

PSALM 22

INTRODUCTION

We come to a Psalm that starts off with very familiar words (v 1). The Lord Jesus of course speaks these words in Aramaic on the cross and that means that we may be in danger of taking this Psalm and only applying it to Jesus. Yes this Psalm is clearly messianic but it also has I believe an original setting and meaning that we must not miss.

We must find out the original meaning before we can jump from its Old Testament application to the New Testament and its application to Christ. As we go through the Psalm you will find a number of phrases that refer to the Lord Jesus and his death in particular. But this week we want to try and ascertain this Psalm's original meaning and purpose and that will enable us to apply this Psalm to ourselves.

Then next time we will look at it from a messianic perspective.

1. THE SILENCE AND ABSENCE OF GOD (vs. 1-11)

It is clear that the opening sentence sets the theme for the whole Psalm. The Psalmist feels abandoned he feels as if God has forsaken him. In his experience of God, God seems so far from him, he longs for God's intervention in his life he needs to be rescued or saved but it seems that God is miles away and that he does not hear his groaning (v 1-2). The Psalmist cries out to God night and day but God does not answer him, God is silent.

Now we must understand that Christians can at times in their own experience of God feel just like this. I have been dealing with people long enough to know that at times people can become so low physically mentally and spiritually that they can feel that God has abandoned them, that he does not hear them or that he does not come to their aid. It is not just a feeling either for as they look at their lives and their circumstances, there is ample evidence to lead to that conclusion.

In this Psalm the Psalmist also presents the evidence why to him it seems that God has abandoned him and left him alone.

In presenting his evidence he contrasts his past experiences of God with his current experience and therefore concludes that his current experience is so different from what he knew to be true in the past and he is left with no option but to think that God has forsaken him. The Psalmist knows that God is King and is holy (v 3) therefore he knows that God is able to speak to him that God is able to help but for some reason he is not doing so. The Psalmist knows that God receives the praise of his people (v 3) because his people know that he is a God who hears and comes to the aid of his people.

The Psalmist's forefathers put their trust in God in the knowledge that God will deliver them and he did (v 4). They cried out to God and were saved they were not disappointed (v 5) but that is not the experience of the Psalmist. He has cried out many times and God has not answered or delivered him and the implication is that the Psalmist is disappointed.

Now I wonder have we ever thought like this or experienced this sort of forsakenness ourselves. We pray to God time and time again but nothing happens it seems as if our prayers go no further than the ceiling. There is no real sense of God responding. We read our bibles but God does not seem to speak his word is so dry to us. Yet matters are made worse as we think of other believers who have prayed and God does respond and who read his word and God does speak to them. There is clear evidence that God is with them. To make matters even more confusing we know

that God is faithful that He is King and we have in the past known God's help but now there is only divine silence.

If you have had that experience or are currently facing it; then let me assure you that other Christians have also experienced that and even the Psalmist has faced it so you are not the only one who has faced such silence and what seems to be abandonment by God.

As far as the Psalmist is concerned there is every reason for God to act because his situation is desperate (vs. 6-11). He feels degraded to the level of a worm because of the opposition that he is facing and because of the silence of God (v 6). The Psalmist is scorned, despised, mocked and insulted. His opponents say he believes and trusts in God let God save him but the agony is that God does not respond he does not come to save him (vs. 7-8).

The view of the people is that the Psalmist delights in God (v 8) but for the Psalmist God seems to have abandoned him. The Psalmist has known God's hand upon him even from birth the Psalmist has had to completely trust in God and has known God's loving protective care of him but all this simply contributes to the growing feeling of abandonment (vs. 9-10). No wonder he cries out to God not to be far from him he is in desperate need of help and he knows that if God does not help him then no one else is able too.

Have we been in this situation? We are in great need, we cry out to God again and again but God is silent we know that he is able to help but for some reason he is failing to do so. Our situation is so desperate that we know that unless God helps no one else is able too even if they are willing. To make matters worst for us our enemies mock us and insult us.

Where is your God now they say? "You say you trust in God; well where is he now when you need him?" All this leads to our sense of abandonment and we begin to lose our sense of humanity we feel that God is treating us like an animal; we feel that he does not care. This is why I love the Psalms even though I find them very difficult to understand.

But the Psalms are godly people's experiences of God and here the Psalmist who delights in God feels abandoned by him. So when we feel likewise let us assure ourselves that such feelings are not wrong in themselves its what we do with those feelings and experiences that are important as we will see this as we move towards the end of this Psalm.

2. WHY THE PSALMIST'S NEEDS GOD TO ACT (vs. 12-21)

This middle section of the Psalm is describing why the Psalmist needs God to deliver him. His enemies are depicted here as fearsome beasts that surround him and cut off his escape (v 12, 13, 16, 20-21). These fierce attacks from his enemy reduce the Psalmist to fear and weakness. The signs of physical weakness are common ones. His strength departs like water poured out on the ground (v 14) so that his body feels out of joint and control.

His courage (heart) melts away like wax before a furnace (v 14). He is crippled with fear (v 15) and there is real and physical pain (v 16). His enemies watch him as he looks helpless they gloat over him and even thinking he is sure to die begin to raffle his clothing (v 18). Of course these words are not just true of the Psalmist but also of the Lord Jesus who suffered greatly for us. But as I said in the introduction we will look at this Psalm next time from a messianic perspective but it is worth saying now that as he suffered for us we also are to suffer for him. We go the way that he went and that way is the way of suffering. What is making the matter worst for the Psalmist is not so much his suffering but his sense of being forsaken by his God.

The Psalmist longs for God's deliverance and help for then he will know that God is not far away (v 19-21). We have this same problem as the Psalmist had. We long for God to act in our

circumstances because then we know that God is not far from us and that God has not abandoned us. It's the same in the church. We long for God to use us in the salvation of souls because we love people and want them to know the Lord.

We want God to save sinners so that he will be glorified in his church but his action in saving people is also an assurance that God is with us as a church that he has not abandoned us. Is that not a question that we sometimes ask in our hearts? When things are very slow in the church perhaps spiritually things are deteriorating and we begin to ask has God abandoned his church.

We long for him to act so that at least we can have some evidence that will assure us that God is still with his people and that he has not forsaken us.

3. WHAT TO DO WHEN WE FEEL ABANDONED BY GOD (vs. 22-31)

We can learn much from how the Psalmist responds to his sense of abandonment. His situation is desperate but notice how he responds.

a) He praises God among his people (vs. 22-25). - He decides in his heart that no matter what his feelings might be saying to him and no matter how desperate his situation is and even though he cannot understand God's response to his prayer he is determined to continue to worship and praise his God (v 22). This he does in the midst of the congregation. What a great lesson for us.

What do we feel like doing when we sense that God has abandoned us and we feel he is far from us? The temptation is to not come to church why bother if God has forsaken me anyway is how we reason. But we must not give in to those thoughts we must continue to come to church and join with the people of God with the praises to our God.

Continue to speak of God to our brothers and sisters in Christ (v 22) and encourage others to join us in praising honouring and revering God (v 23). You may not feel like it, you might even feel a bit of a hypocrite but that is how to deal with our sense of abandonment. All too often we give in to our feelings and so we stop coming to church or we begin to miss the occasional meeting because our experience of God is that we have been abandoned by him.

Something else that the Psalmist promises to do and that is to fulfil his vow within the Assembly of God's people (v25). In other words he promises to fulfil his responsibilities in the community of God's people. Once again if we apply this to the church the Psalmist is telling us to continue to do what we know we ought to do in the church. It is so easy when feeling disappointed with God to lessen our commitment to him in his church.

O we still come to church but instead of twice we only come once. We use to come to the midweek but that soon goes too. When there is evangelism to be done whereas once we were there to do it we now don't turn up. What's the point we argue when I feel so forsaken and let down by God. But that response is the wrong response, keep doing what you have always done, don't slacken off, keep your commitment to God and do what you know you should do and have always done in the church. I want you to notice that it is as the Psalmist is in the midst of the congregation praising God that he realises that the very fact that he is praising God is evidence that God has not forsaken him as he thought (v 25). The praise that is on his lips comes from God, it is God who enables him to praise him and therefore that is the assurance he needs that God is with him.

Although his own experience of God might say that God has forsaken him he is assured by the fact that he is praising God that God has not abandoned him.

b) He remembers the future (vs. 26-31). Even though our own experience might be saying one thing the Psalmist reminds us that we need to see the whole picture and remind ourselves that God is on the throne. It is God who rules (v 3 & 28) and is working out his purpose within our world. Although in the Psalmist own experience it seems that his enemies are in control we are now reminded of the truth that God ultimately is victorious.

Every class and every kind of person whether rich or poor (vs. 26 & 29), in the prime of life or as life is ebbing away (v 29) shall also enjoy the blessing of praising God. It's not just Israel that will praise God but the Psalmist sees a time when all the ends of the earth, people from every tribe tongue and nation will seek the Lord and turn to him (v 27). At the minute everything is bleak for the Psalmist but he knows that in the midst of his bleakness the good news is that God will be worshipped, all future generations will be told about the Lord and they will proclaim the righteousness of the Lord (vs. 30-31).

You see what the Psalmist is doing. He is looking at the complete picture he knows that in his experience it seems that he is abandoned by God. But he knows that God does not abandon his people in fact the reality is that he will be worshipped and praised throughout the world and in every generation God's righteousness will be proclaimed.

How is it going to happen through Jesus coming into our world and dying to save all that call out to him for help? So in the end when the Psalmist takes his eyes off himself and focuses them upon the Lord he has plenty of reasons to praise and thank his God for the Psalmist is on the victory side.

So this is what we must do today if we have this sense of abandonment, we must look at the big picture and remember that Christ has come into the world to save sinners from every tribe tongue and nation. God has not deserted his people but through Christ is building his church so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. If you are a Christian and feel that God has forsaken you then look to the future. You have a bright future your home in heaven is assured because of Christ.

Therefore make sure you join the millions of believers across the world today in thanking God for Jesus and for the fact that he is victorious and we are in Christ, therefore we too are victorious no matter what our circumstances or feelings may say to us.

Amen