

GOD'S PRESENCE IN SUFFERING - PS. 22

The Life of David in the Psalms #7

Will was a pitiful sight. He was only 18 years old, but he had lost his desire to live. Only a couple of years before, Will had been a young man with great dreams and a bright future. He was a brilliant student in literature, math, history and the arts. He had been a gifted athlete playing baseball, football and hockey at school. He was a committed Christian. He had even sensed God's leading in his life to go into the ministry. In fact, Will had applied and been accepted at Yale Divinity School. But then, in March of Will's senior year, one event happened that started a downward spiral in Will's life.

He was playing on his school hockey team against Army. One of his opponents swung his hockey stick back by mistake and smashed Will in the mouth. Almost all of his teeth had been knocked out as his mouth was suddenly a mass of bloody pulp. Will was rushed to the hospital where he received stitches and his wounds were cleaned and dressed. But Will's problems didn't stop there. As he was recovering at home from his mouth injury, he started to have some stomach disorders. When he went back to the doctor for his stomach problems, the doctor found that his heart was beating very irregularly. Fearing that any strenuous activity would now affect his erratic heart, the doctor confined Will to complete bedrest. Within just a few months, Will had gone from being a star athlete and gifted student with the brightest future ahead of him to being a semi-invalid, confined to his home. There would be no more sports, probably no more school. Will's mind became obsessed with one thought day and night - the thought

that he was going to die young. And his spirits plunged into the depths of despair.

8 years passed. Will was just a shadow of the person that he had been before. Gone was any optimism; gone was any joy in his life; his life was now defined by degrees of suffering.

All the time that Will was going through this dark period of suffering in his life, his younger brother was standing by watching helplessly, praying for wisdom as to how to support the one he loved so much. Finally, he got an idea. He came to Will and suggested a joint business venture. Maybe it was true that Will couldn't be physically strenuous anymore, but he still had that keen mind. If Will would be the brains of the outfit, he, the younger brother, would handle most of the physical matters. Will thought about the offer and finally decided to accept it. And today we are all happy that he did, for few people have changed our lifestyles as much as Will and his younger brother. For as Will became involved in this business venture with his younger brother, his spirits began to lift and finally to soar - and he took a whole nation and a world up with him. For those 2 brothers first set up a small bicycle shop. But eventually, Wilbur and Orville Wright grew in their technological skills until they invented the first airplane. And now, amazingly, we can go down to the Gerald Ford Airport, board a plane and in a few hours fly to a place where it would have taken people in the Wright's day years to travel to.

But few people today remember that this life-changing invention of the airplane that we take for granted today was born out of intense, deep, even suicidal suffering.

One of the most difficult lessons that anybody learns in life is that fact that a certain amount of suffering is indispensable to ultimate success. For there are lessons that are learned in suffering that cannot be learned in any other way.

One of the most interesting verses in the entire Bible is found in Hebrews 2:10 where it says of the Lord Jesus Christ, *In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.* The word *perfect* means *complete or fully mature*. Here in this amazing verse we see the fact that suffering was not optional for Jesus Christ, the son of God. It was absolutely necessary. For even though He was the perfect man, the sinless Son of God, there were certain areas of his life that would have not been completed unless he experienced suffering. So Jesus Christ, the author of our salvation had to suffer for he was made perfect or complete through suffering.

So it should not surprise us at all to find an intense period of suffering in the life of David - the very period that we have been looking at these past weeks as we have witnessed his exile from his home and his family running from the threatening sword of King Saul. God was in the process of making David into a man of great character who would be an influential King and leader of his people. Suffering was needed in this process.

Nor should it surprise us when God allows suffering to enter our lives. For nobody is immune to suffering. A measure of suffering is needed to teach lessons that cannot be learned in any other way. So, like David, we are wise if we cooperate with God in learning the lessons in suffering that we need to learn,

lessons that help to complete and perfect our character.

The Psalm that we are going to look at this morning is one of the most important ones that David wrote. David was obviously enduring great suffering when he wrote this Psalm. But whether he consciously knew it or not, David was also writing prophetically of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ for no fewer than a dozen specific prophecies were fulfilled from this Psalm when Jesus walked up that hill called Calvary and gave his life as a sin sacrifice for us and it was this very Psalm that was in the mind and on the lips of Jesus as he hung upon that cross.

As we briefly study this Psalm that speaks to the theme of suffering, I would like to look with you at **3 types of suffering** that David endured and Christ endured to an even greater degree and which we all will endure to some degree - and the comfort that David found when enduring these kinds of suffering. Because of the prophetic importance of this Psalm, we will also be speaking of the atoning work of our Savior on the cross as we work through this passage.

1. First of all, note with me in the first 2 verses the suffering of ISOLATION AND FEELINGS OF LONELINESS - VS. 1-2

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

*We don't know the exact historical setting out of which David wrote this Psalm. Most commentators feel that it was composed during the time of his exile while he was on the run from King Saul. Many feel that the specific setting for

this Psalm is found in 1 Samuel 30. David and his men had offered to join King Achish of Gath in battle. Achish wanted David to come along, but God had moved in the hearts of the other Philistine rulers to halt this plan so that David would not have to join the Philistines in battle against King Saul and the Israelite army. So David and his men were sent back to Ziklag where they and their families were living, secure in Philistine land from the hand of Saul. But when David led his men back to Ziklag, he found the worst possible scenario. Some Amalekites had raided the town in their absence and had taken all of their families and possessions. Understandably, David's men were beside themselves with anger and grief having lost all of their families and possessions, and they turned their venom on their leader, David. I Samuel 30:6 records David's dilemma: *David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.*

This was undoubtedly one of the lowest points in David's life. He had already experienced rejection from King Saul and the recognized leaders of Israel. He had just been rejected by the Philistines - they didn't value his fighting abilities enough to want him in battle with them. He comes back to Ziklag to find that his family and all of his possessions had been confiscated by the Amalekites. And now his formerly loyal men whom he had trained and who had fought beside him had mutinied on him - they were plotting to take his life by stoning him. It just couldn't get any worse than this. You can see why David would cry out in anguish - *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* I feel so all alone. I feel so

isolated. I feel so forsaken.

As forsaken as David felt during this low period in his life, there is another example in history of one who was more forsaken. For this individual not only had his enemies turn on him and his formerly loyal friends leave him, but he also experienced more than just the threat of execution. This individual was being executed by the cruelest and most painful method practiced at the time. And it was as the Lord Jesus Christ was hanging upon the cross of Calvary, paying for our sins as God's sin sacrifice that the final and most painful rejection of all occurred. As Jesus Christ was becoming sin for us, his holy and righteous father could not maintain fellowship with him. God the Father had to turn his back on his one and only son. David might have felt forsaken by God - but in reality God never forsook David. And the prophet Samuel records that he ultimately found strength in the Lord his God. But God did have to turn his back on his Son as he hung upon the cross of Calvary. Is it any wonder that these words were on the lips of Jesus as one of the 7 phrases that he uttered from the cross? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

What can a person do when he or she experiences the suffering of feeling isolated and all alone? Notice David's comfort that he expresses in verses 3-5 which undoubtedly was the only comfort that Jesus Christ had on that hill called Golgotha. READ 22:3-5:

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. ⁴ In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. ⁵ They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

*The reality of any situation no matter how painful and threatening it might be is that God has not abdicated his throne. Even though David felt so isolated and alone, God was still directing his life. He had already protected him from fighting against his own kinsmen with the Philistines, and he was going to not only help David recover his possessions and family as well as the possessions and families of all the rest of his men, but he was also going to use this occasion to remove the Amalekites as a future threat to him in the future.

*David needed to remember that God had delivered many of his forefathers from worse situations than this before. God had taken the whole nation out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery in a manner that was simply miraculous. God had delivered his people in the past, and He would certainly be faithful to David now in his predicament.

*We can only imagine the comfort that this passage brought to the mind and heart of the Lord Jesus as He was in the midst of his execution. For while our Savior only quoted the first verse, it is clear that this entire Psalm was on his mind and in his heart. True, the situation appeared to be bleak. This was the moment when the prince of darkness was gloating. Yet God the Father was still on the throne. And just as he had delivered his people in the past, so he would not forsake His holy one or leave his body to decay in the tomb. Just as God would work this low point in David's life out for his good, so God would bring about the greatest blessing of all for the human race through the apparently tragic death of his one and only Son. For because the Lord Jesus Christ died, we now have the opportunity to live - and to live for all eternity.

There are some here this morning who are suffering feelings of isolation and loneliness. If God met his servant David in his time of need, and if God brought eternal good out of the suffering of his one and only Son, can't the God who never leaves his Sovereign throne meet you in your time of need this morning?

2. A second kind of suffering that we find in the next few verses is **LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND FEELINGS OF REJECTION - VS. 6-8**

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

*One of the natural consequences of feeling isolated and alone is feeling worthless, having a loss of self-esteem. When we feel that everyone has rejected us, we don't even feel like we are part of the human race. Here David testifies that he doesn't even feel human. He says that he is a worm and not a man. His men were mocking him, they were ridiculing him, they were picking up stones and threatening him with them.

But it is most interesting to note how David's feelings are prophetic and even more fully fulfilled in the suffering that the Lord Jesus Christ endured. I wish we had the time this morning to develop this completely. Let me just summarize quickly by saying that the word that is translated *worm* here is the very same word that is also translated *crimson* in Isaiah 1:18 where it says, *Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*

There are a couple of Hebrew words that could be translated *worm*. But this specific one that David chooses here describes a small grub like worm that was used in making a very valuable red dye. This dye was literally made by taking a whole bunch of these *towla* worms and crushing them. Out of these worms being crushed like grapes making wine the valuable crimson-red dye was secured.

What a picture this is of what transpired on the cross of Calvary. The Bible says that it pleased the Father to crush His son. As the very lifeblood flowed from the hands and feet and side of the Lord Jesus, he was like this *towla* worm - a priceless dye was brought forth that would once and for all cover our sins. But the blessing that Christ's death was producing in no way minimizes the suffering which he endured - the suffering of being dehumanized as a worm, the suffering of being looked upon and scorned and mocked and insulted as one who people were regarding as less than human.

What was David's comfort as he was suffering the loss of self-esteem and rejection and what was Christ's comfort as he reflected upon these words on the cross of Calvary? Notice them with me in verses 9-10:

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 upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.”

The simple fact that David realized is that none of the mocking, ridiculing men around him had anything to do with his existence. In fact, no human being can ultimately give us life. Yes, it is true that our mothers and fathers were instrumental in the birth process. But the Bible is clear when it says that God is

ultimately the author of life. God is the one who gives life to that union of sperm and egg. And when God creates something, he pronounces it to be good. When God makes a human being, no one has the power to dehumanize it.

And what a thrilling thought this must have been to the Lord Jesus Christ as he hung upon the cross. Here he was being dehumanized by the mocking crowds around him. They were spitting upon him, they were hurling insults to him. But in his mind as he hung upon that tree, he must have gone back to this Psalm and seen how even the insults were fulfilling God's prophecy. And he must also have gone back to his own miraculous birth - born of the virgin Mary. If God the Holy Spirit had overshadowed the virgin Mary so that she might be enabled to conceive the very Son of God himself, who among this mocking and ridiculing crowd had the power or authority to declare him to be less than human. It is God and God alone who is the giver and sustainer of life.

One of the major goals of the educators in our nation today is to build self-esteem into the lives of our young people. Yet in spite of all of the efforts and the billions of dollars that are being funneled into this purpose, young people and adults alike continue to struggle with feelings of poor self-esteem and rejection. But when a person comes to grips with the singular fact that God and God alone is the one who has given life made a human being with a divine image and likeness, it really doesn't matter anymore what others might think. Peer pressure loses its grip when confronted with this powerful and freeing truth.

3. We only have time to briefly mention the 3rd type of suffering -
PHYSICAL PAIN - VS. 12-18

¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. ¹³ Roaring lions tearing 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 away within me. ¹⁵ My strength 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 have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

*It is obvious that David is speaking figuratively here - for there is no record in his life of any experience that would approximate what he is describing in these verses. For David is describing an execution - and he never had to suffer that literally. But we all recognize that emotional and spiritual suffering can bring even physical torment to our bodies. And it is likely that David was enduring some agonizing times when he wrote these words.

*But isn't it amazing how the Holy Spirit guided David to literally describe the physical sufferings that the Lord Jesus Christ would endure upon the cross of Calvary? His **bones being jerked out of joint** which was the natural consequence of crucifixion. For when the condemned was nailed to the cross while still on the ground and that cross was then lifted to an upright position and then dropped into its slot in the earth with a thud, the arms were jerked right out of their sockets. **The severe thirst that was caused by the loss of bodily fluids.** As the blood drained from the body, the dehydrating flesh would cry out for water, liquids to replenish the system. Some experts in this area claim that the severe thirst was

actually among the greatest of all the sufferings endured by the one being crucified. That nagging desire for water that never went away. In fact, the only personal complaint that Jesus uttered in his 7 phrases from the cross was word, *I thirst*. **The hands and feet that were pierced** - unique only to Roman persecution. Before crucifixion, there wasn't another means of execution that would pierce both hands and feet. Yet, amazingly, David writes these words 1,000 years before Christ died upon the cross. **People staring and gloating at his naked body**. One of the most humbling elements of Roman crucifixion is the fact that the condemned was forced to hang naked at a busy intersection before a gawking and mocking world. This was especially humbling for the Jewish people who valued modesty so highly. Details, even to the point of predicting **the gambling for his clothing**. The physical suffering that the Lord Jesus Christ endured in his atoning death.

Where can any comfort be found when intense physical suffering enters one's life? Notice verses 19-24 in closing:

¹⁹ But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. ²⁰ Deliver my life 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 brothers; in the congregation 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 disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

*God did not desert his servant David. Yes, the situation appeared to be pretty hopeless. But God restored David's possessions and family and in just a short time David would be the king of Judah and then over all Israel.

*Nor did God desert his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Yes, the situation from the cross appeared to be hopeless. But in reality, sin and death were being defeated and the serpent was being crushed under the feet of the seed of woman. And in just 3 short days, there would be new life and hope that would be realized forever because of Christ's resurrection from the grave.

*Nor will God ever desert any of his children. It doesn't matter how severe the suffering might be - it doesn't matter what kind of suffering it might be (loneliness, rejection or physical) , God will never despise or disdain the sufferings of his children, but has committed himself to come to their aid and even bring blessing out of their sufferings.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you are in one of those periods of your life when you are not experiencing any suffering. Life is great. Everything seems to be going your way. Just wait, your time will come. Prepare yourself so that you can gain the most benefit from the sufferings that you will endure.

Perhaps you are in the midst of some deep suffering this morning. Take heart. God brought his servant David through his suffering; God brought his one and only Son through his suffering; and God brought great blessing to both of their lives and ours as well through their sufferings. God will not desert you during your time of need. And God can also bring great blessing through your suffering as well.