

## **Psalm 22 (1984 NIV)** ***A Faith Journey***

### **Introduction**

Today we look at Psalm 22. Some are of the view that it is a Psalm of Messianic Prophecy—that David is talking about the Messiah to come (i.e. Christ), and not about himself in this psalm. There is evidence in the text that shows some of the things described do match the events in Christ's life, especially at the time of His crucifixion.

But I like to take the position that the original intent of David here is not to talk about Christ, but about himself at one point in his life. However, behind the human intent in the writing of Scripture is always the divine inspiration of God. And He may want to convey more to those of future generations, even without the conscious knowledge of the human writer.

Hence, I will use Psalm 22 to first share what David is saying about his own situation. At the end, I will briefly connect his experience with that of Christ, and learn what that means to us today.

A Christian blogger once wrote this:

I am very, very, very angry with GOD! I feel he has forsaken me and has left me alone to fight evilness—of which I am not well equipped.

Does he even hear my prayers? Does he know of my anguish? Does he love me? Why would he leave me at their mercy to hurt me and allow me no reprieve? I am being falsely accused, why hasn't he vindicated me?

I am scared, fearful, angry, hurt, begging for help and he has left me alone. Why has he forsaken me?

Lord, hold me, help, save me, love me ... rescue me, deliver me, come into my heart and release me, give me peace and allow my life to continue and allow me to be stronger. I want out of this situation. If I have an opportunity, please allow me to move on away from this poison. Please do not forsake me for I am a child of yours ...

Indeed, one of the greatest pains experienced by a Christian is that of feeling forsaken by God Himself.

(<http://www.experienceproject.com/stories/Am-Mad-At-God/706179>)

Psalm 22 is King David's cry/lament to God who seemed to have forsaken him at one point in his life. David poured out his grief in God's presence because he desperately needed a new perspective. He honestly expressed his pain to God. In doing so, David opened his heart to God.

Perhaps, many of us in today's church don't know how to lament, often because we haven't given ourselves permission to do so. We think grief is something to be avoided, or denied, or moved through as quickly as possible. Perhaps, we go through the motions of the spiritual life without truly opening our hearts to God. Let us, therefore, learn from David in Psalm 22 today.

Psalm 22 is King David's faith journey. This journey can be considered in three phases. These three phases correspond to the three stanzas in Psalm 22. The first phase is ...

### **I. Struggling with Doubt (vv. 1-11)**

David feels forsaken by God. Worse still, he doesn't know why his God has forsaken him. The Lord promised to be with His people and particularly their human king. But David doubts that promise. Although David feels that the Lord has forsaken him, he has not forsaken the Lord. He still calls the Lord "my God", and he does so twice in verse 1.

David then defines what he means by the word "forsaken" in the second part of verse 1. He means that his God has not delivered him. David has expected his God to hear his groans and to grant his deliverance. But the Lord seems to have abandoned him.

Despite his predicament, David still believes that his God is "holy" (v. 3) which means, among other things, that He is faithful to His promises. David is working out this paradox in his mind—he is trying to bridge the gulf between the silence of the Lord and the holiness of the Lord.

David remembers that the Lord who is also his God (vv. 1-2) had delivered Israel's fathers when they trusted in him and cried out to Him (vv. 4-5). David affirms that the Lord is his God as much as He was his ancestors' God whom they had trusted. Therefore, David wonders what makes his situation different such that he is receiving no answer.

The problem isn't with the Lord, and the problem isn't with Israel. Perhaps, David thinks, the problem is with him. The Lord had not forsaken his ancestors. But why has the Lord forsaken him now? Perhaps it's because he (David) has no human worth at all—"But I am a worm and not a man" (v. 6). He sees himself as a despised creature who is not worthy of the Lord's attention. After all, that's how his enemies view him—they despise him, reject him and mock him, both with words and gestures (vv. 7-8).

David's mind goes back to the beginning—his own birth. He was not only brought forth by the Lord, he was “cast from birth” into the hands of the Lord. It was the Lord who had caught him and nurtured him from his very beginning (vv. 9-10).

In verse 11, he petitions the Lord. Remembering the nearness of his God at birth leads David to plea, “Be not far from me.” The Lord's absence has been filled with “trouble” which is “near”. Nevertheless, his God is his only hope for there is no one else David can turn to for help.

In releasing our emotions, we may be shocked by their intensity. So we don't expect the Lord to accept our words and raw emotions. But know this—the Lord wants worshippers who trust Him enough to approach Him with all that is in their hearts. However, in presenting our words to the Lord, don't just complain.

Seek to bridge the gulf between your feelings of abandonment and His promised faithfulness; between the silence of the Lord and the holiness of the Lord.

As you stand where you are, you notice that the Lord has delivered others. You will then wonder, “What makes me so different that the Lord has not answered my prayers?” Maybe, you think it's your fault. You wonder if something about you makes you unworthy of the Lord's attention. To feel abandoned by the Lord, who promises to be with those who put their trust in Him, is to feel as if you are like a worm—i.e. less than human. The words and gestures of others, whether intentional or not, might make you feel this way. Some adding insult to injury, may suggest that God would deliver you if you just have more faith. You feel despised, rejected, and mocked.

Maybe you've been afraid for quite a while to appeal to God for His nearness. You're not sure you can trust Him anymore. You've been afraid to ask for deliverance, lest you are once again disappointed. However, after releasing your emotions of confusion and doubt in God's presence, you begin to hope again that He can be trusted to help you. Like David in v. 11, you begin to plea, “Lord, do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help ... but you.”

*A child of God doubts not because he doesn't want to believe in God, but he wants to believe in Him more.*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of David's faith journey is ...

## **II. Wallowing in Despair (vv. 12-21)**

In verses 12 and 13, David describes his predicament. He compares his enemies to beasts. David's enemies are like the strong bulls of Bashan, a region that was known for its well-fed cattle. These powerful opponents have

encircled him and left him without escape. They are together like open-mouthed lions ready to devour their prey.

Verses 14 and 15 depict David's reaction to his predicament. He feels that life is being emptied from his body. His heart has melted like wax before a flame; he is without courage. His strength has evaporated, and he's as useless as a worn-out piece of pottery. He even has problem speaking because of his anxiety. Without seeing the Lord's deliverance, it seems to David that his God is laying him down in the "dust of death" (v. 15).

In verse 16, David again paints the picture of being surrounded by animals—this time he calls his enemies "dogs".

David's food supply has been cut off, so he's nothing but skin and bones. His enemies are now depicted as vulture-like scavengers who await his death so that they can tear up and divide his clothing among themselves (vv. 17-18).

When faced head-on with our biggest problems, they can look so scary—like a herd of bulls encircling around us and ready to trample on us; or like a pride of roaring lions ready to rip us apart. How do you feel when faced with your suffering, your problems, and your anguish alone? Do you feel empty and drained out? Indeed, you feel as if every bone in your body is out of joint. Your heart melts like wax—you don't have any courage left—it is all gone. You just don't have the energy to keep going, you are ready to give up, and even to die.

The pain of suffering is real and can't be underestimated. The feeling of being abandoned is intense and not to be belittled. And so is the guilt that we are somehow failing in our faith because of our despair. If we feel this way, you and I are not alone—King David feels exactly that way too in Psalm 22.

Perhaps you expect to be able to manage your life, but somehow your life has managed you. Someone, or something, is against you. You've to struggle against some powerful beasts, so to speak. As the beasts close in, you feel that something is being drained from you—passion, hope, maybe life itself. Your physical health, which you could previously depend on, may even be failing you. Your courage is melting away, and your strength has evaporated. The anxiety you feel even restricts your ability to speak—like what David says in v. 15, "My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth."

This is David's predicament and it could hardly be more hopeless. Yet he envisions an amazing turning point at the very end where he petitions God—"... come quickly to help me ... Deliver me ... Rescue me ... Save me ..." (vv. 19-21). In fact, this is no longer the language of petition; it is the language of assertion. David believes that his God has heard him and will answer him. David will unveil the amazing, new vision in the climactic and final stanza of Psalm 22. And if you are or like David here, do you know what that means?

It means in all of this, you have made a great and crucial move. Not physically, but emotionally. You're in a different place now than when you first began addressing and petitioning the Lord. You're ready to trust Him with more of your heart. You pray for deliverance again, but in a different way. Having emptied your soul, you sense that God has heard you.

*When a child of God has poured out his heart of despair to God, he can sense afresh the presence of the Lord.*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of David's faith journey is ...

### **III. Praising with Delight (vv. 22-31)**

The final stanza (phase) represents an abrupt and climactic change. The laments and petitions of the first two stanzas give way to an explosion of praise. David now envisions praising the God whom he has accused earlier for forsaking him. Such praise will be uttered in the midst of the assembly of Israel as it gathers to worship in the temple (vv. 22, 23, 25, 26).

Having poured out his grief, David has received from the Lord a new vision. David says that his praise comes "from" the Lord. The Lord, through His response to David, has created this inclination for praise in David. "My groaning" in verse 1 has become "my praise" in verse 25.

David's vision moves beyond Israel to the nations in verses 27-29. He expects all the ends of the earth to "remember and turn to the Lord" (v. 27). The psalm began with one lonely individual crying out to his God for deliverance; it now concludes with all the ends of the earth and all the families of the nations joining David and Israel in worshipping the Lord. The reason given in verse 28 for such a response is the Lord's sovereignty over the nations. David expects the Lord to demonstrate His rule in such a way that the nations will worship Him. Even more than that, the Israelite worshippers of the Lord will tell their future generations about Him. They will speak of the Lord's righteousness and faithfulness to their descendants.

You've emptied your heart of grief in prayer. You feel that your God has heard you. Now He answers you—by granting you deliverance in the form of a new spiritual vision or perspective about your situation and about God. This is the power of lament and one of its great mysteries. Great visions are birthed when all hope is lost except for hope in the Lord. The lament expands the borders of what's possible. You anticipate and even praise with delight in the God who has supposedly abandoned you. You know this is not the kind of praise you could have generated yourself. The Lord has created it in you. He gives you the gift you need most—the gift of praising Him.

And with this gift, you know you must share your story. Others need to hear it and praise the Lord for it too. You know it is not enough to worship the Lord by yourself. Far from separating you from others, your suffering now binds

you to them. You sense a kinship with other sufferers and a responsibility to offer them hope. You once had no strength, but now the Lord strengthens you so that you may strengthen others. You want to impart faith in the Lord to strengthen the future generations; to give hope to the lost without God in their lives.

*God puts praises of delight on the lips of His people so that others can hear these as well.*

Indeed, the good news of the Gospel is to be told, shared and spread so that ALL people can come to hear it as well.

## **Conclusion**

Here is a true story that comes from the mission field. It happened in the region of Assam on the north-eastern part of India in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the many tribes there were still head-hunters.

A man and his family were converted to Christianity through the efforts of a Welsh missionary. Unfortunately, their change of faith stirred up much animosity against them from the whole tribe. The man and his family were “arrested” and brought before the tribal chief.

When the chief pressured him to renounce his faith, he declared, “I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back.” They killed his two sons.

Then the chief threatened him and his wife with death. The man responded, “Though no one joins me, still I will follow. No turning back, no turning back.” They killed his wife.

And just before the man himself was executed, his last words were, “The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back, no turning back.”

What made this Indian martyr said those words with such courage and commitment when faced with perhaps his greatest crisis in life?

What do we see when facing our adversities in life? Do we see Crises or the Cross of Christ? I believe when this martyr was facing his fateful trial, he saw not Crisis but the Cross of Christ before him. That’s why his very last words were—“The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back, no turning back.”

This amazing display of courage and commitment brought about the realization of a great truth on the part of those who witnessed it—i.e. behind such radical and amazing faith must be a real and awesome

God! This realization led to the eventual conversion of the tribal chief and his whole tribe.

The Indian missionary, Sadhu Sundar Singh, later used the words of this martyr and formed them into a hymn sung to Indian melody. He titled it “Assam” after the region where the lyrical text originated.

An American hymn editor, William Jensen Reynolds, composed an arrangement which was included in the “Assembly Songbook” of 1959. It became a regular feature at Billy Graham’s evangelistic meetings in America and elsewhere, spreading its popularity. We still sing this hymn today—“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.”

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Have\\_Decided\\_to\\_Follow\\_Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Have_Decided_to_Follow_Jesus))

I am indeed glad and grateful that the Lord has not led me and my family to a point where we have to follow Him by way of being martyred. But in a figurative sense, He has called us to spiritual martyrdom—He says in Luke 9:23, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”—i.e. die for Him by dying to self not for one time, but on a daily basis.

There are times in life when we start to give up hope, and to feel that God has forgotten and abandoned us to dark and hurtful experiences. But the Cross of Christ reminds us, “No, you’re not forgotten nor forsaken.” And the resurrection gives us the assurance that some day we too will see our Deliverer face to face. When He returns we will hear Him say, “I’ve come for you. I have not forgotten nor forsaken you.”

David’s psalm is also our psalm. However, before it becomes our psalm, it became Jesus’ psalm. The Lord quoted this psalm on the Cross—He quoted the first verse of this psalm in Matt. 27:46. Jesus felt forsaken too by His Heavenly Father because He was then carrying the sins of the whole world upon Himself when He was on the Cross. Jesus cried out to the Father, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” And the significance is this—it means Christ knew what abandonment felt like for He was there—He felt it; He endured it for us. Thus Jesus Christ understands how you are feeling when you are going through your pain in life; He is able to lament with those who lament.

The superscription in Psalm 22 features a note to the choir director, indicating that this psalm was one of ancient Israel’s songs of worship. Hence, the expression of lament and agony, in a raw way that calls the Lord into question, was even considered appropriate for worship in the nation of Israel. Psalm 22 teaches us then that when we pray such a prayer, or write such a poem, or sing such a song, we are still worshipping our God.

Psalm 22 helps us to understand this: *When we release our emotions in the soul, we can renew our strength in the Lord.*

This is a faith journey that we must be honest and open enough to take from time to time.

Are you feeling today that God has abandoned you? If you are feeling like that, know this—God will never abandon you because He loves you too much; He has paid such a high price for you in Jesus Christ. God will never abandon you because He has promised to be with you to the end.

In bringing our pain before God, we make ourselves accessible to His compassion and His new perspective for us. So, let us who are God's people never, never give up on this hope so that we will always be ready to proclaim this Good News to the hopeless and helpless around us.

*There is one thing God will not do—He will not abandon those who belong to Him.*

Pray that the Lord will help us remember and keep this truth deeply within our soul. Amen!