

# My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

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[ 0 : 00 ] The scripture reading for this morning, if you could turn with me, is Psalm 22. Book of Psalms, Psalm 22.

It reads as follows. To the leader, according to the deer of the dawn, a psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? From the words of my groaning.

Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer. And by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried and were saved. In you they trusted and were not put to shame.

[ 1 : 23 ] But I, I am a worm and not a man. Scorned by others and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me.

They make mouths at me. They shake their heads. Commit your cause to the Lord. Let him deliver. Let him rescue the one in whom he delights. Yet it was you who took me from the womb.

You kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from birth. And since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Do not be far from me. For trouble is near. And there is no one to help. Many bulls encircle 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.

[ 2 : 25 ] It is melted within my breast. My mouth is dried up like a pot shed. My tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs are all around me. A company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled. I count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me.

They divide my clothes among themselves. And for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O Lord, do not be far away. O my help, come quickly to my aid.

Deliver my soul from the sword. My life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion. From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters. In the midst of the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him.

[ 3 : 25 ] Stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel. For he did not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted one. He did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation. My vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied. Those who seek him shall praise the Lord.

May your hearts live forever. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. And all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

To him indeed shall all who sleep in the earth bow down. Before him shall bow all who go down to the dust. And I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him. Future generations will be told about the Lord and proclaim his deliverance. To a people yet unborn saying that he has done it.

[ 4 : 25 ] This is the word of the Lord. Let us pray as we look at this passage together. Amen. Well, we too.

We gather again this morning around your word. And as always, the prayer is that you would be the one who has spoken after we have spoken.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you. O God, my rock and my redeemer. Do this so that your name is glorified and that we, your people, are helped.

Amen. One of the names that we gave to our child, it is Tulumzi. But if you struggle, you can call him Lizwi. We called him Lizwi, which means word.

As in Shumayela ilizwi. Preach the word. Right? Now when people, especially the older generation, who know their hymn books very well.

[ 5 : 30 ] When Sim and I say that his name is Lizwi. They respond by completing the sentence. They say, Lizwi li na mandla.

Livi wa bubu suu bubale. And they are quoting hymn 118 in the Methodist hymnal. What I didn't know though, is that this very famous hymn is actually a translation of the hymn, Thou Whose Word, written by a certain John Marriott, who lived in the 1800s.

So the translation for your sake is, Thou whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard and took their flight. It's a very famous hymn in black spaces, the churches.

My simple point with this is this. Sim and I just say, his name is Lizwi. And immediately they know it's a hymn.

They know that the famous Methodist hymn. They know that we are evoking a message, or the message of that hymn. The prayer that that hymn is.

[ 6 : 48 ] And I think a similar thing is happening on the cross in Matthew chapter 27 verse 35. When Jesus says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Although he is really saying those words at that time, in that moment. He is also directly quoting from Psalm 22.

In the same way that those who hear the name Lizwi show their familiarity with the hymn, Jesus, reciting this line from the psalm, shows that he himself would have been familiar.

And perhaps in his earthly lifetime, recited the psalm regularly. He himself evokes the message and meaning of that psalm for the situation that he finds himself in at the time.

And at this point, I think it's important to mention something of how the psalms function as Christian scripture.

[ 8 : 07 ] The psalms have historically been the hymn book of God's people. But it's not just feel good hymns as you heard that reading.

One professor likes to say, The psalms are God's word given to us to say back to God. I love it. I love it. Because it helps us approach the psalms.

And so as we familiarize ourselves with the words of the psalms, whether it be psalms of praise and thanksgiving, or psalms of deep loss and lament, in the psalms of deep loss and lament, in the psalms, we find words that capture and relate to God our very human experience.

In doing this, we train our hearts to feel the way they ought to feel. We are trained for moments of real life.

Whether we are angry, like the book of Job, or exuberant, like David dancing, going to the temple, our experience is given voice and related to God himself.

[ 9 : 43 ] Because I want you to remember, 2 Timothy 3, verse 15, don't turn, they'll read for you. 2 Timothy 3, verse 15, says this, All of Scripture is God-breathed and is able to make us wise for salvation.

All of Scripture is God-breathed and is able to make us wise for salvation. And I think this is exactly what is demonstrated at the cross as our Lord Jesus' hands, encircled by villains who have pierced his hands and his feet with no one to help.

They mock him and they cost lots for his garments. Laying in the dust of death, his mouth dry like pot-shared, he's thirsty, just like the psalmist, he really felt his heart melt within him.

He felt like King David here in Psalm 22, but it was in the psalm that he found words here. It was in psalms like these that his heart was trained in his lifetime in the arts of God's word for such a time as this.

You see, I think it's to miss the point to be preoccupied as I was preparing this. I think it's to miss the point to be preoccupied with how could the Son of God say, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[ 11 : 31 ] How could he utter those words? He is not merely uttering those words. What is happening at that moment is his spiritual muscle memory, so to speak, is kicking in.

He's actually Psalm 22-ing at that time. So then, what does it mean to Psalm 22?

I want us to have a look at the psalm together. And this is how we're going to look at it. This is what we're going to do. If the psalm is an art gallery, verse 1, my God, my God, why be forsaken me? Would be the portrait in the foyer as you walk in that would pique your interest. But that would ultimately only make sense as you have walked through the gallery and seen the other portraits at the end of the display.

The picture's drawn from verses 19 on us. Verse 19, look at verse 19 with me. Here's the picture drawn there. You are my strength. Do not be far from me.

[12:47] You are my strength. Do not be far from me. Come quickly to help me. The picture painted in verse 24. For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one.

He hasn't. He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. The picture drawn in verse 25.

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly. Before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows to you.

That's where the psalm is going. And so it's just Psalm 22-ing that's where he is going. That's what he's evoking. But before we get there but before we get to the end of the display we get into the foyer.

Because there is a real human experience that the psalmist really goes through. It's a real human experience that the psalmist really goes through.

[13:58] After that foyer portrait as you walk into this gallery the first picture we come across is verses 2-5. Look at verse 2-5 with me. He says, My God I cry out by day but you do not answer.

By night but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One. You are the one Israel praised. In you our ancestors put their trust. They trusted you and you delivered them. To you they cried and were saved. In you they trusted and were not put to shame.

He's like, I know I know you can do this. I know you can. You see the psalms and this psalm are not made up hypothetical experiences you know to teach us a lesson here or there.

They are the human experience. They are the human experience. In his book *The Ordinary Hero* Pastor Tim Chester recalls receiving an email an unsettling email from a Kenyan student after violence erupted during their voting season.

[15:12] It read like this. I quote This past week I've realized that I don't truly know what God being good wise sovereign and faithful means.

I know what it doesn't mean. It does not mean no suffering in this life. I know that whatever he allows is for his glory and for our good. But I also don't want to be flippant or simply parrot phrases as though I've merely learned them by rote.

I talk to my aunt and uncle who are doctors and have hardly slept during the last three days because of the sheer number of people coming in. I want to know what it means to talk to them and then say God is good.

Surely any earthly parent would come running at the sound of their baby's blood-curdling shriek. So I want to be sure.

I want to know what I mean by God is good. When we have prayed and prayed to the soundtrack of screams of children being burnt, knowing that the stench is getting to heaven and silence is the response.

[16:26] God is when I watch on live television people being dragged out of cars and hacked to death, my mind spins. And not because I've wondered if God is sovereign, but precisely because I know that he is and God.

And I think as we are going through the series on the images of the cross in the Old Testament, one of the reasons Psalm 22 is an image of the cross of Jesus is because the cross is the fuller experience of Psalm 22.

It's the ultimate experience of the psalm. Psalm 22 is King David going through a sense of total abandonment by God.

through fierce suffering and trials and opposition, but ultimately ending with a theme of praise where there was scorn and shame.

And at the cross, the ultimate king goes through inexplicable and inexplicable experience of abandonment by God.

[17:52] cross. And although you and I will never be quite able to wrap our minds around what he went through on that cross, a good place to start is this, that he went through the abandonment and

suffering that the whole of humanity deserves for ourselves.

It's a good place to start. God will never know what he went through. But a good place to start is that he went through the abandonment and the suffering that the whole human race deserves for our atrocities.

Where is God in the suffering of this world? He's at the cross. He's at the cross. He's at the cross. Treated as a worm, not a man. Being insulted even in that question by those who shake their heads asking, where is this God?

Let him come and rescue these kids. Let him come and deliver. He's at the cross. He's at the cross. But then there's this picture drawn in verse 19 of the psalmist himself, helpless and weak, but knowing that it is God who is his strength.

[ 19 : 35 ] And you know, because we're reading poetry, it can sometimes give a sense of just poetic language vibes. but that's what's happening.

It's a powerful picture of one who describes himself as laying in the dust of death, who has strength that is outside of him, and that strength is God himself.

you see, in the full arc of its realization, as an image of the cross, it relates to that power of God to renew all things.

He's in the dust, the dust of death, but he has strength that's outside of him, and God is a strength. in its fuller realization of the cross, it's an image that relates to the power of God to renew all things, of which the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday is the beginning of the renewal of all things.

Amen. Furthermore, that Jesus through his cross and his resurrection is the ultimate image of Psalm 22.

[ 21 : 03 ] We, on the other side of the cross, unlike David, also get a window into our own spiritual formation. We get a window into our own formation as we become like him.

The word of God, as it was for David, is for us, but much fuller for us. You see, the psalmist knows that in his weakness, that it is God who is his strength, because he knows that God is enthroned in heaven, and that God rules and reigns, and that God answered the prayers of his ancestors.

He's seen this. He knows the theology. For us, on the other side of the cross, we're a fuller picture. For we know that on the cross, the wholeness of the human experience is embodied.

Yeah? The wholeness of the human experience. And so we know, or rather we also know, that what's happening at the cross, is that God's salvation is coming in the midst of judgment.

We're a fuller picture. We know why he's on the cross, but we also know that it's also salvation. And so we see that God's salvation is in the midst of God's judgment.

[ 22 : 37 ] God's salvation is good. And so at the cross, God is both judging and forgiving. At the cross, God is both meeting our justice and righteousness and showing grace.

At the cross, God is loving for God to love the world. God is also very angry at the cross. His wrath has been poured out.

At the cross, God has arrived. At the cross, God is also yet to come. And so the Kenyan student who asked Pastor Tim Chester what it means to say that God is good when he feels distant, when he feels that God is distant and silent, he's in good company with the psalmist.

He's in good company as he sits with God's word. He's in good company as he sits with God's word post the cross, as he looks to the image of the cross through the word of God.

It's important to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus at the cross and realize the importance of looking at his word through that experience.

[ 24 : 03 ] Psalm 22, in the mouth of Jesus, at that moment, is not random. We're just there on the cross and he's saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Evoking the whole psalm, not just that line. It's not random. It's muscle memory. It's the word of God. God, and in this case, specifically the psalms, that he's been reciting all his life.

It's not just beautiful poetry or expressions of human emotion. These very words have been vehicles for fostering relationship with God.

when we engage with scripture, especially post the cross, we're not merely reciting words or, you know, admiring literary genius.

We're entering into a sacred dialogue with the almighty. he is changing us.

[ 25 : 14 ] He is molding us. When we immerse ourselves in the word of God, just like Jesus on the cross saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

We too, Stephen likes to talk about counter-catechesis. We too are being catechized in the language of faith.

Our faculties of our minds and our hearts are being shaped and our instincts are being molded. We are learning to express our deepest longings and our fears and our joys before God authentically and intimately and appropriately.

you see, the Bible is not always trying to resolve stuff. Paul says, as we said earlier on, it's to make us wise for salvation.

It's to train us. To be made wise requires a level of wrestling. Scripture shows us how to wrestle.

Even as we see with the psalmist, how to wrestle with doubt, real doubt, and despair, even here as we see in Psalm 22.

[ 26 : 40 ] Yet always, always, we're turning to a place of trust and hope in God's unfailing love and faithfulness.

Not because of anything, but because it's ultimately sin at the cross. And so when we look at Psalm 22 in closing, and we see it ultimately fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, we in turn get to look at him and get a window into our own formation and what it will look like to walk the road that he has walked.

As we look at the image of the cross through the word of God, we are formed. and shaped into disciples who are resilient even in doubt.

Who are resilient even in struggle. Who are steadfast in faith. Because we are always deeply rooted in the truth of God's word.

Ultimately sin through this image of the cross. in that way, we too, we ourselves, become more like Christ in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions.

[ 28 : 07 ] For all the instances of life, and for any moment that life might throw at us, we will be unwavering and steadfast in our Lord.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that your word is a gift to us. We thank you that your word shapes us. Forbid, oh God, that we would fall into the trap of being about your word for the sake of the Bible.

But rather that we would be of those who go to where the word points, and that is to you. And I pray together with the apostle Paul this morning, that our love may overflow more and more with knowledge of the scriptures and full insight to help us determine what is best in our everyday lives, so that Christ may be glorified in our bodies and our lives, and that we, your people, be helped.

For your name's sake, amen. Amen.