

Text: Psalm 22 (Easy English Version)

Sunday 3rd May 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Boys and girls, what do you think this noise is? Listen up!
(PLAY SOUND OF ROARING LION)

Can you guess what that noise was? Shout out your answer! The right answer is...“a lion”. Well done if that’s what you said!

The sound you heard was a lion roaring. Do you think you can hear a lion roar from very far away (stretch hands) or only very close (put hands close)? Where will you put your hands? What you going to pick?...the answer is very far away, sometimes even miles away.

Now, why are we talking about lions?! Well, in the psalm we read today, we heard another prayer of David, and he begins **with these words: ‘My God! My God, why have you left me alone? Why is my help far away? I am crying out in great pain!’ (v1)**

How do you think David is feeling at the start of this prayer? Thumbs up if you think he’s feeling good...thumbs down for not feeling good...I think David is...not feeling good. **I think he is feeling sad, hurt, scared by things that are happening around him and to him.**

And so, David cries out to God in prayer, he roars to God, as loud as a lion because God seems distant; God seems absent. I don’t think David is looking for an answer to his questions; I think he just wants God to act!

Because what makes this even more difficult for David is that God has acted before, both for David and for his ancestors. **David says:** 'Our ancestors trusted in you...[and] you saved them. They called to you and...you did not disappoint them.' (v4-5) David cannot make sense of God's absence, God's distance, because that has not been the case for others.

Also, David remembers that God was like a midwife to him **when he was young:** 'Lord, you brought me safely to birth....From the day that I was born, I was already in your care. You have been my God since my mother gave birth to me.' (v9-10)

God brought David safely into the world and laid him upon his mother – so again, why is God absent, so distant, that the roar of David's soul is not heard?

Now, I wonder if we resonate with David's words here? Does God seem absent and distant to us? Do you feel in the depths of anguish and doubt just now? Is your plea also for God not be far from you and to help? And if you are in that place, or if you've been in that place, I wonder if you think your faith is failing or imperfect?

Last week I mentioned a few times when I had experienced difficulties, and in one of those periods of life I remember being on a weekend away in Pitlochry with friends from church. We invited a speaker to come that weekend, a minister, and in some of my free time I spoke with him about how I was feeling, that what I had experienced had rocked my faith and I felt at my lowest, I felt far from God. I thought my faith was diminished.

But then he said, “what if this is the moment when your faith is actually at its strongest? Because it would be really easy to give up on God, to walk away, and yet you are holding on and seeking God even in these hard times. That speaks of faith to me, a strong faith.”

David says, ‘My God! My God...’ (v1), even when all the evidence suggests that God is absent, maybe non-existent. David still holds on to his relationship with God because he sees what God has done in the past and so he continues to put his hope in God now. This is maybe the moment when his faith is strongest.

Boys and girls, there’s also something else very important about this psalm – do you know who else prayed these words? If I used some sign language, could you guess?

(sign the cross – palm to palm)

Who do you think prayed these words?...Did you guess?

It's "Jesus"! Many years after David, Jesus used the words of this prayer when He was facing the most difficult moment in His life: dying on the cross for our sin, dying there because He loved us. And when He was on the cross, and our sin was like a weight upon His shoulders, Jesus said, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46)

As Jesus prays the words of David, upon the cross, it shows us that Jesus understands our hard times, He understands those moments when Father God seems distant, absent. Jesus encourages us to come to God with raw honesty and to see that as a sign of faith, maybe even the darkest moments of life.

This psalm of David is a prayer of lament, anguishing over the apparent absence of God, and yet it can be a model of prayer for us in these times as well.

But boys and girls, towards the end of the psalm, what David is feeling changes, he uses different words. Is David feeling upbeat (raise hands) or very low (lower hands) at the end of the psalm?...He's feeling really upbeat, David is full of praise for God. So, why the sudden change?

Well in the middle of the psalm, **we read these words:**

'Lord, please do not stay far away from me!...Keep me safe!...Save my life...*I know that you have answered my prayer...God did not forget to help...He did not turn away...*' (v19-21, 24)

At some point God acted, at some point God broke the silence, He came close again and helped. And so now David is able to gather with his people and praise God, in fact he says: 'I will tell my people how great you are...' (v22) and then he calls others to join in praising God, to see that God is worthy of praise.

Now, this may feel similar to the "I will..." statement of last week's psalm, but it is different. David is not simply talking to God about what God has done, David is talking to others about what God has done, first to his fellow Israelites, but then he envisages this good news of God rolling out to the nations and to future generations. This good news is that God is still Lord, God is still King, He is still on His throne despite the experiences we have which cause us to cry out, "my God, my God".

What great action of God might we look to? What great action of God shows that He cares for us and for the nations? **Well, of course, it's the death** and resurrection of Jesus, the ultimate sign of God's love for this world, the way He broke the silence, speaking to us in the person of Jesus, drawing close to our brokenness, because Jesus is Immanuel, 'God with us.' (Matthew 1:23)

Psalm 22 is used 24 times in the New Testament because again and again there are words and ideas here which point to Jesus and only Jesus. Never in the life of David does **verse 16 actually happen**: 'a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.'

So, here is another prophetic word from God through David, written hundreds of years before Jesus...

so as to help us see that Jesus is the promised one, the one who would be afflicted, broken, for the sake our world, to give us hope, a world-changing hope, the hope of Psalm 22.

Jesus, on the cross, roared out, “my God, my God...”, but He also said, “It is finished...” (John 19:30) Not a cry of defeat, but of victory – that His death was ushering in a glorious hope, even more glorious than what is painted in the psalm. Because our hope through Jesus is that one day a time will come when we **see Him face to face**, and ‘He will wipe every tear from [our] eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things [will have] passed away.’ (Rev. 21:4)

Friends, this psalm, and the very life of Jesus, acknowledge the hard realities of our world; that we experience brokenness and the depths of anguish. Yet at the same time, both the psalm and the life of Jesus, remind us that God has acted, God has heard and delivered; ‘He has done it’, ‘it is finished’.

And so now, there is a call to take up those later words of **David as well: ‘I will tell...how great you are...’ (v22 EEV), ‘I will declare your name...’ (v22 NIV) Brothers and sisters, in these difficult days, yes, this psalm invites us to be honest, but it also invites us to share the hope we have, because of Jesus, with others: that ‘He has done it’ (v31 NIV), ‘it is finished’ – God has broken the silence, He is not absent, but has acted and came close in Jesus. To Him be all glory, now and forever. Amen.**

We're going to take a moment to pray now, and in our prayer, we're going to use the sign language for "Jesus", which is this...we are going to do that four times, and each time remember or pray for something. So, let us pray.

Let us make the sign of Jesus and remember how He felt left alone, just as you might feel alone today.

Let us make the sign of Jesus again and remember that He died for us.

Let us make the sign of Jesus again and remember that Jesus rose from the dead, giving us hope.

Let us make the sign of Jesus one more time and ask to God to remind us of someone who needs to hear the good news of Jesus this week.

Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.

We close with our final hymn, "Our eyes have seen the glory".