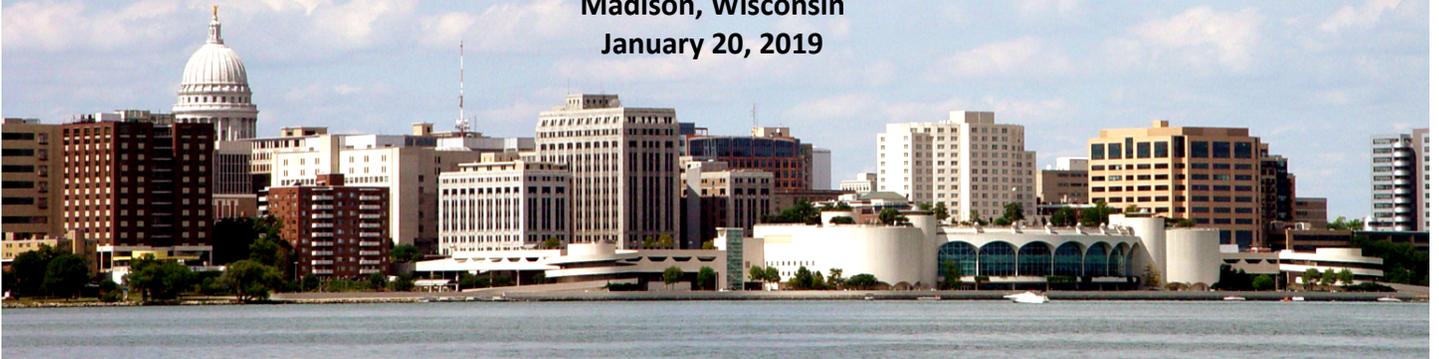


A Cry of Anguish & Song of Praise

PSALM 22 (PART 1)

Baxter T. Exum (#1484)
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Several weeks ago, I think it might have been in our Wednesday class, I mentioned that I had allowed my mind to wander a bit during the Lord's Supper the previous Sunday and that I hadn't really focused on it, as I should have done. I got home later in the day, I was thinking back over the service and our time together, I was thinking about who was here and who wasn't here, and I suddenly realized that I didn't really remember thinking through what we were doing at the Lord's Table. And it scared me a bit. We know what Paul said about the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 where he warned that,

...whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

This morning and next Sunday and on the third Sunday in February (when I get back from Tennessee), I'd like to take a few moments to try to refocus our thoughts on the Lord's sacrifice and what he did for us on the cross by studying one of the most graphic accounts of the Lord's death. But what makes this account rather unusual is that it is found in the Old Testament, in the book of Psalms, it is written by King David, and it was written roughly 1000 years before the Lord's death. I am referring to a song written by David, preserved for us in Psalm 22 (p. 874). As we make our way to Psalm 22, I'll mention the heading in many of our Bibles. Those headings are not necessarily inspired, but they are very old. The translators have made their own headings - these are fairly recent. The NASB says that Psalm 22 is "A Cry of Anguish and a Song of Praise." We are taking that as the title of our study today. We'll look at the "CRY" this morning, "ANGUISH" next week, and then we'll look at the "SONG OF PRAISE" in February, if the Lord wills.

But the heading right under that is the heading that goes back many, many years - probably to the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The heading says something like this, "***For the choir director; upon Aijeleth Hashshahar. A Psalm of David.***" Many of these headings go back to the time when the scribes still knew the tunes to these songs. They didn't have the musical notations we have today, so they would often say something like, "Sung to the tune of..." and then they would name a tune or a song that most of the people at that time would have known. If we didn't have any musical notations in our books, it would be like one of us saying, "Let's sing Amazing Grace to the tune of Gilligan's Island." It does work quite well, by the way! But going back to Psalm

22, some of you might have a footnote that this Hebrew expression indicates that this song is to be sung to the tune of ***“Deer of the Morning.”*** What happens to deer in the morning? Think back a few months. People all across this state will wake up well before dawn to head out into the woods to wait in blinds and tree stands to hunt deer, first thing in the morning. We know that King David was a hunter. Some have suggested, then, that the tune of this song was probably rather ominous - something similar to the theme from Jaws or maybe the Imperial March from Star Wars - Darth Vader’s music - something ominous and foreboding. In our own songbooks, we have our own very spooky song - *While on the Sea* (#774). Even if the words were uplifting, that would be a scary song, just because of how it sounds. Some have suggested something similar for Psalm 22 - that the tune itself is dark and foreboding. It’s the music we might imagine going along with a deer getting hunted or tracked down early in the morning.

And the reason is: Psalm 22 is painful song. It’s what is known as a “lament.” It is a sad song, a song of grief, a song expressing unimaginable pain. It’s a song where David pours his heart out to God, begging God for relief from whatever it is he’s going through. It’s the kind of song we don’t really sing together anymore. Many of the songs we sing together are generally positive. Many of the Psalms, though, are not positive at all. Many are very negative, and most of Psalm 22 would definitely fall in that category.

The song has three stanzas - verses 1-10, verses 11-21, and then verses 22-31. We hope to cover the first of these today, the second stanza next week, and save the third stanza for February. But as we look at the first stanza today, we’ll notice that the author goes back and forth - looking to himself and his miserable circumstances, and then looking to God for help; looking to himself, and then to God; back and forth, back and forth; from despair to a glimmer of hope, over and over again.

These words were first written by King David, but as we look at Psalm 22, it is obvious that these words go far beyond anything David ever experienced. These words actually describe the crucifixion, a thousand years before it happens, in great detail, hundreds of years before crucifixion was used or even imagined as a form of execution - at the time this was written, stoning was how people were put to death. But here, we have hands and feet being pierced, extreme thirst, bones being pulled out of joint, we have the mocking from the crowd (even in the form of a direct quote) - we have some seemingly random references to clothing being gambled away. With David, all of this is symbolic language at the most - we have no record of these things actually happening to King David - but Jesus is the perfect fulfillment. Jesus, in fact, quotes this Psalm from the cross. And there is no other way to explain the amazing accuracy of this psalm, other than the fact that these words were inspired by God. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all give their own perspective of what happens, but Psalm 22 is written from the perspective of the one Man who was there.

Many of the religious leaders would have memorized Psalm 22, and so we wonder whether Jesus quoted the first line as a way of trying to get them to think about it, as a way to encourage them to recite the rest of it so that they could figure out what was happening. We can hardly imagine what that would’ve been like - to watch the crucifixion and to be thinking about Psalm 22 and to realize that these things are happening, just as God had predicted. It’s no wonder that some of the religious leaders would go on to repent and obey the gospel.

So, as we focus our thoughts on the crucifixion and on what Jesus did for us, let us please look together at the first 10 verses of Psalm 22 - Psalm 22:1-10,

¹ ***My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.***

² *O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;
And by night, but I have no rest.*

³ *Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.*

⁴ *In You our fathers trusted;
They trusted and You delivered them.*

⁵ *To You they cried out and were delivered;
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.*

⁶ *But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.*

⁷ *All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,*

⁸ *“Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”*

⁹ *Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb;
You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts.*

¹⁰ *Upon You I was cast from birth;
You have been my God from my mother’s womb.*

- I. As we look at the first part of this Psalm today, we start with this **UNANSWERED CRY** as David (and eventually Jesus) cry out to God, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

Of all the words Jesus spoke from the cross, these are the most difficult to understand. In fact, it has been said that Martin Luther once vowed to wrestle with this text until he could explain it, no matter how long it took. Well, he focused on this passage for several days, going without food or sleep, and he finally stood up and said, “God forsaking God! Who can understand that?” And with that, he gave up! Even today, most of us still struggle with this. Did God literally forsake his own Son on the cross? Or did Jesus just feel forsaken in some sense? I don’t know, but we do know it must have been horrible. A few months ago, we studied Jesus’ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed all night, asking his Father to find some other way. And as we discussed then, we have no answer in scripture - but we do know what happened next. Jesus went to the cross! So at the very least, in some sense, Jesus certainly felt some kind of distance; at the very least, he felt some kind break or gap in the relationship, and it seemed as if his prayer was not being answered.

But in spite of this feeling of abandonment, let’s not miss, let’s not forget that the author still calls out to God! Not only that, but he cries out, **“MY God, MY God!”** We are reminded of those lines that have been repeated and embellished through the years, supposedly from someone who lived in hiding during the worst of WWII in Europe, “I believe in the sun even though it is not shining. I believe in love even when feeling it not. I believe in God even when he is silent.” And perhaps in a similar way, even when feeling that separation for a brief moment, Jesus cries out with a loud voice to a God who does not seem to be answering.

Remember how I said that this song goes back and forth? That’s what’s happening here - he cries out in desperation, but then the author immediately acknowledges God’s help. If you ever mark in your Bible, I would underline the **“My God, My God”** part in verse 1, and then circle the two **“yets”** at the beginning of verses 3 and 9. In verse 3, he says (in spite of this silence), **“Yet, You are holy....”** So, even though he feels desperate and far away, he knows that God is holy, that God is still God. There is a difference between FEELING and KNOWING. He FEELS abandoned, but in verse 4, he knows that God is a God who has delivered

his people in times past. You are not answering ME right now, but I still believe that you are a God who answers.

In verse 5, he then turns back to his own desperation, ***“But I am a worm and not a man.”*** This treatment he received was sub-human. We don’t even treat animals this way. In our society, we get upset at the death penalty if a prisoner so much as twitches a second too long. But the Romans had a goal of making each execution as horrific as possible. They were making a statement. Their goal was to make an example. That’s why they would put the sign over each cross outlining the crimes, and the message was: Don’t do what this guy did. And when this happens to the Lord, he becomes as a ***“worm and not a man.”*** The cross was dehumanizing. The Romans had no ban on “cruel and unusual punishment” as we do. Their GOAL was “cruel and unusual punishment.”

He goes on to talk about how he is despised and rejected, harassed by the people. And is this not what happens at the crucifixion? The Romans designed crucifixion to be humiliating. They did it by a main road in a public place to invite participation from the public. In fact, in verse 8 we have a direct quote, ***“Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him.”*** Isn’t that what the people were saying to Jesus in Matthew 27:43, as they passed by? In fact, it’s almost as if they were reading this from the Psalms! By quoting this to the Lord, they are fulfilling the prophecy! They are doing what God said that they would do! They are demonstrating their own spiritual blindness. And the mocking is relentless. Jesus was mocked and verbally harassed by the soldiers who dressed him up in the purple robe and the crown of thorns, he was made fun of by King Herod, he was harassed on the cross by the two other men who were also being crucified, and then also by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. I so appreciate the song we sometimes sing, “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us,” because in that song, we sing to one another,

*Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.*

Part of the torment Jesus faced was from those who made fun of him as he died, and in some sense, we were in that crowd.

But then, in verse 9, we get to the next ***“yet.”*** Even though he’s being mocked and tormented, even though he feels distant from God, he says, ***“Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb.”*** So, he feels separate, but he knows that God has helped him in the past. One author pointed out that instead of wishing he had never been born (as Jeremiah and Job both did), this writer thinks back to his own birth in a reassuring way - ***“You have brought me forth from the womb.”*** He feels forsaken by the Father, but he does not forsake the Father. In his pain, in his anguish, he cries out to the God who seems so distant at the moment. But he still cries out.

What does this mean for us? It means that even if we feel distant or cut off either from God or from our own Christian family, we still need to be calling out to God. If we think nobody understands what I’m going through, we might be right about that, we might not be right about that, but I would just beg all of us to keep on taking those thoughts to Jesus. I might not understand, the rest of your Christian family might not understand, but he does. And that’s what David is doing here. In this first paragraph, it’s as if David is calling out to God, “I might not see that you are hearing me NOW, but I know that you are a God who answers! You are a God who has listened in the past. You are a God who has rescued me before.”

This is a terrible passage, one of the worst experiences and feelings ever recorded in Scripture, and really, the only good thing so far is that the author continues to call out to God. And I would give the reminder that we had a few months ago, that God is big enough to handle whatever we lay out before him in prayer. We don't need to protect God from what we're thinking. He wants to hear from us, even if it is not pleasant. The cross reminds us that Jesus has been there. Wherever it is, whatever we are feeling, he has felt it. And when we go to God in prayer, we are praying to the same God who heard his people in Egypt, the same God who brought his people back from Babylon, and the same God who ultimately hears Jesus on the cross and answers in an incredibly powerful way.

Conclusion:

Hopefully we can get back to this Psalm next week as we look a bit more at the "ANGUISH" part of this. This morning we've looked at the "CRYING OUT" part of it, and we've learned that even when God seems far away, even when it seems like God is not listening, he is listening. And it's important that we keep on calling out. There are times when God seems distant, and Jesus has one of those moments on the cross. But, he calls out anyway. I hope we will remember all of this as we partake of the Supper this morning.

As we close, let us remember that he went through this for us. Up to this point in his life, Jesus and the Father had always been close. Up to this point, his prayers to God the Father had always been answered. But here, as he faces God's wrath, as he takes on the penalty for sin, sin that was not his own, there seems to be some kind of break in that relationship, some kind of silence, and it is overwhelming. But he went through it for us. We owed a debt of sin that we could never pay, and he paid it - an awful price. As was read in our scripture reading this morning, we were redeemed, not with perishable things like silver and gold, but we were redeemed with ***"precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."*** Our answer to the cross is to turn to him in faith, turning away from sin, and submitting to his plan for our lives, starting with the act of baptism, a burial in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you'd like to learn more, get in touch. If we as a church can serve you in some way, let us know. But if you are ready to become a Christian right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com