

Sorrow into Praise

Psalm 22:1-31

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.*

²² *I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.*

²³ *You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!*

Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

²⁴ *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.*

²⁵ *From you comes the theme of my praise in the
great assembly;*

*before those who fear you I will fulfill my
vows.*

²⁶ *The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!*

²⁷ *All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations*

*will bow down before him,
will bow down before him,*

²⁸ *for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.*

²⁹ *All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before*

*him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.*

³⁰ *Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.*

³¹ *They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!*

Psalm 22: A Lament Psalm

Lament: a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

In a lament psalm, the petitioner addresses God directly on the occasion of some calamity. Most of the lament psalms would eventually turn to an expression of confidence in God and end in a declaration of praise.

Verse	Text	Focus on Self	Focus on God
1-2	<i>“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”</i>	Complaint in distress	
3-5	<i>“Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One” “they [our ancestors] trusted and you delivered them.”</i>		Appeal to God’s holiness and faithfulness (towards Israel)
6-8	<i>“But I am a worm and not a man”</i>	Acknowledgement of brokenness	
9-11	<i>“From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”</i>		Remembering God’s faithfulness (personally)
12	<i>“Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.”</i>	Pleads for help	
13-18	<i>“Strong bulls, roaring lions, dogs, packs of villains” “Poured out like water, bones are out of joint, heart melted within me, mouth is dried up, tongue sticks to the roof, lie in the dust of death”</i>	Intensity of his situation: danger & threat His helplessness	
19-21	<i>“But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.”</i>	Urgent & desperate for God’s intervention	
22-31	<i>“I will declare your name to my people”</i>		Declare & praise God in faith for deliverance

1. Acknowledging our suffering (vv. 1-2)

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.*

The psalmist is someone who knows the Lord and trusts him is forsaken, abandoned by his God, and cries out in agony. He was transparent with his pain and anguish. Are we that honest with God?

Honesty does not mean a lack of faith. Many of us have been misled to think that having faith means we must always keep ourselves together; that we must not feel any negative emotions; or if we ever do, the sorrow must quickly turn into dancing, because we must trust God in whatever circumstances. But, throughout Scriptures, God invites his people to be honest and to wrestle with him.

During his crucifixion, while he was hanging on the cross, Jesus cried out the words from verse 1. Jesus was in excruciating physical pain, he was bearing the betrayal and denial by his disciples, his beloved friends. But, he was also in emotional turmoil as he was literally separated from the Father because he was bearing the sins of the world. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus was not without faith, but he was truthfully crying out his anguish.

- What does that tell us about God?

God does not despise our truthfulness; God welcomes and delights that we truthfully work through things with him.

Many of us do not know how to handle suffering and challenges in life. Some would ignore their emotions, trying to run away while others would drown in it. The more we run away from it or bury it, the more it will affect us in other parts of our lives. On the other extreme, when we are fixated on our suffering, we let the suffering control us. Our whole life is centred on that suffering, and we drown in it. In both ways, we become more miserable. Our happiness depends on the circumstances we are in. We don't experience the love and joy of God that the Bible speaks about. It is important to take time to prayerfully reflect on our lives, on the Word of God, allowing God to work through our issues, to learn to look to God as we face and address suffering.

- Are we running away or ignoring any issues or suffering? (Take a few minutes to quiet down and invite the Holy Spirit to reveal to you.)

2. Wrestle with God (vv. 3-26)

(i) Appeal to God's holiness and faithfulness towards Israel (vv. 3-5)

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.*

God is holy and, in his holiness, God brings justice. He delivers the righteous and brings judgment to the wicked. The psalmist is asking, "Why then is God deaf to his servant who is righteous? Where is justice? Where is deliverance?"

God was faithful towards his forefathers, Israel. God delivered them when they trusted and cried out to God. "Has God stopped giving Israel occasions to praise Him since God is no longer delivering them?"

- Have you been in such situations? What did you do?

(ii) Acknowledgement of brokenness (vv. 6-8)

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."*

"Worm": utterly despised and defenceless. The psalmist acknowledges his brokenness, his helplessness; and it borderlines with having self-pity. He is scorned, despised, mocked and insulted. Yet, he chooses to trust in the Lord.

Verse 8 is based on a false premise: the assumption is God exists for our benefit; to make our lives easy and comfortable.

During the temptation of Jesus, Satan was tempting Jesus in getting him to do things for himself (focus on his own comfort and benefit):

- to make stone into bread to satisfy his hunger
- to throw himself down so that angels could come and minister to him
- to bow down to Satan so he can receive earthly powers and kingdoms.

Jesus overcame the temptations by pointing the focus back God; to the word and will of God.

Satan continues to tempt the disciples of Jesus everyday. We are tempted to build our lives around ourselves; to live in our own comfort, in our convenience. We are made to believe God exists to meet our needs and give us all the benefits we desire. We get upset with God or blame God when things don't go our way.

- What do our prayers look like? Do we focus on the word and will of God? Do we look to God to direct us, to change us to be more like him? Or are our prayers focus on ourselves, focus on making our lives more comfortable and convenient?

(iii) Remembering God's faithfulness personally (vv. 9-11)

- 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.*

In the previous section (vv. 3-5), the psalmist remembers the faithfulness of God upon his forefathers. His knowledge and confidence on God were based on what he saw or heard from others. In verses 9 to 11, the psalmist personalizes God's faithfulness to his own life. He recognized that from the beginning of his life in his mother's womb, God was there, God was the One who knitted him together in his mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

Contrast:

How the people around him treats him (scorned, despised, mocked and insulted)	vs.	How God sees him (made by God, chosen by God, watched over by God, protected by God)
---	-----	--

(iv) Intensity of the situation: danger & threat leading to his helplessness (vv. 13-21)

- 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.*

Verses 13-21 show the intensity of his situation:

Brutal image of danger and threat: “Strong bulls, roaring lions, dogs, packs of villains”.

The psalmist’s depletion: “poured out like water, bones are out of joint, heart melted within me, mouth is dried up, tongue sticks to the roof, lie in the dust of death”.

He is completely helpless. That leads to his intense and urgent cry for help. He knows of no other way. He needs God’s intervention. Breakthrough begins when we recognize we cannot function without God, we come to a place of complete surrender.

(v) Declare and praise God in faith for deliverance (vv. 22-26)

²² *I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.*

*he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.*

²³ *You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!*

²⁵ *From you comes the theme of my praise in the
great assembly;*

²⁴ *For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;*

before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

²⁶ *The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!*

“I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.” (v. 22)

The psalmist speaks in the future tense, “will”. The praise has not happened, the deliverance has not happened; but in faith, the psalmist vows to declare and praise the name of his God. His sorrow turns into a confidence, an assurance, a conviction in the God that he cries out to.

The things that he is currently experiencing from his enemies (being despised, being scorned), he is confident that God does not do that to him (v. 24). The things he currently feels (forsaken by God), he is confident to say God has not hidden his face but listen to his cry for help (v. 24).

- How did this change happen? How did his sorrow turn to praise?

Wrestle with God = Prayer

It was his prayer, his wrestle with God that led with to this change. The bible gives us many examples of people wrestling with God: Jacob, Job, David, Abraham, and even Jesus.

“Wrestle” is not fighting with God to win an argument or prove our point.

“Wrestle” means “to struggle with the difficulty or problem”.

We wrestle with God by sharing with God our thoughts, our pain, our complaints, our disagreements	God is gracious to show us his attributes, his perspective, his will, through Scriptures and his people; through reminding us of the things he has spoken to us, the things that he has done
---	--

As we wrestle with him, in perseverance, we will:

- Find assurance in God, placing our faith in God, rather than letting our circumstances control us
- Trust in who God is, rather than our emotions
- Trust and surrender completely to God.

- Are there areas in your life that God is inviting you to wrestle with him?

3. Wrestle/Prayer is a process

Wrestling with God takes time. It is a process. We don't go from sorrow to praise with one conversation with God. It doesn't happen in one day. Transformation happens over a period of time. God often works in bringing progression gradually. God is concerned with the process of transformation.

- How would reflection and journaling help with our wrestle/prayer with God?

Reflection and journaling help us to record what God is doing and speaking.

- We learn to recognize the little changes God makes in us.
- We learn to see the progression of our growth.
- As we look back on our previous journals, we remember God's faithfulness, we recognize the work of God in our lives and we realize how the little things are important for our growth.

4. Deliverance

The psalmist eventually moved from sorrow to praise for God's deliverance.

- How do we define "deliverance"? What does "deliverance" look like?

In any challenging situation, we all pray for the removal of the difficulty. But, that is not the only deliverance God gives.

- Was Jesus' prayer at the garden of Gethsemane for the cup of suffering to be removed answered? Was he delivered?

Yes, but in a very different way from what we may define deliverance as. He was not spared from crucifixion. He struggled with the pain and the suffering. His deliverance was not being removed from the cross, but his deliverance was the strength to carry on with the plan to save mankind, to obey the Father in receiving this cup of suffering.

Reflect on Timothy Keller's prayer request as he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer:

- For Kathy (his wife) and me, that we use this opportunity to be weaned from the joys of this world and to desire God's presence above all.
- Running the race set before me with joy, because Jesus ran an infinitely harder race, with joy, for me. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

- What does deliverance look like in our suffering?
- What does deliverance look like for the Covid-19 pandemic?

If our whole prayer, our whole perspective of deliverance is to be removed from the difficult circumstances, we are missing out on the true blessings, the abundant life that God gives, especially through these circumstances. It will be very sad if we are delivered from these circumstances, but we did not learn anything; we were the same person we used to be. Breakthrough happens when we ourselves are changed by God. That is deliverance.

All will turn to the Lord (vv. 27-31)

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.
²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and
worship;

all who go down to the dust will kneel before
him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the
Lord.
³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

The effect of his praise of deliverance: all generations within all nations will come to know the Lord. This is Israel's calling from the beginning, to be a light to the other nations so that the other nations would know Yahweh. Israel did not fulfil that calling, but it was fulfilled by Jesus. His birth, teaching, life, death and resurrection became the beacon of light to the whole world, pointing every nation, every generation to Himself as the Son of God.

The Gospel, the good news, is that Jesus bore all the pain and suffering, so that you and I do not need to bear the same pain and suffering. He literally suffered many of the brutal things we read in Psalm 22, in exchange of our salvation. He was rejected and abandoned by the Father, so that we will never be forsaken by God.

There is a great difference between suffering without hope, and suffering as Christians with hope in Christ. There may be days where things get very challenging to a point that we are unable to see any light at the end of the tunnel, where we don't understand what is going on, but we can be confident and assured that *"neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom 8:38-39) That is the Gospel!

Prayer Items

1. Assurance and confidence in the love of God in and through Christ

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:38-39)

2. Transformation/Growth:

- We learn to wrestle with God
- We learn to persevere with our eyes on Christ
- We learn God's definition of "deliverance"
- We learn to face and address suffering with hope in Christ

3. Unity in the Church

4. Covid-19 pandemic

- Deliverance
- Front-liners: medical officers; armed forces
- Leaders (government & companies): wisdom, compassion, righteousness
- Economy: especially those who are badly affected: poor, homeless, more vulnerable people (refugees, foreigners)

5. Salvation of souls; opportunities & courage to witness

6. Binil, Asmita & baby Yohan: safe delivery