



MARCH 28, 2021 | PASTOR WOOHYUN JUNG

“Forsaken” (Psalm 22:1-21)

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.”

⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast.

¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

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.

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.



Core Idea: Christian lament is how we bring our sorrow to God. We continue to wrestle in prayer knowing that Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of this psalm, was forsaken so that we would never be forsaken by God.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. It's great to see many of you here in person. For those of you who are joining us online, we're delighted to have you. I pray that all of us can gather to worship together sooner than later. If you have your Bibles, please turn to Psalm 22:1-21. But before I read, let me share some thoughts that will prepare us to read this more meaningfully.

Psalm 22 is a psalm for those who are suffering. It's a psalm of lament written by King David. I'll be quoting a few times from a book called *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop. If you want to learn more about Christian lament, this is a great resource. The author shares, "Lament is how we bring our sorrow to God – it's how Christians grieve. Without lament, we miss out on the opportunity to learn important truths about God and our world. Without lament, we won't know how to process pain." Yet sadly, many of us don't really know *how* to grieve in a way that honors God – which is why we often respond in anger, despair, or denial when we encounter pain. Some people are so filled with anger at God that bitterness dominates their spiritual lives. Some people are just exhausted that hopelessness consumes their hearts and some people pretend like everything's fine, all the while, experiencing this raging storm in their souls.

That was me. A few years before God gifted us with Eli, our son, Alicia and I went through a miscarriage. It was a painful experience. My heart was crushed. The doctors told us that it happens to everyone – that it's just a natural part of life. And when I realized that I needed to be strong for Alicia's sake, I started to suppress my pain. I comforted myself that God is still in control, but the real challenge came after this. For two years, Alicia and I could not get pregnant. Disappointment and discouragement consumed our hearts day by day. Even though I was trying to hide it or deny all my feelings, questions started to surface: "God, why can't we get pregnant? Is there something that I'm not *doing*? Should I pray more, read my Bible more, give more, serve more, exercise more? Is there something that I *shouldn't* be doing? Should I stop drinking coffee? Is something in my life displeasing You? What should I do? Why are you letting this happen?" Only in hindsight I recognized that God was stripping me off of my idol – this unhealthy hunger and need for a child. Friends, some of you may be experiencing what Alicia and I went through. My heart goes out to you – I would love to talk to you if you reach out to me, but even if you didn't go through this, suffering, pain, and losses are real.

The emotional weight may be so heavy that it feels like you're drowning, suffocating – and the pain may come in various ways. You or someone you dearly love may be battling an illness; you may be feeling utterly lost with parenting; hanging by a thread not to give up on your marriage; being unjustly treated; being rejected; overwhelmed by the injustice you see around the world. To make things worse, the things that we lost during COVID: jobs, finance, relationships, opportunities, ordinary things of life, and most importantly, our community – the freedom to come and worship together, hug one another, and simply do life together. One way or another, this pain and burden may be growing; yet many of us still fail to grieve over these things because we don't know how or we don't think we need to. I wonder if many of you are like me – trying to sweep things under the rug. Brothers and sisters, we must realize that without lament, our pain and suffering can easily derail and lead us astray from God. **The good news is that the Bible understands our pain.** I pray that this psalm will give you a voice to your silence and will shine light in your darkness.

Another thing I want to point out is the relationship between this psalm and Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday celebrates the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem to fulfill His mission. It was a glorious moment as people waved palm branches and shouted, "Hosanna," which means "Save us!"



People recognized Jesus as the chosen Messiah – the One who will save them – though they didn't realize that Jesus came not to rescue them from physical oppression through a war against Rome, but to revive them from spiritual death through His death. **In other words, underneath Jesus' triumphant entry was this deep sorrow, lament, and heaviness in His heart – knowing what this day would lead to: He would be betrayed, beaten, and killed for our sins.** The first verse of this psalm may be familiar to you because Jesus cries it out on the cross. Jesus deliberately chose these words to describe His agony on the cross. This implies that we won't fully understand the implications of this psalm unless we see it in light of Christ, and we will, but before we do that, we should first see this psalm from the perspective of the author, King David, because it will set the right foundation as we connect it to the gospel story. The amazing thing is that as we do this, this truth will also speak to our own pain – and teach us about Christian lament. With this in mind, let's read Psalm 22.

[Read Psalm 22:1-21]

Three things from this psalm:

- **THE STRUGGLE**
- **THE PRAYERS**
- **THE ANSWER**

1) **THE STRUGGLE (V. 1-10)**

Verse 1 begins rather abruptly, with a desperate cry: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me?"* Feel the language. David was deeply troubled that God seemed like He was too far removed from what was happening in his life. God was silent. He felt as though God was forsaking him. Listen to how Pastor Thabiti describes forsakenness: "Forsakenness is loneliness and let down that includes a sense of betrayal. Imagine the groom dressed in his tuxedo awaiting his bride. While expecting to see her dressed in white, slowly walking down the aisle, he learns that she left him at the altar. That's forsakenness. An expectation, a longing, a hope, completely shattered. Forsakenness is to be cast off, abandoned, deserted, and walked out on." David felt that he was the forsaken one. David was struggling hard – not just with his pain, but also with God. **Injustice was one thing, but God's lack of intervention was a deeper pain for him.** He just couldn't understand, and this reality began to crush his soul. Friends, when was the last time you felt like this? Do you feel like you're forsaken by God right now? Do you feel like He's so far from you? Do you feel like you're not being heard? I think every believer can relate to this at some point in our lives, especially when there seems to be this inconsistency or discrepancy in what we see in the Word and the world around us. For example, God promises that He'll be with us always; but at times, we feel alone. We know that God wants the best for us; but at times, we wonder how He could allow some things to happen in our lives. If this is you, I pray that the Spirit will minister to you through this psalm. Even just the fact that this kind of language is part of the Bible teaches us that these feelings should not be dismissed as if it's sinful. **In one sense, God is giving us the permission to feel this way because this is a part of our faith journey.**

At the same time, this psalm shows us the right way of struggling. David may have *felt* like God was forsaking him – but he wasn't going to forsake God. Look at the wrestling that happens in this psalm. **Verses 1-2** record David's "why" questions. But David reminded himself of God's past faithfulness in **verses 3-5**, which begin with the word, "Yet." He didn't know what was going on, *yet* he did know that God was holy. He remembered that the Israelites put their trust in Him, and they were delivered. Then we see another turn in **verses 6-8**, which begin with the word, "But." David may have been comforted to know that the Israelites were saved; *but* this somehow discouraged him. He was saying, "They cried to You and You answered; I cry to You and I'm ignored." David felt like he wasn't loved or valued. He felt like everyone was mocking him, but we see another turn in **verses 9-10**, which begin with another "yet."



The temptation to walk away from God must have been overwhelming, *yet* he preaches the truth to his soul again – namely that as God was the One who gave him life, so, God will take care of him.

What's going on here? **It shows us that David was fighting for God.** There's this sense where he was saying, "With everything going on, I want to give up; but I can't give up. I must trust God. The Bible reminds me that God will rescue. But trust God for what? Does He really care? Because it feels like He doesn't. But what can I do? I must hope in God." Pastor Vroegop writes, "Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness. Belief in God's mercy, redemption, and sovereignty create lament. Without hope in God's deliverance and the conviction that He is all-powerful, there would be no reason to lament when pain invades our lives. Rather, we should be quick to give up – we have no other option but to be in despair. Therefore, lament is rooted in what we believe. It's a prayer loaded with theology. Christians affirm that the world is broken, God is powerful, and He will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise." Brothers and sisters, it's okay to struggle. But the struggle should draw us closer to God and His truth, not away from Him. We must not forsake Him because we feel like He has forsaken us. Don't follow your *feelings*; hold onto your *faith* in Him. **Struggle in the Word and struggle with Him.**

2) THE PRAYERS (V. 11-21a)

The way David struggled with his pain was in the form of prayer. His anguish led him to pray because despite his feelings of forsakenness, he still believed that God heard him, which is why he *desperately* turned to God. **In our suffering and pain, the biggest problem is not that God stops talking to us; the biggest problem is when we stop talking to God.** I understand *why* we don't want to pray – disappointed by unanswered prayers or frustrated by circumstances that are out of our control. But we must recognize that this is exactly what the enemy wants. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" Satan desires to devour you. He wants your suffering to make you lose your trust in God. He doesn't want you pouring out your heart to God. He doesn't want you searching the Word for truth and consolation. He wants you to leave God's people. Pastor Beeson said, "One of Satan's favorite lies is to tell us that no one understands: no one understands our temptation, no one understands our pain, no one understands what we are going through. Like lions separate weak prey from the pack, Satan loves to isolate the injured." Why is Satan so eager to draw us away from God? Because God alone is the source of strength, comfort, joy, and life. Satan certainly knows that. Then do *you* know this? Do you know that God alone can sustain you, restore and complete you? I invite you to be *desperate* for the Lord today. It's the only remedy to our doubt and answer to our questions.

Now, let's observe how David prayed so that we may learn from him. **First, he prays his questions**, which we see in verse 1. Two questions that many of us often wrestle with: (1) "*Where* are you, God?" (2) "If You love me, *why* is this happening?" It's comforting to know that we can come honestly before God with all and any questions. We don't have to pretend like we have everything together. We don't have to figure everything out before we come to the presence of God. God wants us to come to Him with our doubts. If this was not okay, then God would've taken this psalm out of the Bible because it's not setting a good example. So, come to God with honesty. He wants to hear you. He wants to comfort you. And most importantly, He wants to grow you through it.

Second, he prays his pains. Listen to how David described his pain to God. In verses 12-13, he felt **threatened and intimidated**. In verse 14, he felt **physically and emotionally dry, exhausted, and empty**. In verse 15, he felt **like dying** – no reason to get up in the morning, no motivation for anything. In verse 16, he didn't have friends who encourage but only enemies who were wicked. **He was lonely**. In verse 17, he felt **utterly humiliated** and in verse 18, he felt **completely stripped away – powerless and helpless**. Friends, do you relate to his pain in any way today? Then it's okay to pray these things to God.



Rather than allowing painful circumstances to rule him, create bitterness or great despair, David laid out his angst. Why is this important? Pastor Vroegop said, “Pain has a way of awakening us to our need for God’s help. It shines a spotlight on our powerlessness to control everything.” Unspoken frustrations can grow and unknowingly push us further *away* from God; but our pains honestly expressed in our lament will push us closer *toward* God, as it did for David.

Thirdly, he prays for God’s presence and help. Isn’t it interesting to see that by this point in the psalm, David was no longer asking, “Why”? He wasn’t demanding God to answer his questions; but rather, he was calling God to be with him and to act in accordance with His character. His lament moved from the “why” questions to the requests based on “who.” Verse 19, “*But You, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*” In other words, we can stake our requests on who God is and what He has promised to do. We can and should ask God to rescue us, but we should always end our requests as Jesus did on Gethsemane, “*Yet not my will, but Yours be done*” (Lk. 22:42). And more importantly, wait on Him. Pastor C.J. Mahaney once shared that the book of Job feels incredibly long in the middle. There’s a lot of conversation going on between the friends and it just sounds very repetitive. And this is what he said (paraphrasing), “But maybe it was intentionally done that way because grieving is often like that – it’s long; wrestling through the cycle of same questions, doubts, and emotions – it almost feels never-ending, but at the end, God broke the silence. He *did* speak. And He will in our lives too.” So, I invite you to pray, because one day God *will* answer and restore according to *His* will and as we pray, God *will* also provide grace and faith so that we may face the problems that come daily into our lives.

3) THE ANSWER (V. 21b)

One of the benefits of understanding the original language of the Bible is that you see the things that you may miss in our English translations. There are two important things I want you to see from verse 21. **First, the order.** In Hebrew, verse 21 is ordered this way: “Rescue me from the mouth of the lions and from the horns of the wild oxen, save me.” “Save me,” which actually is one word in Hebrew is located at the end of the verse. **Second, the tense.** In Hebrew, the tense for the word, “Rescue me” is *hifil* imperative while “Save me” is *qal* perfect. What does that mean? It means that a better translation for the word “save me” is actually “You *have* saved me.” Then let me rephrase this verse again: “Rescue me from the mouth of the lions and from the horns of the wild oxen, *You have saved me.*” After pouring out in agony, all of a sudden, David declares that God has answered him – and he enters into this delightful celebration as we’ll see when Pastor Peter preaches from the rest of this psalm on Easter Sunday. Agony, answer, then celebration. It’s unfortunate that it’s hard to see this crucial turn in NIV; but those words, “*You have saved me,*” completely change the course of this psalm. Then how was he delivered? Did his enemies get what they deserved? David doesn’t tell us. But what he does tell us is how it impacted his relationship with God which led to praise. Pastor Vroegop says, “Lament is a path to praise as we are led through our brokenness and disappointment. The space between brokenness and God’s mercy is where this song is sung. Think of lament as the transition between pain and promise. It is the path from heartbreak to hope.” Brothers and sisters, God hears our prayers – He *will* answer; He *will* save. I don’t know how; but He *will* – and you *will* sing again.

Now, one Christian scholar commented, “No Christian can read this psalm without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion.” What does he mean? To understand this, we must recognize that the descriptions of pain in this psalm depicts a public execution; but we know David was never publicly executed. Then what’s going on here? It means that as David was reflecting and meditating on his pain caused by something we don’t know, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he must have gotten this prophetic insight into a greater David who was going to go through a greater suffering, a greater abandonment by God, yet a greater deliverance. David’s assumptions were wrong: God *hasn’t* forsaken him. God *wasn’t* far from him. God certainly *was* there through his troubles. God *was* his strength, but not so with Jesus.



Up until the crucifixion, many things happened to Jesus. He had been flogged, beaten, mocked, betrayed, thorns driven to His skull, had nails driven through His hands. Now, let me just read a portion of this psalm once again. And I want you to see in light of Christ – see how these words uttered a thousand years before perfectly describe what Jesus went through: *“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ‘He trusts in the LORD,’ they say, ‘let the LORD rescue him. Let Him deliver him, since he delights in Him’... Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. 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. 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. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”* With pierced hands and collapsing lungs, Jesus fulfilled Psalm 22. These had been the desperate words of David who *felt* as though he was being executed. Now, the sinless Son of God was the One truly being executed.

Yet through it all, this excruciating pain, He was quiet. Isaiah 53:7 said, *“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth.”* But all of a sudden, that silence was broken. Listen to Matthew 27:46, *“About three in the afternoon **Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’** (which means ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’).”* Jesus who was silent throughout, suddenly, cried out; literally screamed. Pastor Tim Keller said, “When Jesus started to cry out, He didn’t say, ‘My friends, my friends!’ ‘My head, my head!’ ‘My hands, my hands!’ He said, ‘*My God, my God.*’” His silence was broken because He was experiencing something infinitely worse than physical suffering – He was forsaken by God.

Now, why is it important for us to see this psalm in light of Jesus’ suffering on the cross? Remember verse 21? David declares, “You have saved me.” God may have saved David at that moment; but it didn’t mean that he never experienced pain again. In fact, David’s life was a constant ups-and-downs. **Yet, in Jesus, this declaration became true eternally.** In order to make sense of this, we need to acknowledge that the biggest problem of mankind is a sin problem. The Bible tells us that all of us have turned to our own way. Yet the Bible also tells us that God who loves with an everlasting love pursued those who were running away from Him and He laid on Jesus Christ the iniquity of us all. Jesus bore the wrath reserved for you and me. And in His death, justice of God was satisfied completely, once and for all, so that we may be forgiven and made righteous. Jesus’ death is how God ultimately answered David’s and all of our question: *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”* **Jesus was forsaken so that we would never be forsaken.** He has certainly saved us eternally. And this is why we can have hope even in our deepest darkness.

APPLICATION

How can we apply this truth to our lives today? **First, be reminded of and comforted by Jesus’ love for you in your pain.** We understand that Jesus humbly and joyfully faced His death. But why? Why did Jesus empty Himself – why did He go through this great condescension (Phil. 2:6-9)? **Because He loved us.** John 13:1 says, *“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, **He loved them to the end.**”* This is what Pastor Ortlund says about the verse, “John’s point [here] is that in going to the cross, Jesus did not retain something for Himself, the way we tend to do when we seek to love others sacrificially. He does not love like us. We love until we are betrayed. Jesus continued to the cross despite betrayal. We love until we are forsaken. Jesus loved through forsakenness. We love up to a limit. Jesus loves to the end.” Brothers and sisters, do you feel forsaken by God? Are you tempted to give up, stop trusting God, stop depending on God because you feel forsaken? Let this truth comfort you: Jesus loved you to the end – and He will continue to love you to the end. Even when we feel like turning away, *He* will never let us go. God will always be with us because that’s what Jesus’ death accomplished for us – we would never be forsaken. He suffers with you; He grieves with you; He is with you today.



Second, comfort and pray for those who are suffering. There are many who are suffering in this community – they may be questioning and wrestling, yet they may be also ready to give up. Friends, they need you. I invite you to struggle and grieve alongside of them. I invite you to wrestle in prayer on behalf of them. This of course means that I'm calling those who are suffering to make yourselves vulnerable by sharing your pain with others. I understand how difficult that is. But isolation and loneliness will continue to drift you away from God and the community. As Romans 12 teaches, let us be a community that "*mourns with those who mourn,*" being devoted to one another in love, and being faithful in prayer.

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, Christian lament is how we bring our sorrow to God. We continue to wrestle in prayer knowing that Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of this psalm, was forsaken so that we would never be forsaken by God. This psalm and Palm Sunday remind us that what we truly need in our lament isn't ultimately the changes to our circumstances but to know that God is with us, that He hears us, all because Jesus died for us on the cross. Then I invite you to find rest in Christ today.

Let's pray.