. As we remember Christ’s death, we must remember our sin. His death and our sin are joined together at the hip. It was our sin that held Jesus on the cross. Our sin is so severe that it required the most unthinkable sacrifice—the sacrifice of God’s own Son.

This truth makes me think of the hymn that we sang last Sunday: “Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted.” Listen as I read the second verse:

Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load;  
‘Tis the Word, the Lord’s Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.

As you think about the so called cry of dereliction—where Jesus says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”—remember this. Our sin was so severe that it required the sacrifice of God’s own Son.

**Confidence**

Following David's complaint in verses 1-2, he shifts to confidence in God. In verses 3-5, he says that he trusts God, the way that Israel had trusted God throughout the Exodus. They cried out to God and were rescued (Ex. 2:23-25). God proved himself trustworthy then, and so David trusts God

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6 Waltke
7 God is not necessarily far off, but Jesus feels that he's far off. “God's silence makes him existentially to be so far off,” Waltke (emphasis mine).
now, In verses 9-10, David says that God taught him to trust him from the moment he was born. As a child learns to trust his mother for nourishment, David learned to trust God from birth.

Complaint

But although David knows that God is trustworthy, he still feels like God’s abandoned him. There is dissonance between his objective trust in God and his subjective experience of abandonment. This dissonance comes out clearly, in verses 6-8, where he returns to complaint. Israel trusted in God and they were delivered, “But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; he trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him.”

David’s trust has led nowhere. He’s not only surrounded by enemies that want to kill him, he’s also being mocked by his enemies. They don’t believe God will save David.

The same was true for Jesus. Not only was he being put to death, he was being mocked by those who put him to death. His enemies didn’t believe God would save him either.

Confidence

But David and Jesus believed that, even though God seemed far off, he would deliver them. They were confident in God. However, Jesus didn’t believe that God would deliver him from death. Jesus believed that God would deliver him through death and that he would be raised from the dead. Jesus’ death was necessary, because of our sin.

Application

How does this apply to us? Amazingly, Jesus’ death makes a way for our deliverance. We need to trust God to deliver us. But our trust is not in some general deliverance. It’s specific. We need to trust that Jesus’ death at the hands of his enemies is the only thing that can save us from our enemies of sin and Satan. Jesus suffered unto death and trusted God throughout the whole ordeal. We need to trust Jesus’ death to be delivered from the eternal death that we deserve.

Confidence

The dance of confidence and complaint continues in verse 11. Verse 11 picks up where David left off in verse 1. In verse 1, he complained that God was so far from saving him (v. 1). Now, in verse 11, he cries out, “Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.” There is confidence in God in the prayer—be not far from me. He wouldn’t be praying to God, if he weren’t confident in God. But there is complaint in the reason for the request—for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Complaint

What is the trouble that is near David? That comes out in verses 12-18.

In verses 12-13, we see that bulls surround him. And these bulls are like a roaring lion, seeking to devour him. The animals described in this verse are stronger than him and aggressive. They show just how threatening his enemies are. How does this threat make him feel? Look at verses 14-15. “I

Magary
Magary, Dennis. Lecture, EFCA One Pre-Conference, July 2013; Waltke
am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.” He’s at death’s door. His physical and emotional strength is sapped.

Jesus felt the same way. He was so worn out on the cross that he said, “I thirst.” His tongue stuck to his jaws. And so, he was given sour wine on a hyssop branch to drink (Jn. 19:28-29). This prefigured the fact that his death would satisfy the wrath of God against us. He drank the wine of God’s wrath for us.

But he not only felt that he was at death’s door. He was at death’s door. After he drank the wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (Jn. 19:30).

David was so near to death that he imagined scavenger dogs surrounding him. We see this picture in verses 16-18. They were ready to get the leftovers after his execution. They were gloating. They were ready eat through his flesh and get at his bones. They were ready to pierce his hands and feet with their teeth. And the people present at his execution were ready to divide up his garments.

We see something similar with Jesus. Before he gives up his spirit, his hands and feet are pierced with nails. Before he goes to the cross, his garments are divided among the soldiers. David’s threat of death predicted Jesus’ actual death.

Confidence

But as we’ve come to expect, after the complaint section, we have a final confidence section. In the face of death, David cries out again in prayer. Look at verses 19-21. “But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!”

In the face of certain death, David was still confident that God would deliver him. So he prayed. Jesus was confident too. But again, Jesus knew he wouldn’t be delivered from death. His death was necessary for our salvation. Jesus knew that he would be delivered through death; he would be raised. And through his death and resurrection, we can be saved.

Application

As we think on the cross where Jesus died, we see that his suffering was great. Psalm 22 draws this out in vivid color. But we must remember that Jesus’ suffering unto death was not without purpose. Jesus didn’t deserve to suffer and die. But he endured the cross to pay the price for our sins. On the cross the wrath of God was satisfied. And just as Jesus trusted God through his suffering, we’re called to trust Jesus so that we won’t have to suffer God’s judgment.

As we think on Jesus’ death, we must remember these things.

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PRAISE (22-31)

In verses 22-31 of Psalm 22, David moves from lament to praise. The Psalm begins in dark anguish, but ends in soaring hope. This is typical of all Psalms of Lament. They all move from lament to praise. In the wake of God’s deliverance, he is to be praised! We’re not going to read the whole section, but I want to draw your attention to a few verses.

In verse 22, David says “I will tell of your [deliverance] to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” He then calls God’s people to praise God for his deliverance in verse 23. “You who fear the LORD, praise him!” But not only should God’s king and God’s people praise him for their deliverance. God’s salvation is to extend to the ends of the earth. In verse 27, David says, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.”

There’s a movement of praise, flowing out of deliverance, that starts with David, moves to God’s people, and finally to the nations.

Application

The same is true for us today. Jesus also praised God for his deliverance. In Hebrews 2:12, we’re told that Jesus actually used Psalm 22 to praise God after he was raised. He said, like David, “I will tell of your [deliverance] to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” And after Jesus praises God for his deliverance, his disciples are called to praise God for our deliverance in Jesus. But not only that, we’re also called to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth until Jesus returns, so that people from every tribe and nation and tongue will praise God for their deliverance.

In a moment, we’re going to observe the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is a celebration. It’s a way to respond to all we’ve experienced this evening. It’s a way to remember our deliverance and give God praise for what he’s done. And as we take it, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he returns (1 Cor. 11:26). The Lord’s Supper is for God’s people. If you’ve trusted in Christ for your salvation, you’re welcome to come to the table. If you’ve not yet trusted in Christ for your salvation, we ask that you don’t come forward. Instead, reflect on the gospel. Jesus died for your sins. If you trust in him you can be delivered from sin and God’s judgment.

And as you come remember that the deliverance we have through Jesus’ suffering should lead to praise. Communion is a way to give him praise and thanks for what he’s done for us.

Prayer

Thank you for the cross, Lord. Thank you for the price you paid. Bearing all our sin and shame, in love you came, and gave amazing grace. Thank you for this love, Lord. Thank you for the nail pierced hands. You washed us in his cleansing flow. And now we know your forgiveness and embrace. Worthy is the Lamb! We praise you as the one who is high and lifted up. We praise you that the treasure of heaven was crucified for us. Worthy is the Lamb. May you bless these elements in the Lord’s Supper to strengthen our faith in Christ? It’s in his name that we pray, AMEN.

13 Longman