

“A Cry from the Cross”

Series of Psalms (Lent) – part 4

Psalm 22

[57] *Welcome, prayer*

[58 – Father and son] Years ago, my family visited the California Science Center in Los Angeles, which featured an earthquake room and a real space shuttle. The place was huge, and after a while, I noticed my son, Jonah, wasn't with me. When my wife, my mom, and I all got together, Jonah was gone. Talk about a parent's nightmare. My little white four-year-old northern Michigan boy got lost in a city with 10 million people. Those were the scariest ten minutes of my life. Eventually, a staff member found him and brought him back to us.

Shortly after we returned to Michigan, I brought Jonah to work with me and let him take a nap in the lounge across from my office. This had been part of our afternoon routine, until we came back from LA. The first time I stepped out to use the bathroom, no less than three minutes later, Jonah disappeared. I looked all around the church until I found him, red-eyed, in the secretary's office. Jonah thought I had abandoned him, because he couldn't find me. He thought I had forsaken him.

Getting left behind, being lost and alone, is a primal fear. Have you ever felt that way as a child, or even as an adult? Do you know what's it's like to be utterly alone?

[59 – girl in forest] We don't like to admit it, but sometimes we feel that God has abandoned us, especially when we've been hurt. Maybe we experience an illness, or a relationship ends. And we cry out to God for relief, but relief doesn't come. Have you felt like crying Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

[60-61 - Scripture] Even though Good Friday is about two weeks away, I want to ponder those words with you today. They were Jesus' cry from the cross. Matthew 27 gives us the context in which he spoke them.

⁴⁵From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶About 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?").

⁴⁷When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

⁴⁸Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

⁵⁰And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. (Matthew 27:45-50, NIV)

Why did Jesus say these words? What was happening? This is the end of what is commonly called "The Passion of the Christ." In just twenty-four hours, Jesus had been betrayed, abandoned by his friends, arrested, imprisoned, falsely accused, beaten, mocked, insulted, spit upon, and finally, forced to carry his own instrument of torture and death – his cross – upon which he was now nailed.

[62 - crucifixion] Do you know who was crucified in Roman times? Criminals. Political prisoners. The cross showed the power of Rome. It was an example that said, "This is what happens to those who oppose us." It was the most humiliating way to die. The word "excruciating" literally comes from the pain of the nails severing the nerves of the condemned.

[63 – Eli, Eli...] And in this moment, while Jesus was experiencing the worst pain and humiliation imaginable, he said, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

[64 – scripture] The Jewish people thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. They thought a hero of Israel's past would come to save Jesus. They missed it. Jesus was actually quoting Psalm 22. Just like in the psalm, Jesus was surrounded by enemies who mocked him (verses 6-8). Metaphorically, the wild animals were attacking him: mad bulls (v.12), roaring lions (v. 13), and wild dogs (v. 16).

[65 - scripture] This psalm has obvious correlations to the crucifixion, especially the physical pain the psalmist describes. His bones are out of joint, his heart is failing (v. 14). He is dehydrated from blood loss. (v.15) As Jesus hung

there, he was insulted. (v.7) When he was flogged, his bones were laid bare (v.17). The cast lots for his clothing. (v.18)

Psalm 22 is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament. Every gospel writer refers to it. The early Christians saw Psalm 22 as a prophecy of Jesus' death on the cross.

[66 – pain] I have never experienced pain like Jesus did. I've had some bumps and cuts, but nothing severe. I don't know the pain that would bring this terrible cry of abandonment from the lips of Jesus. But there is a major difference in our painful experiences and what Jesus went through.

[67 – Hebrews 12:2] When we are hurt, it is not usually our own choice. Our trips to the Emergency Room, the surgeon, or even Hospice care are not our choice. The difference is, Jesus chose the path that led to the cross. Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame..."

Do you know what that joy was? You. And me. We were that joy. Jesus knew his death would free us from sin and bring us back into a right standing with God. And so Jesus chose the cross. For us.

Jesus didn't blame God for the crucifixion. Jesus did not ask, "Why is this happening?" Jesus never even asked for help to come down off the cross. He cried, "God, why have you forsaken me?" as an expression of belief. You can only complain to the God that you believe is listening to you.

I don't believe Jesus really thought that God had left him. By quoting Psalm 22, Jesus was actually saying, "God, I believe you are still here with me, and you and I together will see this plan of redemption to the end. I know you are going to raise me as Psalm 22 promises.

[68 – Man with hope] We need to read the whole psalm, not just the first verse. The psalmist reminded God, "You saved Israel in the past. You didn't put them to shame, even though it seems that I am being shamed. God, you created me in my mother's womb. You have been responsible for me from the beginning." (v.3-5, 9-10, *my paraphrase*)

What starts as a lament becomes a prayer of hope. An amazing switch happens in verse 22. The psalmist says, "I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you." The psalmist goes from suffering and lamenting

to praising God in the congregation, in front of witnesses, telling people to worship and adore God. Why? The answer is in verse 24.

[69 – scripture] “For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.” (Psalm 22:24)

What happened? God listened. God saved. And because of God’s actions, not only is the current generation saved, so is the generation to come. Look at the very end of the psalm, verses 30-31

[70 – scripture] “Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. ³¹They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!”

What happened after Jesus died on the cross? He was raised to life! He saved all of us. And now we proclaim this great story to the whole world, 2,000 years later!

Why did Jesus say those words as he was dying? Because he was quoting this psalm and thinking not of abandonment but of salvation. If he had had enough strength left in him, I’m sure Jesus would have said all 31 verses. But he could only muster enough strength to get as far as the first verse. “My God...”

[71 – title] In light of Jesus’ cry from the cross, I want to speak to two different kinds of people today.

First, to those who are hurting: The truth is, we are fragile. We are human. Suffering is an inevitable part of our world. So the question is, when we experience pain and loss, does your suffering cause you to run away from God or towards God?

When Jesus cried out in pain from the cross, it was his deepest statement of belief that God would rescue him according to the plan of salvation. What about you? How do you use your pain?

C.S. Lewis famously quoted, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” We don’t pretend our pain isn’t real. We believe God holds the future, and real faith says, “I’m in pain, yet I will still trust God’s plan.”

Jesus’ pain drove him closer to God. Where does your pain lead you?

Second, to those who are not currently suffering right now, which is probably the majority of us: Is it possible that we are too comfortable? A pastor I knew used to say, “The job of a preacher is to afflict the comforted and to comfort the afflicted.” Perhaps we don’t know pain and loss because we are scared to risk ourselves for Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Risk requires the possibility of pain and loss. If you haven’t risked anything for Jesus, maybe that’s a sign you are too comfortable.

People don’t come to church looking for comfort. If they did, we’d take out the pews and put in recliners. They are looking for a community that wants to make a difference, a community that shows radical hospitality, that confronts the pain and suffering in this world and offers eternal hope.

We don’t need comfortable churches. We need risky churches. Jesus took a great risk for us. He didn’t consider his status and comfort level. Philippians 2:7-8 tells us “he made himself nothing...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

Jesus risked himself to save us in a terrible, but temporary, moment of pain. Therefore we ought to risk our lives for the sake of Christ. And if our risk brings us pain, we can even say, “God, You got me into this mess. So, make a way out. After all, God, it’s your reputation at stake.”

The cry from the cross is a rallying cry for us to ask God for help in all situations. The lesson from the cross is, when you ask God to show up, He will. Don’t waste your pain. Let it drive you toward God, not away. Become vulnerable. Take a risk. Show the world the meaning of salvation through a relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Redeemer, our Savior, and our Sacrifice.

Let’s pray.

(Affirmation from Romans 8)

Memory verse

Psalm 145:18 - “The Lord is close to everyone who calls out to him, to all who call out to him sincerely.”

Reflection questions

1. Think of a time in your life when you were in a lot of pain. How did that affect your conversation and relationship with God?
2. Why do you think Jesus quoted Psalm 22 from the cross? Why do you think those around him misunderstood his words?
3. What do you think was worse for Jesus – the abandonment of his friends or the humility of the crucifixion? What gave him the strength to go on?
4. How do you feel knowing Jesus went to the cross to save you? How do you feel knowing he rose again to show you eternal life?
5. Knowing what Jesus went through to save you, what will your response be to those around you who are hurting and need a Savior?