

Scripture: Psalm 22

Series: Knowing God

Date: 11.17.2019

Sermon Title: Has God abandoned me?

MPT: The Lord is to be praised among all peoples for faithfully delivering his suffering servant

MPS: Because Jesus secured God's presence with us, we can praise God even when he seems absent.

[elder candidate presentation] 5:00 min

- Explain Elders & Then Present the 3.

Sermon Intro

Turn to Psalm 22. The Psalms are this rich collection of personal interactions directly with God. David and the other psalmists talk to God, cry to God, complain to God, praise God, and rest in God. Because of the closeness to God expressed in them, the Psalms have been the book of personal and corporate worship for the church for thousands of years. They are written in such a way that we can take them and go before God and pray them back to him. They not only teach us *about* God, they offer us a path towards *knowing* God.

The problem we face in a community familiar with Christian things is God can become more like a subject we know *about* instead of a person we *know*. God has created you to KNOW him. To know him like you know a person. And knowledge about him is meant to strengthen your relationship with him.

And that's going to be big this week. Because Psalm 22 is going to open with a very weighty question that many people have dealt with. It's a very well-known question because Jesus quoted it as he hung on the cross. In fact, in church history Psalm 22 is often called the Psalm of the cross.

The Psalm opens asking "My God My God why have you abandoned me?" And for the next two weeks we are going to talk through a really personal and may represent a painful reality for many people. **Where is God when I hurt?** When it seems like we are in a dark place and we are getting absolutely nothing from God.

There are two big reasons I've seen high school / college students walk away from God. 1) their preferred lifestyle conflicts with their beliefs. 2) the suffering of someone they know and they can't explain it. And listen the reality of that second reason is that if you haven't faced it, at some point you will. At some point you will be disappointed with God, someone you love will die, or life will not turn out like you expected it. And you'll ask...where is God? I want to prepare you for that question today.

And I think what will be really helpful for you is this Psalm is very expressive. Very desperate. It's part of what I love about the Psalm is how raw the writers get with God. And I keep telling you...God can handle you being candid with him. In fact, maybe this Psalm will put holy words to some pain you've had towards God. Or maybe this will give you words to relate to someone you know who has left church all together because they are mad that God didn't show up when they

needed him. You've been looking for words to give them and maybe that's what's here.

The Psalm is pretty much all negative for the first 21.5 verses. There are sprinklings of hope but it's mostly despair. And we will spend a good bit of time in there today. And I imagine you'll be able to relate. In those 21.5 verses we'll see 4 reasons we often feel abandoned by God. I think they'll resonate. Then we'll see how God answers us.

And as the Psalm turns into a psalm of praise by the end, I think you'll see how what feels like a really difficult, silent, dry season spiritually can become a rich opportunity to meet with God in a way you can't in easier times.

"In the darkness we have a choice that is not really there in better times. We can choose to serve God just because he is God. In the darkest moments we feel we are getting absolutely nothing out of God or out of our relationship to him. But what if then—when it does not seem to be paying or benefiting you at all—you continue to obey, pray to, and seek God, as well as continue to do your duties of love to others? If we do that—we are finally learning to love God for himself, and not for his benefits."¹

We'll start in verse 1 and go through those 4 reasons we feel like God has abandoned us. The psalm begins with a familiar phrase to those of us familiar with Christianity.

1 My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far from my deliverance

¹ Keller, Tim. *Walking with God through pain and suffering*.

and from my words of groaning?

This is the prayer Jesus prays on the cross as he's dying. You know this from Good Friday. He went to the garden, prayed for God to spare him. But then said not my will but yours be done. And then he was beaten, he was whipped, his clothes were torn off him and he was nailed to a cross and hung with a crown of thorns on his head.

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "'Elí, Elí, lemá ' 'sabachtháni' ? " ' that is, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me ?" -- Matthew 27:45-46

Now I'm going to talk in a few minutes about a big giant theological question about the word abandoned that Jesus expresses here. Because the cross does represent a unique moment in cosmic history where the savior of the world dies for the sins of the world. BUT, the bible also tells us that Jesus is our older brother who suffered like we suffer. Who we can follow into our own suffering. And who chose even on the cross in his moment of agony to quote from a Psalm and model suffering for us.

1 For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. -- 1 Peter 2:21

So for these first 21 verses I want us to follow Jesus into this space of feeling abandoned by God.

Let me show you those four reasons we feel abandoned by him, then show you how the psalm leads us to a place of worship.² And again maybe you will relate to all of these or maybe just one. Maybe you just need to highlight your bible right there and say YES! THIS IS HOW I FEEL. And just that little action of being able to relate to God's word should bring you comfort. Anyway...

2 My God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, by night, yet I have no rest. 3 But you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

First reason We feel abandoned by God if prayers go unanswered when we know God rules

Our songs, our sermons, our bibles...they talk about how God rules over everything! And we are told this God has a people who he loves and that's us. So we are his. We are told to come to him with our prayers. So we do. And we feel betrayed when it seems like this God we KNOW is in charge just doesn't show up. We get mad at him. WHERE ARE YOU GOD? Jesus prayed the same thing. If there was ever a time God seemed not in control, it would be in the murder of his son. He expressed abandonment. And that should bring you some comfort that Jesus has been there.

If there's one I can relate to in the four that I'm sharing with you, this one is probably it. Because I've been in too many hospital lobbies where I have prayed. I have gotten tragic

news that someone is in a bad spot and I have rushed there and I have said to myself the only hope for this person is for God to dramatically intervene and save their lives. And so I said GOD, this is where you show up. We know YOU RULE & REIGN. SO COME NOW GOD. Don't let my friend's baby die God. Don't let this young man die from this tumor. Don't let my father-in-law die from a doctor's mistake. Don't let my child die in miscarriage. AND THEY ALL DIED. And I have gone to my car and yelled and beaten the steering wheel in angry tears. WHERE ARE YOU GOD.

Have you ever been there? Then psalmist says you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. His pain from feeling abandoned by God doesn't lead him to a place where God doesn't exist in his mind. It's like he's standing in front of the person who was supposed to show up but didn't. He's not saying "WHO are you?" but instead its much more personal... "WHERE WERE YOU?"

And maybe like me that's been a hard thing for you before God. And again I'm not going to fully resolve that feeling of abandonment at this moment. Because the psalm doesn't. It does acknowledge God's holiness but it sits in the abandonment feeling longer. But hope is coming ok. let's keep going.

4 Our fathers trusted in you; they trusted, and you rescued them.
5 They cried to you and were set free;

² The 4 contrasts are original to Thabiti Anyawile who drew them out of Psalm 22 in his article "What does it mean for the father to forsake the

son?" posted in 3 parts on the Gospel Coalition in April 2012. Part 2, which looked at Psalm 22, was accessed 11.12.2019 at [The Gospel Coalition](#).

they trusted in you and were not disgraced.

David is talking here about sinful, back-sliding Israel. The people who over and over did not deserve to be rescued. And yet, God kept coming through for them.

6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by people. (this is Isaiah 53.3)³.

7 Everyone who sees me mocks me;
they sneer and shake their heads:

8 "He relies on the Lord;
let him save him;
let the Lord rescue him,
since he takes pleasure in him."

2nd reason we feel abandoned by God. We feel abandoned by God when we seem to suffer more than those who don't believe.

David is saying How could God deliver Israel, that bunch of sinners, yet abandon him now? And now the world is looking at his trust in this God and mocking him. A common reason people drift away from God is because they struggled to make sense of why bad things happened to good people. And the bad people are spared. I'm not calling believers and unbelievers good and bad. Because believers know they are sinners. But there is this belief we have that the power of God

is with us because the presence of God is with us. Yet, we call on it and God doesn't show up. And the non-Christian has the same result or sometimes a better result but they don't have God with them. If Christians are going to suffer the same, or more, than non-Christians what purpose is there in believing in this God?

Can I just pause for a second and show you when Jesus quoted verse 1 while hanging on the cross he was tipping us off to a whole Psalm that was about him?

- Verse 6 – that's Isaiah 53.3 – the suffering servant who was scorned
- Verse 8 – That's all the people surrounding the cross. The people passing by, the people executing him, even the criminals. Everybody shouting...where is your God now? Even the crown of thorns was a form of mockery. Come on KING...let's see your God work.

Again we haven't reached resolution yet. Still the pain of feeling like God isn't there. Still the question of where is God when I hurt. There's hope coming for you. Let's keep going.

9 It was you who brought me out of the womb,
making me secure at my mother's breast.
10 I was given over to you at birth;
you have been my God from my mother's womb.
11 Don't be far from me, because distress is near
and there's no one to help.

³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him. -- Isaiah 53:3 (CSB)

When we have followed the Lord for a long time and tried to do so faithfully...when our lives have been marked by obedience and trust in the Lord. We've chosen his ways. We've really sought him...and then it feels like when we really need him he isn't there.

3rd reason people feel abandoned by God. We feel betrayed by God when faithfulness is repaid with abandonment

It's the thought "I've served God for years and years and where is he when I need him." There is a common feeling among de-churched people. Those who used to be Christians but walked away. When they are surveyed what they often say is "**I didn't leave God, God left me.**" Maybe that was you. And you are sitting in here today wounded and skeptical because **you feel like God left you.** This is usually the person who got tired of being spiritually tired. You've been my God from day 1, but what good has that been for? And they drift. And there is hope coming for you. Let's go to the last one. On to verses 12-21.

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

14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are disjointed;

15 My strength is dried up like baked clay;

a gang of evildoers has closed in on me;
they pierced my hands and my feet. (John 19.34, Rev 1.7)

18 They divided my garments among themselves, (Matt 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19)
and they cast lots for my clothing.

19 But you, Lord, don't be far away.

My strength, come quickly to help me.

20 Rescue my life from the sword,

my only life from the power of these dogs.

21 Save me from the lion's mouth,

from the horns of wild oxen. (quick bible note, that horns of wild oxen is translated unicorns in older translations. So, unicorns are evil enemies of Jesus.)

Verses 12-21 are filled with the aching, almost to the point of death cry by someone whose enemies are closing in and he needs help. And God feels much farther away than his trouble. Ever felt this way? God these people are hurting me and I'm asking you to intervene and nothing. They just keep on.

4. We feel betrayed by God when people hurt us while God seems far away

This one maybe more than any other puts words to some really deep pain you've felt in your past or maybe you are feeling now. For all you've heard about God's great deliverance he gives to his people...you've asked for it. But you've been hurt. Listen some of you have been deeply hurt by others. And maybe nobody else knows other than you and the one who hurt you.

- One in 4 girls and one in 6 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18
- One in 5 women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives

And because sexual assault is a form of victimization particularly stigmatized in American society, many victims

suffer in silence. Which only intensifies their pain. And makes God seem further and further away. And yet there is hope even still.

That brings us to the second half where the Psalm is about to do a dramatic shift. Which is good because otherwise this would leave us in our feeling of abandonment. And if you have been silently doubting God, I just want you to see from everything we just read that doubt isn't always a bad thing. Doubt is often the response when the superficialities of faith meet the realities of life in this world. But it is a foot poised. Poised to take a step closer to God because as you've seen this whole way...the Psalmist isn't walking away. He's pressing God for an answer. God I feel abandoned by you. But I'm still here. Still asking for help. He doesn't ask once, he asks several times. Job asks for 38 chapters of scripture. And maybe the big thing today is going to be for you to keep asking God to answer you.

When Jesus invoked verse 1 of Psalm 22 he knew it had this shift. He knew even as he hung on the cross that Psalm 22 didn't end in betrayal and despair. Listen to these three words at the end of verse 21

...You answered me! After the psalm has sunk down to the lowest depths of hopelessness and loss there is rescue! And if you've resonated with the feeling of abandonment at all up to this point, verse 21 is especially for you. And that's not just because David finally heard an answer from God though we should acknowledge that. It's not just because of the

character of God to never leave his people though we should be comforted by that. It's because of the cross.

See we Christians read the Psalms and all of the Old Testament through the lens of the death and resurrection of Christ. That's especially important today.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross and cried My God My God why have you abandoned me. There was something happening there that will never happen to us. See the reason he went up on the cross...was to be a substitute for you and I. The message of Christianity at its core is that the wages of sin...what we are duly owed for our rebellion against God...is death. And that death is not just physical though it is. That's why our bodies breakdown over time and we eventually die. It's because of sin. But, we also deserve death spiritually. And spiritual death is eternal separation from God the father. It's hell. Eternal punishment for our rebellion against an eternal God. All this death is often summarized as the curse of sin.

What makes the cross so unique in all of history is that Jesus is stepping in and saying instead of you and I experiencing that which we deserve, He is going to take the curse of sin for us. So in what can only be described as a divine mystery of how it happens – Jesus who was always perfectly united with the father experiences abandonment by the father SO THAT the father's wrath for sin can be poured out on HIM instead of on us.

It's not the manner in which he was killed that makes his death unique. Plenty have been crucified & even died more

horrendous deaths. It was what was happening in his death that makes it uniquely awful & uniquely powerful for us.

Jesus made that cry of God-abandonment so that no child of God would ever truly be abandoned. He drank to the dregs God's judgment on sin so that not one drop remains for his followers. And that means Christ who went to a torment beyond what we could ever go, has secured the presence of God with us no matter what. So we can say with Isaiah
But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities;
punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. -- Isaiah 53:5 (CSB)

And what is that peace? That healing? It is the effect of our permanent union with God.

35 Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: Because of you we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. -- Romans 8:35-39 (CSB)

So yes Christians do hurt. Christians do suffer. And Christians feel seasons of doubt and disappointment. But IN THESE THINGS...we can actually draw close to God in a way we couldn't otherwise. Even in, especially in, the season of silence from God...we learn to love God for God. And we take comfort knowing Christ has not only been there, but went even further to ensure we never would have to.

Christian I want you to leave here with great hope that you can know for certainty the God who said he would be with you always is with you now. In Christ He is answering you in your suffering even now. And he promises to be with you to the end of the age. And right now is the moment where you can learn to love & trust God in the silence by looking back & looking ahead. And believe Acts 3.20 is coming. You keep confessing your sins to him and drawing close to him and believe that seasons of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord. Next week we will pick up in what we do with this. What our response must be.

22 I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
I will praise you in the assembly....

You answered me in Christ. So I will praise you in my suffering. Nothing ignites faith in others like seeing a brother or sister choose praise in the midst of suffering. Let me guide you through a time of response to this. I'm gonna have 4 prayers on the screen. You can pray them. Maybe you need to write them down or snap a picture with your phone so you can pray them later. I'll put all 4 up and walk you through them. Let's pray.

1. God, I feel abandoned, but the gospel tells me you are with me even now.

2. God, I feel betrayed, but the gospel shows me you are faithful even now.

3. God, I feel like all is lost, but the gospel says You've won the victory for me.

4. I will praise you, Lord, in my suffering.