

An Individual Lament

August 12, 2018

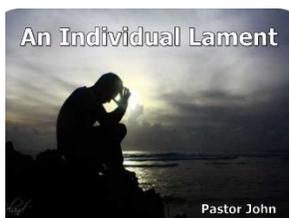
Psalm 22

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. ³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵ To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame...

¹² Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death...

^{21b} From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. ²² I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: ²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All your offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. ²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;

and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. ²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, ³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.



Let us pray...

Last week we looked at Psalm 44, a communal lament. This week we turn to Psalm 22. This is an individual lament. In his book, The Spirituality of the Psalms, Walter Brueggemann writes about these personal lament Psalms. He writes that these Psalms are written by “those who find their circumstances dangerously, and not just inconveniently, changed. And they do not like it. These are the speeches of caged men and women getting familiar with their new place, feeling the wall for a break, hunting in the dark for hidden weapons, testing the nerve and the patience of those who have perpetuated the wrong”. Powerful words about powerful pieces of Scripture.

In general, laments are cries of individuals in distress. Like Psalm 44 did last week, the veiled language in Psalm 22 makes it almost impossible to determine the concrete situation out of which the lament is voiced. The heart of these individual laments is that the person feels abandoned by God and they feel that they are about to be overwhelmed by the powers of death. As with the communal lament from last week, this Psalm also begins with a cry to God. Verses one and two offer a poignant cry to God:

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

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Next comes the usual remembrance of what God has done for the chosen people in the past. The element of trust is central to recalling the faith of their ancestors, who lived on in these songs used frequently in worship. These words acknowledge that God is trustworthy. Hear 'trust' in verses three through five:

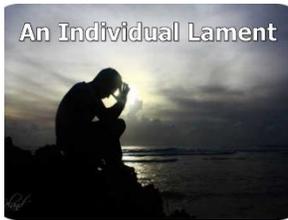
³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵ To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

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While it is good to remember God's hand at work on our behalf in the past, in these individual laments there is also the recognition that these memories are only "an island of comfort in the midst of the ocean" – a sea of suffering that is the current reality. Allow yourself to be drawn into this reality as I read verses 12 through 15:

¹² Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within

my breast; ¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.



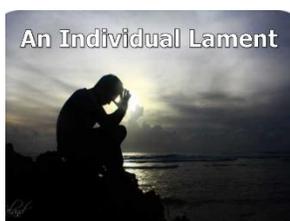
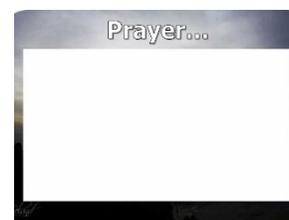
These complaints to God ring out from the psalmist. He is being devoured, poured out, his heart is melting, he is being laid in the dust. Although we do not know the exact context of this severe suffering, we do feel a degree of empathy for the suffering that he is enduring. And then there is a sudden shift in the Psalm.

Beginning with verse 21, the song of complaint turns abruptly to words of praise and thanksgiving as the psalmist writes, *"From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me"*. The psalmist shifts to words of praise and he stands in awe of the Lord. He rejoices in the fact that God did not hide His face from the afflicted but heard his cry. The psalmist declares that *"dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations"*. It is a beautiful recognition of God's presence and power in and over the world. The Psalm then closes with these words, *"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"*. These verses get back to why the Psalms were written in the first place: to tell the story of God and to recall His faithfulness to the people of Israel.

To me, this theme is also the continuing story of the entire Bible. God is faithful. God loves us. God will be present to us in our times of joy as well as in our times of suffering. God is in all and is over all. The Psalms also bring forth the reality of suffering in our lives and in the world. The suffering and pain are acknowledged in these songs of lament. The writers of the Psalms name these

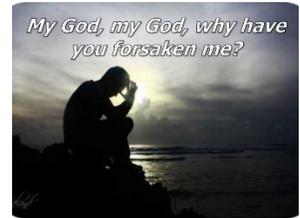
things and express moments or seasons of hurt and anguish. But in the end, God loves His children and God is faithful. The response is appropriate: thanksgiving and praise and adoration. The Psalms remind us of this.

The Psalms, at their core, are prayers to God. These prayers were used by people in moments alone with God and by groups of people gathered for worship. The Psalms of lament are filled with honest emotions, with fear and doubt, with impassioned cries to God for intervention and rescue. And often they conclude with answers. This, after all, is why we pray. I invite you to turn your attention to the screens for this short video summarizing the concept of why we pray. Please watch and read along. *[Play video.]*



The content of the video uses quotes from many different Psalms, not just the Psalms of lament. It reminds us that praying the Psalms is just one form of prayer. Our prayers can and should include sadness, adoration, feelings of being alone, times of introspection, offerings of thanksgiving, rejoicing. As the video closed, it made two important points I want to reiterate. First, prayer is not about being polite. From the first two Psalms that we have studied, we should understand this point. Second, prayer is not a passive act. Our prayers should be full of energy and honest emotions. When we spend time reading and studying and meditating upon the Psalms, we can feel their energy and their emotion. All this is just another way of saying that we can and should use the Psalms as they were originally intended: as prayers to God.

I stated earlier that I believe that the Bible is the continuing story of God from beginning to end. The Old Testament in many ways points to Jesus and to the New Testament. As we near to a close, I want to help us connect Psalm 22 to the New Testament and specifically to Jesus. The connection between this Psalm and the story of Jesus' suffering and death is natural given the extensive description of suffering that Psalm 22 contains. The Psalm opens with the exact words from the cross, expressing Jesus' cry of God-forsakenness: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Other portions of the Psalm provide an outline of the experience of Jesus on the cross. Mark 15:29 implies the language of Psalm 22:7 in the description of passersby at the crucifixion: *"All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads."* Matthew 27:43 also frames the taunts of the religious leaders with an allusion to Psalm 22:8: *"Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver -- let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"*

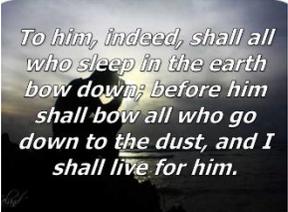


In all four Gospels the description of the soldiers' activity beneath the cross draws on Psalm 22:18: *"they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."* John 19:28 also probably has Psalm 22:15 in mind when reporting that Jesus says, *"I am thirsty"* in order to fulfill scripture.

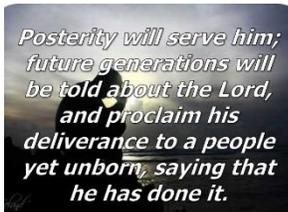
Though the original setting of Psalm 22 had nothing to do with the passion of Jesus, a Messianic reading is a natural result of the psalm's extensive expression of suffering and also of its far-reaching declaration of hope. Not only does the psalmist cry out to God with unparalleled expressions of pain and loss, but the writer also expresses hope in something closely akin to resurrection. Hear again the closing lines, but this time with New Testament ears on:

"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". God, through Jesus, will indeed deliver His people. In

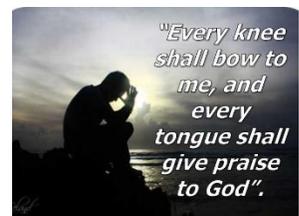
Romans 14:11, we read that at the name of Jesus, *"every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God"*. We join the psalmist today as we bow and offer our praises this day to the one who defeated the grave, to the one who suffered yet rose, to the one who offers us eternal life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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.



"Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God".

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) How can Psalm 22 help you grow in your prayer life? What emotions do you need to honestly express to God?
- 2) If you had to lift one thing to God all week, what would it be? Claim it and bring this prayer to God each opportunity you have this week.
- 3) People in our community also cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". How can you serve someone who cries out this week?