**Psalm 22: A Psalm Of Troubles**

The task of every preacher in every sermon is to take the ancient text of the Bible and draw out the fact that its principles are timeless. If he does not do that, he fails in his most holy task. It is an incredible responsibility to do this and I hope and pray that I never fall short of this calling.

With that goal in mind, today we want to turn to the book of Psalms to Psalm 22 and make it real, active, and applicable in each of our lives, specifically as we find ourselves in the throes of troubles. I hope to accomplish my chief goal and invite you to attend to what I am about to say in the next few minutes. This will be a precious expedition in the Scriptures that will deepen all of our understanding of the revealed mind of God. Having said that, let’s now take our first step and bring 21st century life to Psalm 22.

**I. Psalm 22 Is Relatable & Valuable**

A. People have turned to the book of Psalms all over the world in hundreds of languages and across vast expanses of time to find emotional refrains of lamentation and numerous hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God. Among the most powerful, moving, and timeless of these is Psalm 22.

B. Psalm 22 is so highly valued & relatable for at least five reasons:

1. It is the Word of God. Every word that proceeds from Him is priceless.

2. It is among the most Messianic passages in the Bible. It’s been called the 5th Gospel crucifixion account (e.g. Frost, *CJT* 8 [1962] 102-15). Jesus quotes verse 1 on the cross in Matt. 27:46//Mk. 15:34. Verses 7f and 18 are both implicitly and explicitly connected.

3. It connects deeply and directly to all of us.

4. It conveys the lamentations of a person surrounded by enemies who only seem to have his demise and destruction in mind.

5. It is a journey from the valley of the shadow of death to the peak of blessed life, all the while following the path of God’s abiding presence.

C. Given the value of this text, let’s now take a few moments to intimately acquaint ourselves w/ it & walk upon the path of God’s abiding presence.

**II. Psalm 22 In The 21st Century (Loosely based on situations I know of)**

A. A mother and father spend nine months awaiting the birth of their child. The day finally comes and the baby is happily born. The family feels complete now. Two hours later, the baby is laboring to breathe and dies. There was no warning. Nothing on any of the ultrasounds showed any concerns. The birth went as smoothly as any birth can go. The parents are now more broken and incomplete than ever. They whisper to God through their unending tears: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken us?”*

B. A gospel preacher is in the prime of his youth, zealous for God, and influential among God’s people. Everything is going as perfectly as life can manage to go. Then disaster erupts in the congregation he preaches at and the group divides. 9 out of 10 leave the congregation and enter into denominationalism. His wife leaves him for another man and takes their children. He is diagnosed with cancer and both of his parents die in the same month. Frustrated, angry, and upset, he turns his face upwards and screams: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

C. A young woman finds the love of her life. He is charming and romantic, funny and witty, intelligent and successful. He treats her like a queen. He’s everything she’s ever dreamed of and more. He gets down on one knee at the restaurant they had their first date at. She shouts, “Yes!” in ecstasy as her dreams come true. Everyone applauds. After a few months of preparation, the wedding of her dreams also comes true. They leave for their honeymoon as she fantasizes about their dreamy future. The first night of their honeymoon he beats her senseless and rapes her. She’s trapped. After two years of beatings and torment, she is pregnant with this man’s child. During the pregnancy, the man continues to beat her and one night in a drunken fit shoves her down the stairs and she starts hemorrhaging...As she weeps, she cries aloud, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

D. These are real life situations that happen every day. And these simply relate to the opening line of our psalm. Imagine how much we could extrapolate by moving through this passion-filled hymn. Imagine how we could examine the feeling of being abandoned by loved ones, surrounded by hateful people, hurt by those we love. Imagine how we could expand our reflections by not merely applying this psalm to the catastrophes of life, but also by the random, implacable vicissitudes of life. Psalm 22 is for all of us brethren.

**III. Lamentation & Appeal From The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death (22:1-21)**

**A. Verses 1-5—FORSAKEN**

1. The Lamentation (vv. 1f): *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest.”*

a. Oftentimes, we find a good rhythm in our discipleship but if we are all honest, this plea may arise in our hearts in times of distress. **I know it did for me when our first child was miscarried.**

b. The psalmists regularly echo this refrain, esp. throughout Pss. 1-41 (e.g. Pss. 10:1, 12; 13:1-3). As such, it is imperative that we understand something...it is perfectly healthy to not be okay 100% of the time! Moreover, God is amenable to complaints! *“There is ample accommodation for a faith that can question and inquire about God’s enigmatic ways”* (Bullock, *Poetic*, 149)

c. Even Jesus uttered these words from the Cross (Matt. 27:46). He knew God’s presence was there in His affliction (cf. Jn. 16:32), but even when spirit is willing, flesh is weak! (Matt. 26:41)

d. Sometimes, life is OVERWHELMING and it’s OK to be bewildered.

2. The Appeal (vv. 3-5): *“Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; They trusted and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; In You they trusted and were not disappointed.”*

a. When we feel overwhelmed, we should remember God’s proven track record. He has never lost a battle and no one who ever put his or her trust in Him was disappointed. Keep in mind His intervention in the past and that will guide and enable you in the present (cf. Ps. 4:1b; of God remembering in 25:6).

b. Life is meant to be overwhelming in order to direct our attention to the weaknesses of our sin-laden souls & this sin-laden world. A close friend of mine, Adam Smelser, hours before he drowned in BG, KY, said: *“This world is a broken down, decayed house. My God takes care of us and wants to get us out of that house.”*

c. Brothers and sisters, please also keep this in mind: Give your burden to God; don’t instruct Him on how and when to handle it, because if you do, you will be sorely disappointed. In a certain sense, He wants & allows us to be overwhelmed so that we develop reliance upon Him (cf. Ps. 18:17-19; 2Co. 1:8-10).

d. This allowance doesn’t mean He has abandoned us; we are assured otherwise (Pss. 16:7-11; 18:3; 21; 23:4; 38:9, 15). *“The writer does not blame God, nor is he cynical; he is hurt and bewildered.”* (Ash & Miller, “Psalms”, *Living Word Commentary*, 92)

e. Rather, it means that God is training and equipping us through the troubles of life (Pss. 30:6f; 38:10f, 17, 21f). As Frank Turek and Norman Geisler have said: *“You can’t develop courage unless there is danger. You can’t develop perseverance unless you have obstacles in your way. You won’t learn how to be a servant unless there’s someone to serve. And compassion would never be summoned if there were never anyone in pain or in need...Soul- building requires some pain. The Job of chapter 42 is a deeper and more joyful man than the Job of chapter 1.”* (*I Don’t Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist*, Appendix I) cf. 2Cor. 1:3-6.

**B. Verses 6-11—DESPISED**

1. The Lamentation (vv. 6-8): *“But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, b/c He delights in him.’”*

a. We alternate here again. The psalmist goes from lamentation to appeal, to lamentation again. This vividly reflects the emotional roller coaster we are on when we face perilous events. It’s like, once we figure out how to process something, another weight is thrown on top. The psalmist really gets life, doesn’t he?

b. No doubt, Jesus acutely experienced exactly what is written here (cf. Mt. 27:39, 43; Mk. 15:29; Luke 23:25f). He did this so that God could specifically sympathize with the weight of the world that we so often bear (Heb. 2:14-17; 4:15).

c. Identical to Jesus’ hour of misery, many see the tribulations in our lives as a sign that God has forsaken us or that He is fictitious. They will scoff & ridicule & berate our weary souls (cf. Ps. 3:1f). It makes these situations all the more challenging, doesn’t it?

2. The Appeal (vv. 9-11): *“Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb. Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help.”*

a. *“The author is not a foxhole convert; he is not a crisis Christian. He is a well-established believer with experience in prayer and faith. He has seen God work in the past.”* (R. Alden, 57).

b. When others turn against us & add to our woe, God wants us to take refuge in Him & be saved (Pss. 25:15-22; 27:9f; 37:39f). He wants us to open the photo album of our spiritual journey & see His presence throughout. *“A brief reflection on our spiritual pilgrimage can be most helpful and therapeutic.”* (R. Alden, 57)

c. Rest assured the wicked won’t succeed in their plots against you. They’ll see reckoning at God’s wrathful hand (Pss. 21:8-13; 25:1-3).

**C. Verses 12-21—AFFLICTED**

1. The Lamentation (vv. 12-18): *“Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.”*

a. After contemplating God’s faithful presence in his past, the psalmist looks back at the present & is still dumbfounded by the events.

b. I don’t know about you, but I have been right here. In the midst of a series of some of the worst things that can happen to someone, I remembered all the relevant verses and all the times that God has backed me up in the past, and still I was speechless at what lie before me. Have you been there?

2. The Appeal (vv. 19-21): *“But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, My only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth; From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.”*

a. Jesus acutely felt all of this at His crucifixion. We truly have a Savior Who is aware of what the weight of difficulties can be! He is indeed mindful of our affliction (Pss. 34:18; 40:17).

b. Wait for God; He will hear & deliver, renew & fortify (Pss. 27:13f; 28:6-9; Is. 40:31). Weeping may endure, but joy will also come! (Ps. 30:2f, 5b, 11)

c. Remember again, you will see God avenge His people, especially those who caused or compounded your pain (Ps. 37:17-25, 34).

**IV. Praise From The Peak Of Blessed Life (22:22-31)**

**A. Verses 22-25—EMPOWERED**

1. The Text: *“I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard. From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.”*

2. God knows & He does answer! (Pss. 3:4f; 4:1b; 31:5, 7, 22-24; 37:28) When we are patient, He saves! (Ps. 40:1-3) And this brings Him glory and honor as we praise Him for deliverance.

3. Jesus exemplified this truth powerfully (Heb. 5:7-10; Phil. 2:6-11).

**B. Verses 26-31—RESTORED**

1. The Text: *“The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s And He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness To a people who will be born, that He has performed it.”*

2. Compare: Pss. 23:3; 34:4-7, 15-22

3. All are called to the Messianic banquet! V. 26 may even be viewed as a toast at that banquet. And their joy would be shared to future generations (vv. 30f; cf. John 17:20f). The hardships we endure, bring fruit that we couldn’t possibly perceive amidst the fires of trial.

4. God does not abandon His holy ones! Nevertheless, there are those whom He will abandon – those ungodly individuals who forsake Him (cf. Rom. 3:21-26). Those who “turn to the Lord” (v. 27) and accept His rule (v. 28) will be protected.

Let me share a benediction with you regarding this lesson. It comes from Psalm 20, just two psalms prior to the one we’ve studied today: *“May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high! May He send you help from the sanctuary, And support you from Zion...We will sing for joy over your victory, And in the name of our God we will set up our banners...the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven, With the saving strength of His right hand...Save, O Lord; May the King answer us in the day we call.”* (Ps. 20)

Thank you for being here today even though your heart may be weighed down by many things happening in your life. I hope I have been able to take Psalm 22 and accurately apply this psalm to our days of trouble. I’d like to close with an open invitation to entrust not only your physical, but also your spiritual troubles unto God. Invite Him to bear your burdens and forgive the sin-stains of your souls. Share your afflictions with the brethren here that we may serve you with hands and hearts of compassion. And as we think on these things, let us sing praise and glory to our God who indeed is very present even now.