

The sermon

Intro

Sometimes life is brutal. Sometimes life is relentless. Sometimes there's nothing we can do to alleviate our suffering. Sometimes it's so bad there's nothing our brothers and sisters in Christ can do. Sometimes life beats us down. Our strength is spent. There's no way out.

Ever felt like this? You're not alone.

What do you do? Let's look to David for guidance.

Body

Passage Focus

We'll walk through David's Psalm. Then we'll draw some applications.

READ 22:1-5

Feeling abandoned...remembering God (22:1-5)

22:1-2

David feels forsaken by God. Prayed but nothing's happening.

David's heart is troubled by his circumstances. He's groaning. He's crying. No rest from his tears.

God hasn't acted. Suffering day after day. Tear after tear.

Is "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" familiar?

Jesus said this shortly before he "*yielded up his spirit*" (Matt 27:46, 50).

In what sense was Jesus forsaken?

There's mystery here. We're not told explicitly what this means. The verb means to break connection with someone such that the person is no longer cared for.

On the cross, there was an actual break in relationship = Jesus in his humanity cut off from the depth of fellowship he enjoyed with his Father throughout his earthly life.

Jesus faced the weight of our sins alone! Jesus was forsaken for no fault of his own. Jesus was forsaken so we wouldn't be.

Illustration

A person dying at the height of COVID with no one allowed to visit for fear of virus spread. Imagine a person spending the last 30 days of their life in slow physical decline while being unable to hug their loved ones, unable to say their last goodbyes in person. Separation.

The fellowship experienced between the Father and the Son is infinitely greater than any relationship we experience. Because God's relational capacity is infinite. So the break in relationship was more painful than any separation we could experience. Greater love, greater depth of relationship = greater suffering experienced. The more someone enjoys their marriage the more they grieve when their spouse dies.

Jesus was forsaken in that he was treated as if he was a sinner. For the moment, the Father's beloved Son became sin in the eyes of the Father (2 Cor 5:21). As if he was you and me. And not as if he had just committed my sins, but he was treated as though he committed all the sins of God's people throughout history. God's infinite wrath towards all our sins poured out on one man at one point in time.

David felt forsaken because God wasn't acting to remove his miserable experience.

22:3-5

In the midst of his misery, David recalls God's being and God's acts. God is holy = separate, distinct, different, unlike us. God possesses abilities we don't. God can alleviate my situation if he desires to do so.

David's ancestors trusted in God and they were rescued from horrific circumstances. They cried out. They were rescued.

In the midst of his despair, David reminds himself who God is and what God does for those who trust him.

READ 22:6-10

David's present experience...God's past faithfulness (22:6-10)

22:6-8

David's been treated like a worm, not a man. With their mouths ("**reproach**" = speaking sharp/mean things; slander, insults, taunting), with their hearts ("**despise**" = David holds zero value in their eyes), with their body language (mouth gestures, wagging their heads).

"He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" Is this familiar?

Matthew 27:43 describes Jesus being mocked by the chief priests, scribes, and elders (Matt 27:41) in these ways. Speaking of Jesus, **Isaiah 53:3** says,

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Jesus was rejected. Jesus was despised.

We keep seeing David's experience repeated in Jesus' life. What's the connection?

David's experience foreshadowed Jesus' experience. David's life/pattern was repeated in Jesus' life. David's vivid description of his miserable experience prophetically pointed forward to the future experience of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ.

On one hand, David intended to write about his own experience. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit moved on David to pen these words to describe the future sufferings of Jesus Christ. Behind Psalm 22, there was David's intent. Behind Psalm 22, there was the Holy Spirit's intent. We can debate the extent of David's knowledge another day.

22:9-10

God has always been with David. God safely brought him through childbirth. The ESV seems to be saying that David has trusted God in saving faith from infancy. This isn't totally unheard of. John the Baptist was "*filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb*" (Luke 1:15).

The point is God's never let David down. God's been faithful to David from birth.

READ 22:11-18

Pleading for help...speaking his situation to God (22:11-18)

22:11

“there is none to help” = hopeless situation. There’s nothing David can do to get himself out of his predicament. There’s no human helper who can alleviate his suffering. There’s only one place David can turn: God.

Real not imagined.

22:12-13

Bulls/lion picture enemies who are powerful, unpredictable, dangerous (22:12-13. Surrounded means no way out (22:12). Trapped.

22:14-15

“poured out like water” = like an empty vessel. Nothing left. Drained.

“all my bones are out of joint” = physical pain, losing ability to function.

“my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast” = my soul’s deteriorating.

When a candle melts, the candle disappears as it shrinks in size. David’s losing heart. The longer the torment remains, the weaker he gets.

“my strength is dried up like a potsherd” = no strength, no vitality, left.

“my tongue sticks to my jaws” = dried up, his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. Can barely speak.

“you lay me in the dust of death” = ascribing his impending death to God.

David retains belief in God’s sovereignty. God can get David out of this if God desires to do so. Thus far God hasn’t chosen to rescue David. By his inaction, God’s leaving David to die.

The weight of the relentless, unceasing torment is breaking David. He has little fight left in him.

22:16-18

These humans who surround David are equated with dogs (22:16). Nasty scavengers who eat the remains of dead bodies.

There’s debate over *“they have pierced my hands and feet.”* The Hebrews literally reads, *“like a lion my hands and feet”* (see ESV footnote). I take it to mean his hands and feet are surrounded by lions = danger abounds.

David’s enemies look at the damage they’ve done and gloat over it (22:17).

Psalm 22:18 once again finds David’s experience repeated in Jesus’ life.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things, – John 19:23-24

We don’t have any record in the Bible where David literally was stripped of his clothing. Likely David’s describing his experience in figurative terms. God, I’m as good as dead if you don’t act.

Crucifixion events fulfilled Psalm 22:18 = foreshadow, repeated pattern. David used figurative language to describe his experience. David's figurative language was literally fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

David describes his suffering in figurative, non-literal, language to convey the idea that he's a goner with zero strength left.

READ 22:19-21

Continuing to pray (22:19-21)

David begs God to help quickly (22:19). David's enemies (dogs, lions, wild oxen) are coming with the sword (22:20-21) = death. *"You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!"* (22:21) expresses confidence.

David thought himself forsaken. Now he thinks himself rescued. Sounds like, in the middle of his prayer, David had an impression from God that rescue was coming.

Despair has given way to confidence.

READ 22:22-31

Rescue gives way to praise...forever and ever (22:22-31)

22:22-24

Expecting rescue, David declares he'll give public testimony/praise of God's work (22:22). Confidence gives way to exhortation. Others are told to fear (awe) and praise the LORD (22:23) because God didn't despise the afflicted David (22:24).

God doesn't despise David like his enemies do!

22:25-26

The vow David will keep (22:25) is public praise (22:22) when God's people (*"those who fear him"*) gather.

David foresees a role reversal: the afflicted (*"those who seek him"*) will have plenty (22:26).

22:27-29

David foresees the nations (Gentiles) worshipping Israel's God (22:27). Because *"kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations."*

Recalling 22:26, it's worshippers who prosper (22:29). David foresees a time when everyone will bow before the LORD, even those who found themselves powerless to preserve their lives (22:29). Some of God's people don't experience rescue in this life. But they'll prosper in the kingdom to come. David's talking bodily resurrection! The kingdom of God's portrayed as a feast where everyone present eats to the full and is satisfied (22:26, 29)!

Sometimes God's people don't stay alive (22:29), but they'll prosper in the eternal kingdom.

22:30-31

The future descendants of the faithful will serve God because God's righteous acts (*"righteousness"*) were declared to them. When they hear how God acted for the afflicted (22:24), they'll serve the LORD.

God rescues his afflicted people. When others hear about it, they'll fear/seek/serve/praise/turn to the LORD themselves.

Summary

Thinking himself forsaken, David finds himself in tears. But he recalls how God's acted for his people in the past.

David finds himself despised. But he remembers how God's been with him from birth.

David begs God to help because he has zero strength left and there's no human help to be found.

David cries out to God again and finds himself confident of rescue.

Dread gives way to exhorting others to fear/praise the LORD. David foresees a glorious future where future generations will be told about God's saving acts, those future generations will serve the LORD, the Gentiles worship/turn to the LORD, and the faithful will be resurrected to eat to the full.

Glorious truths. What can we learn from them?

1. Share your pain with God.

Tell God how you really feel. Don't hold back.

Word of caution. Be reverent. Don't charge God with wrong. David attributes his impending death to God. But he doesn't revise his beliefs or insult God's character.

Yes, God already knows your feelings. Tell him anyway. One way we fellowship with God is by speaking our pain.

2. Sometimes the suffering lingers.

David's suffering was ongoing, not one-and-done. He was worn out by the suffering because it was relentless!

3. Sometimes rescue never comes.

22:29 speaks of ***"the one who could not keep himself alive."*** John the Baptist was beheaded. Stephen was stoned. James the brother of John was killed with the sword (Acts 12:2).

4. Sometimes rescue comes.

Pray with confidence that God has the ability to do what you're asking of him. I don't have confidence that God is bound by my desires. But I am confident that God can do what I'm asking if he wants to.

I leave my requests up to God's will while believing he can do so if he chooses. I keep asking, believing in his loving concern. I don't stop asking unless I get the sense he doesn't will it.

Rescue may come after a period of time you didn't anticipate. His yes may be delayed.

God's yes to David was apparently delayed.

5. Recall God's faithfulness.

Get your heart confident in God. Recall how he's acted for his people. Recall how he's acted for you.

6. Keep praying.

Don't lose heart. I keep asking unless I sense God has other plans. If so, I ask for God to sustain my weak heart in the middle of the torment. I can also pray both ways!

7. Look forward to the glorious future that awaits God's people.

Ultimately, rescue will come to all who believe. Including those God chose not to keep alive.

8. God may not rescue, but that doesn't mean you've been forsaken.

Hebrews 13:5 tells us, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

Paul learned how to be content in hard times (Phil 4:11). What he said about himself, *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me”* (**Phil 4:13**) is true for all who believe.

God acts for us one way or another. He might end the tormenting circumstance. He might give the strength to endure. If God doesn't end the suffering, he gives grace to suffer well!

9. Jesus sympathizes with your suffering.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. – **Hebrews 4:15**

Jesus feels (sympathizes) because you feel. He's affected by your pain and torment. He cares.

“weaknesses” = sickness/disease, limitations/inabilities, human frailty. Jesus sees our human condition and he feels.

Jesus experienced suffering just like us. Rejection by enemies. Rejection by friends. False accusations. Injustice. Verbal mockery. Physical suffering. Forsaken by the Father.

Jesus sympathizes in part because he experienced the same things.

I'm guessing none of us have a group of people encircling us in attempts to kill us. I don't think it's a stretch to think that some of us have people in our lives that continually despise us and verbally assault us.

David isn't talking about declining physical health. But there's correspondence. Lingering physical suffering is relentless and it eats away at our strength. Same with caring for loved ones whose physical suffering won't let up.

David isn't talking about financial threats. But there's correspondence. The threat of economic instability and job loss can eat away at the soul. An unexpected, relentless stream of equipment failures and calamities can eat away at the soul.

Practical question: am I fighting through suffering like David did?

Conclusion

Maybe you're with us this morning and you're considering Christianity. What have we learned?

First, Jesus died on the cross because of human sin.

Second, those who turn to God will be raised from the dead for a banquet feast.

Our sins separate us from God. In order for us to have reconciled relationship with God, our sins need to be taken away. The only way our sins can be forgiven is through the death of Jesus.

If you trust in the merits of Jesus' death, he took your sins away when he suffered on the cross.

What about the banquet? The only people who will feast with God in the kingdom to come are those who respond rightly to the good news of Jesus' death.

David uses the language fear, seek, turn, worship, serve. Those who believe what the Bible says about Jesus and repent of their sins will be welcomed to the feast.

Turn from your sins, doing life your own way rather than God's way, by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection, not yourself. Follow Jesus!