

Near [Psalm 22]

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INTRODUCTION

1. When I was five years old my aunt decided to throw a birthday party for my brother.
 - a. She invited a bunch of people from her church—not my brother and I's church.
 - b. The party was at a park. My aunt transported everyone in her van.
 - c. She left the house while I was still in the bathroom upstairs.
 - d. Yes, my aunt had left the five year old home alone
 - e. My aunt realized what she had done 45 minutes later and returned to get me.
2. Loneliness is an epidemic in our society, even though we're more connected than ever.
 - a. But since all of our earthly relationships can be defined by the way we view God, today we want to explore the question: What if I feel that God has left me alone?
 - b. The theological philosophy behind this is known as *Deism*:
 - c. Not as popular today, it presumed that God created world and then stepped back
 - d. In this worldview, we humans were left alone on the earth to live life without God.
3. This morning, we look at what the Bible says about God's silence.
 - a. This is an intense time of Christian remembrance with lent coming to a close and Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter fast approaching.
 - b. We're going to try to cover the span of those emotions in looking at Psalm 22.
 - c. There's controversy concerning this Psalm because of how Jews vs Christians interpret it.
 - 1) Jews claim that Christians use too much of a prophetic license with the text
 - 2) They think it is a retelling of the story of Queen Esther.
 - 3) We Christians who cite **Acts 2:30**, that David was truly a prophet and not just a king.
"But [David] was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne."
 - d. We believe that this is prophecy concerning the crucifixion of Jesus.

VERSES 1-8

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.

⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

1. There are moments in which we must grapple with God's silence.
 - a. Some of us struggle: is it even proper to wrestle with God?
 - 1) Is it a lack of faith that leads people to do so?
 - 2) No, it's about our humanity.
 - b. It's not "unbiblical" to question God's presence if it can be done in a healthy way
 - 1) Notice the psalmist's next words: **YET**. It's a word of balance and structure.
 - 2) Our world would be better if we all adopted the balance-recognition of **YET**.
 - a) YET permits us to understand that there are two sides to the story
 - c. The YET here is that God is still enthroned. For generations, he delivered people.
 - 1) This is where the benefit of our faith proves true: it's worked for thousands of years
 - 2) They cried out and he answered. So there's something there.
2. But still, the psalmist feels emboldened to question WHY. And (VS 6) he feels like a worm
 - a. The Hebrew word for **worm** here is "Tola'a, This is an interesting word.
 - 1) It's a specific kind of worm indigenous to the Middle East.
 - 2) In Mexico, similar worms are found in the **Coccus ilicis** family.

- 3) Known as the worm of crimson, used as dye for priests clothing & temple curtains.
- b. The fascinating thing is when the female Tolaath gets ready to give birth.
 - 1) When time for birth, it crawls up the side of a tree & attaches itself to the outer bark.
 - 2) The metabolism of the bug begins to change by swelling up with its eggs.
 - 3) As the sun beats down on it, the creature convulsions until it blows up.
 - 4) The birth kills the mother, permitting her babies to fall to the cool soil safely.
 - 5) Unless the worm dies, all of her babies would die as well.
 - 6) Left behind on the tree is a dark, crimson stain.
 - a) I know this is disgusting, but I think God was giving us a prophetic object lesson concerning His Son.
3. All of this reveals to us something valuable about the rest of the text.
 - a. This text is most famous among Christians for Jesus' using **first verse while on the cross**.
 - b. This was a popular psalm in Jesus' day so people would've understood his point.
 - 1) By quoting the first verse, he was "owning this psalm," taking it upon himself.
 - 2) So when we see this tola'a in the psalm, we understand the metaphor.
 - 3) The rest of the psalm, we'll see language that applies to his crucifixion.
 - c. But we also get a glimpse into the humanity of Christ.
 - 1) On the cross, he had doubts. He had laments. **Not second doubts, mind you.**
 - 2) ON THE CROSS, HE FELT ALONE.
 - d. So take heart, Jesus know how you feel.

VERSES 11-18

¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

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

¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

1. Let's continue to relate the experience of the psalmist to that of **Christ on the cross**.
 - a. Theologically, we believe that on the cross, Christ experienced more than just pain
 - 1) At Calvary, Jesus bore the weight of the sin of the world; he took God's wrath.
 - 2) **2 Corinthians 5:21** "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."
 - 3) This psalm permits us to understand the separation from God Jesus endured
 - a) God couldn't be near the unholiness of sin. Jesus bore it then.
 2. So look at the descriptors here and understand how difficult this experience was.
 - a. The description of bulls and lions were the most dangerous animals in ancient Israel.
 - 1) The psalmist speaks of the feeling of immanent death by predators.
 - 2) We watched Life of Pi and **the tiger relationship** reveals this fear.
 - b. Crucifixion: **Poured out like water** // Potsherd broken ceramics//Bones out of shape
 3. Three more important notes.
 - a. Pierced hands and feet: **Archaeological proof** of crucifixion
 - b. All my bones are on display: likely naked during crucifixion
 - c. Divide my clothes: **Matthew 27:35** When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.
 4. ULTIMATE LONELINESS

VERSES 19-23

¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

²⁰ Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.

²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

²² I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

1. This is the key: the one left alone cries out to God for deliverance and he answers.
 - a. The reality is that God has never truly left.
 - b. Bad things happen because we live in an imperfect world.
 - 1) Sin makes this world imperfect, YET we still benefit from the blessings of God.
 - 2) Everyday we live in the presence of God and therefore are never truly alone!
 - c. Proof of sin in the world abounds but not proof of the absence of God.
 - 1) He gives us life, shelter, food, the sun, beautiful days &, most importantly, grace.
2. Do you know what true isolation from God is? **HELL**.
 - a. Bridging the topics of loneliness & hell in a sermon feel awkward, but they're connected.
 - 1) If you fear loneliness now in this life, you want no part of hell
 - b. **Lutheran teaching**: "state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God."
 - 1) So Hell is the ultimate self-exclusion.
 - 2) Would anyone in their right mind choose an eternity of loneliness?
 - c. C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Great Divorce* "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened."
3. We are a church that believes in hell.
 - a. That hell is an actual place where some people will spend the rest of eternity.
 - 1) We aren't trying to be cruel or judgmental, but this is what the Scripture teaches.
 - 2) Some people just assume they'll get into heaven. Heaven seems automatic.
 - 3) But without Jesus, the eternal destination of people of people is hell.
4. But our God isn't cruel so as not to provide a way out from separation.
 - a. This is the point of this portion of the text: call out to him.
 - b. In describing Hell in **Isaiah 66:24**, "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die nor will their fire be quenched and they will be loathsome to all mankind."
 - c. Do you see how the Scriptures intersect here? Remember the tola'ath?
 - 1) In Hell, there is no worm to die for you.

VERSES 26-31

²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive. ³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. ³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

1. This is the promise of Christ's deliverance. The hope of **Palm Sunday and Good Friday**.
 - a. The poor are fed, hearts live eternally, nations give way to him.
 - b. Verses 30,31 show that the message has an eternal element to it. Good news carries on.
2. But even after the joy of a coronation journey, times can get difficult.
 - a. Five days after shouting, "Hosanna," the crowds yelled, "Crucify Him."
 - 1) Loneliness will come your way. It is inevitable.
 - 2) But on the cross, Christ bore the ultimately loneliness for us.
3. And now, those who struggle with loneliness have an answer: trusting the crucified Lord.
 - a. He gives us the church as a means to help loneliness. We build community in him.
 - b. **COMMUNION** is a way that community is affirmed in Christ.