

# Seek Him

## Psalm 22:23-31

This Psalm is very familiar to most Christians. You may not recognize it from the verse we read; however when I quote the first verse, you will know it immediately. It starts with “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” It is with reverence and deep humility that we hear the words of Psalm 22. The cry of abandonment and the awful details of the psalmist's ordeal remind us that suffering, whether or not it turns out to be "redemptive," is still suffering. This Psalm reminds us of the Friday of Jesus' suffering and death. As the Gospels recount Jesus' passion, they include eight citations of psalms, five of which are from Psalm 22.

Interestingly, our verses begin with a summons to seek and to praise. "You who fear the LORD, praise him...those who seek him shall praise the Lord!" In the context of a psalm expressing abandonment, humiliation, and despair, how does that work? By what right or reason does the psalmist summon people who are broken and brutalized to seek and praise?

Like the original audience, in our congregation and community, as in any other, we have examples of brokenness. You may not have been personally brutalized, but many of us have been drawn in by circumstances of association, friendship, and sympathy. When a plant closes, the losses ripple through town. Seek Him and praise God? When a teenager is hit by a drunk driver, the paramedics, hospital nurses, high school teachers, and countless friends are all drawn in. Seek Him and praise God? When our life-long companions and friends leave us with the numerous problems and challenges that we must now face along...seek Him and praise Him? When

Egyptian, Christian brothers are killed by ISIS only because of their faith...seek Him and praise Him? Our hearts are broken and you want us to do what?

The ground upon which such efforts must stand is revealed in verse 24. The Lord has not despised the afflictions of the afflicted! The Lord has not turned away, but has heard. This is the same bold affirmation of faith that Abraham and Sarah experienced; the faith that claims the promise of grace, and is reckoned as righteousness; the faith that Peter has not (yet) affirmed, the faith that empowered disciples to endure suffering. The Lord has not despised the afflictions of the afflicted! It is this faith in the God-who-hears that has been and continues to be the ground upon which our praise stands. When we did not know how God would get us out of a financial, relationship, or emotional situation.

We may not be happy with everything we go through, there is still room to seek and praise God. While praise and thanksgiving are close kin, they are not identical. The summons is to seek and praise, which related to the nature and being of God. There is always much to be thankful for. But our lessons direct our thoughts especially to the self-giving character of God. Seek Him and praise God.

Another thing we need to remember, especially in 2015, there is a difference between feelings of disappointment and sadness and "depression." The psalmist was struggling with personal and spiritual survival. If you are dealing with loss of weight, loss of sleep, loss of health, loss of relationships, you need to see your doctor. In Psalm 22, the psalmist is apparently confronted by actual circumstances of persecution, brutality, and abandonment. In clinical depression, the conviction that one is worthless, alone, and inescapably bound by troubles is generated from within, and may

or may not correspond to outward circumstances. "Depression is a complex but treatable medical condition. If you or a loved one is severely depressed, seek help. If you entertain thoughts of self-harm, talk to a qualified professional immediately." **Thomas Edward Mcgrath**

In general human experience, those who are strong need not fear; those who are weak are those that fear. Psalm 22 paints a very different picture. It is precisely those who are weak and vulnerable who are cared for by the God who must be feared.

Nonetheless, God does not despise the affliction of the weak.

We humans are called to give the sacrifice of praise, to live out lives that honor this God. We are called to praise and glorify, acknowledging the sovereignty of God over all. Calvin suggests that whatever the time of the composition of this text, the clear message is that the psalmist engages in praise, and enjoins the people of Israel to join in it, in the midst of the affliction, before deliverance has come. This is especially poignant in this, the second Sunday of Lent, as we read of God's fidelity to us and our need for fidelity to God even while we await the completion of the work of Christ.

We continue to work and hope that the "poor shall eat and be satisfied," even as we witness the many who still hunger around the world. We celebrate at the Lord's Table and taste and see, yet experience the real absence of Christ simultaneously with the real presence of Christ. Such an experience of Christ at the Table is part of the reason why many otherwise monthly-Communion congregations have taken up weekly communion during Lent.

When that celebration of worship around the Table is connected to the physical feeding of the poor, the response of gratitude and praise for a yet-to-be-fulfilled work of God comes most clearly into view. Just as the

psalmist praises God in the midst of affliction, so we worship God while still awaiting the complete fulfillment of the kingdom. Christ, in his affliction, has assured us of God's presence, and we, in our afflictions, pass on the same assurance to others.

The scope of the psalmist's vision expands from the afflicted, the poor, those who fear God, and the psalmist's brothers and sisters, to the ends of the earth, and "all the families of the nations shall worship before him." The worship of the people of Israel is instrumental to the worship of all the peoples of the earth. Also our worship shows others how to seek Him and to praise Him.

Even those who have died or think they have nothing to offer, shall live for this God. Christians cannot help but see the shadow of Christ as we read these verses of death and rebirth. This weekend I watched public television and many of the programs were in celebration of African-American and Italian-American contributions. In both cases, those who have already died worship God as a proclamation of deliverance to future generations.

### **Charles A. Wiley**

Last week I have the occasion to be part of a prayer group. We were praying about a specific situation. Most of us were praying for strength and endurance and faith to see us through a very difficult and frightening situation. Then one person started praying and giving God thanks for how they believed that God was going to answer prayers and we left that prayer meeting feeling empowered, because we had sought God and already begun to give praise for what God was going about the situation. Brothers and sisters, seek God and give God praise for what God is already doing in your life.

In my reading last week I ran across *A Morning Watch* by Jacob Boehme. It reminds us to seek and praise him in our study, in our relationships, in our prayer life.

**On Waking:** Living Lord, you have watched over me, and put your hand on my head, during the long, dark hours of night. Your holy angels have protected me from all harm and pain. To you, Lord, I owe life itself. Continue to watch over me and bless me during the hours of day.

**On Rising:** Rule over me this day, O God, leading me on the path of righteousness. Put your Word in my mind and your truth in my heart, that this day I neither think nor feel anything except what is good and honest. Protect me from all lies and falsehood, helping me to discern deception wherever I meet it. Let my eyes always look straight ahead on the road you wish me to tread, that I might not be tempted by any distraction. And make my eyes pure, that no false desires may be awakened within me.

**On Going to Work:** Give me, dear Lord, a pure heart and a wise mind, that I may carry out my work according to your will. Save me from all false desires, from pride, greed, envy and anger, and let me accept joyfully every task you set before me. Let me seek to serve the poor, the sad and those unable to work. Help me to discern honestly my own gifts that I may do the things of which I am capable, and happily and humbly leave the rest to others. Above all, remind me constantly that I have nothing except what you give me, and can do nothing except what you enable me to do.

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