

Psalm 22

Intro

This is my favourite psalm. I'm not sure exactly why. I suppose I like the fact that it has been misinterpreted by many people and that its wonderful secrets are waiting to be discovered by those who are willing to probe a little deeper. I would even be bold enough to suggest that there would be no psalm 23 without psalm 22-the message within it is that important. It is a psalm that Jesus himself quoted in his hour of greatest need, indeed it is widely regarded as a psalm of the cross and has some quite remarkable parallels with Jesus' experience on the cross, and we will come back to that a little later.

Background to the psalm

First of all, I have wondered what circumstances in David's life precipitated the writing of this psalm, as I am of the opinion that this isn't just a vision given to David in the night. I have considered this and keep coming back to one clear option. In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel anointed David as a young man, somewhere around the age of 17, to be the next king of Israel. Soon after he went on to kill Goliath and inspire his nation, but over the next 8 years or so the path to actually becoming King became much more difficult than he initially realised- in fact it became a nightmare. Saul, the incumbent King turned on him, tried to kill him and through a series of events made David into a fugitive in his own country. His home became a cave, and when found there, it became the wilderness, and when found there he even had to have time outside the country-an episode which also failed. During this time, Saul rampaged around, randomly killing people. At one point he killed 85 priests of God and David had to face the son of one of the key priests and explain that his father's death was due to his broken relationship with Saul. During this period he was betrayed by his wife, he had days and perhaps weeks without food, he and his men had their families taken as hostages, and Saul continued relentlessly to chase him. For 8 years David, anointed to become King of Israel, was literally in the wilderness.

My guess is that sometime relatively early on in his desert experience, David penned psalm 22. David, anointed as the next King, was for all intents and purposes, forsaken. God had apparently promised him so much, yet he was a fugitive, starving, and became the reason for untold suffering across the country at the hands of his enemy. An enemy that he had only ever been loyal towards. David had every reason to ask God some questions.

Exposition of the psalm

The psalm starts off with this famous verse. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. In fact there is more than one question. David also asks, why are you so far from saving me (David can see no end in sight for his suffering). And why are you so far from the words of my groaning (David is getting no response to a verbal expression of his depths of pain and suffering). David sees God as being far away in time and place.

David then points out that he has been crying out for God's help for day and night for a long time and has had no answer.

Then David takes us on a bit of a roller coaster.

He points out that God is the enthroned as the Holy one, the praise of Israel. He recalls that the fathers put their trust in God and that he knows that God delivered them. 'When they cried out to you, you saved them. They trusted you and were not disappointed.'

David then draws a conclusion that there must be something wrong with him. In verse 6: I am a worm and not a man. This is reinforced by the fact that I am scorned and despised. I am mocked, and they insult me. His mockers say:

V8: He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord deliver him since he delights in him.

David then acknowledges that all his hope rests on God as that is all that he knows when it comes down to it.

V9: You brought me out of the womb, you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. You've been my God all my life.

V11 A pleading from within: Do not be far from me. Trouble is near and there is no one to help.

David then goes on to describe the various components of his situation and just how bad and desperate it has become:

1. He is surrounded by enemies
2. Roaring lions are on the prowl-this could well have been literally true
3. He is physically affected. I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint, his strength has dried up, he is dehydrated as his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth, and is lying in the desert. He can count his bones.
4. He has lost his heart, his whole sense of who he is: my heart has turned to wax, it has melted away within me.
5. His enemies are ready to pounce. They stare and gloat, take his clothes and cast lots for them among themselves.

V19. David closes his argument with what he may well feel is his last appeal to God to not be far off, to come quickly to help him, to deliver him from this awful situation.

Then we get something quite remarkable. A complete shift in v 22 towards bold proclamation

David declares that he will praise God in public, he exhorts everyone else to praise God, he promises to fulfil his vows before the people, he prophesies that the poor will eat and be satisfied, all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to God, all the families of the nations, all those who live and all those who died, the rich and the poor, the good news about God will be proclaimed to people yet unborn, for he has done it.

Such a massive change from a state of forsakenness and utter despair to one of bold proclamation, and its not entirely clear at first glance what has happened. So where did this come from? If you read this passage again your eyes have settle on verse 24-this profound verse tells us what has happened. David has discovered the answer to his original question:

'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'.

One of the issues is, in difficult situations when we are having trouble sensing God, we tend to look over there, up there, far in the distance for God to come in and rescue us, make a statement, move definitively. Indeed, that was what David was asking for in the first half of this passage. For God to come from over there somewhere and meet him. I believe that what David is telling us is that when God opened his eyes, he saw that he was right there, holding onto him, comforting him, and he had been interacting with him all the time with his situation. He didn't come from over there somewhere, there was no lightening and thunder, no coming on the clouds, no big entry from the horizon, because he was already there. David has an enormous call on his life to lead his country and, while he had learned to trust God and have faith in him, God needed to get him to a place where he knew God personally, that he was always with him, through thick and thin. There was no longer any doubt about whether he was good enough himself for God, no need to rely on what he knew from the forefathers, from his mum or his Dad, he now knew for certain of God's presence with him always. The outward sign of this understanding was bold proclamation. A powerful messianic type proclamation. And perhaps psalm 23 just became possible:

I want to now take this a step further and focus on Jesus on the cross.

In quoting psalm 22, verse 1 and it is very clear that Jesus is quoting this psalm, Jesus is making it clear that he identifies fully with the psalm. Indeed there are remarkable parallels, including the statement that they pierced my hands and my feet (which is possibly over-translated in the English version) and the casting of lots for his clothing.

If you think about it, the fact that Psalm 22 has this whole extra dimension is something extremely precious. It give us a unique insight into the relationship between the Father and the Son.

What is so remarkable to me is that many people regard Jesus' words on the cross, quoting just verse 1 of the psalm, as representing the moment where the Father turned away from the son because of the sin that had been placed on him. A rupture in the God head as the perfect Father in heaven couldn't be associated with his son because of the sin and darkness that had engulfed him. Not only that, the Father was punishing the son while abandoning him.

Yet Verse 24 tells us very clearly that this is not what happened, so why the big misunderstanding -I think this exposes a misunderstanding of the primary place of relationship in the heart and mind of God. To expose this misunderstanding more blatantly let me say this:

No loving father or mother deserts their child in his or her hour of deepest need. Many of you know that I lost my Dad 2 weeks ago. I have wondered if having such a loss gives me some sort of credibility when it comes to preaching on a Psalm that is full of human suffering. But something else has struck me over these days. I am privileged to know what normal is-so I can spot abnormal much more easily than some people. In medical school we spend much of the first half learning what normal is. And when we learn to read chest xrays it is crucial that we imprint normal on our brains by seeing thousands of them under different conditions. Having an imprint of normal enables you to spot abnormal. It is simply not normal to abandon your child. Full stop.

NZ herald 28 June: The Crown began summing up its case in Ewen Macdonald's murder trial today after more than three weeks of evidence in the High Court at Wellington. Macdonald, 32, has denied murdering his brother-in-law Scott Guy, 31, after growing tensions over the Feilding family farm they

co-managed. Mr Guy was shot dead in the driveway of his Feilding home as he left to do the milking in the pre-dawn darkness of July 8, 2010. Two defence witnesses took the stand yesterday after the Crown called dozens of witnesses, including Mr Guy's wife Kylee and close family members. Macdonald did not give evidence in his defence. His wife Anna Macdonald, Mr Guy's sister, sat in the public gallery in court today with father and mother, Bryan and Jo Guy, and older sister Nikki. On the opposite side of the public gallery, Macdonald's father Kerry sat behind his son in the dock.

What about the example of Abraham and Isaac in the old testament

Abraham had been told that through his son Isaac, God would establish his descendants to be a mighty nation like the stars in the night sky. Then one day something awful happened. God asked Abraham to give up Isaac. Not only that he asked him to sacrifice him to him. Abraham didn't leave his son in the hands of anyone else to do this task. He went up that mountain with his son, holding his hand all the way. Only at the last moment God stopped the sacrifice. Hundreds of years later another father and son walked together up the road to calvary and went one step further on the cross.

Turning back to Psalm 22,

Psalm 22 gives us a wonderful glimpse of the ultimate relationship-between the Father and the son if we are willing to look for it. On the surface it looked like Jesus was abandoned and forsaken. In reality what was happening was that the Father was right there, working with the son to bring about the salvation of the world and holding on to him all the way.

Relationship lens

I'd like to take this point about relationship another step further. I wonder if you have thought much about seeing God and the things of God through a relationship lens. I have found that if you see the things of God through a relationship lens, some big points of confusion start to be explained.

Theological issue	Through a relationship lens
Pre-destination	God took the initiative to come and find me
Free will	Genuine relationship can't be forced
Trinity	Perfect intimacy-where three become so intimate in relationship they are essentially one
Assurance of salvation	If I know I'm in relationship with God now, I can be assured that this will simply continue into eternity
The salvation prayer – accepting a free gift on one hand but needing to commit your life to God on the other	It is simply entering into a relationship with God, made possible through his work on the cross. Entering into a relationship is a conscious decision involving commitment.
Sanctification	Increasingly becoming like Christ through deeper

	and deeper relationship with him
Love the Lord your God and Love your neighbour as yourself	The two greatest commands are inter-twined- your love for God enables you to love your neighbour. The foundation for your closest human relationships is your relationship with God

Ending

I’ve been a Christian ever since I can remember. One thing that has struck me when I have seen people turn away from God, is that when I probe it becomes clear that, without exception, they did not fully grasp the relationship issue with God. Some of the smartest people I know, who actually have a basic belief in God, seem unable to come to terms with God’s priority for relationship with us. They don’t appear to walk with God every day. Yet it is very simple logic: Why would God, who has planted in us a deep need for meaningful relationships, not have this as a characteristic of himself??

We all go through hard times. Some of you are having that hard time right now. Are you someone who sees God as some sort of distant judge, maybe even your saviour, but have never really thought of him as a friend, as someone that wants to be in genuine relationship with you on a daily basis?.The God of the universe, remarkably, wants to be your friend. Not just any friend, but your best friend, to walk with you, talk with you, touch you deeply, comfort you, know you intimately and guide you through life.

You know, in many ways its not as easy learning to be God’s friend. You can’t see him, you can’t feel him, you rarely hear him. But it is possible to relate to him. It can be slow and difficult at first but the rewards are huge. Learning to walk with God is a process, its something that takes time. I have been having a daily bible reading for example since I was a kid. Yet only in recent years have I really found myself missing the daily time with God if I haven’t had it. That’s because there have now been so many times when God has spoken to me through these times.

I’ve found wonderful versus sticking out for me from my daily time with God.

Not so long ago, when I found myself in a work situation that threatened everything I planned to do God hit me between the eyes with Deuteronomy 2 verse 7: I have been with you these forty years and you have had everything you needed.

I don’t know about you but I often struggle to choose God over some other thing that is more instantly gratifying. I came across this wonderful verse in Jonah the other day-Jonah 2 v 8, at the time when he suddenly saw everything clearly after his deliverance: ‘Those who follow after worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.’ You might get short term pleasure from some endeavour but you’re also missing out on being closer to God in that relationship. Don’t miss out!

I often get self focused when things are going well and I achieve. But I’m at my best when I realise that I am fully dependent on him. My verse on January 1 this year was John 1 v 3: ‘Through him all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made’. All that I achieve is done

with him. I am totally dependent on him for what happens in my life. I need to remember this every day.

Only you really know how deep and special and awesome your relationship with God is. God wants you to know that he knows that it is hard. But there aren't a great number of short cuts. You and him need to spend time together. And it will become increasingly easy and wonderful as you get to know him and you let him be more and more part of your every day life.

Do you realise that God's goal is not simply to save you to eternal life, it is to relate to you as your friend. How's that going? Do you know him as your friend? Do you know deep down that he's right there with you, on your side, all the way, no matter what? We're going to finish the service with a time of worship. I'd like to encourage you to commit to discovering a relationship with God that will have you knowing him through the good times and through your hard times as your saviour, yes, but as your eternal faithful friend.