

HE HEARS US

Psalms 22:1–31

Key Verse: 22:24

“For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.”

Does it ever seem that you are not being heard? We may share something honest, but people ignore us. At times we may be surrounded, exhausted, and feel like no one cares. In Psalm 22 this happens to David. He feels “so far” from God, unheard, forsaken, then begs God to “be not far from” him (1–11). He says more about his sufferings and exclaims to God, “Do not be far off!” (12–21) But when he realizes God *has* heard him, he promises to praise him in the congregation, and sees how this good news will reach the whole earth, even to future generations (22–31). Still, some words in this Psalm are uncomfortable to us. Why not just focus on the positive? But if we reflect on all these words, it leads us to a much closer, deeper relationship with God. Ultimately it points us to our Lord Jesus and the confidence we can have toward him. We especially want to focus on the truth that God hears us. How is it possible that he hears us? How should we respond? May God speak to us through his word.

I. “Why are you so far?” (1–11)

In our Psalms series thus far, this is the first one that’s called a “lament.” A lament is a passionate expression of grief, sorrow, or even complaint. But to us, this may not seem a right way to talk to God. We should come to God with awe, respect, and thanks, right? But we also should come to him honestly and tell him all we have in our hearts. And yet, if he isn’t really listening, what’s the point?

Read verses 1–2. Three times here David says “my God.” He’s not just complaining; he really knows God and has been close to him. But now, things are different. He feels “forsaken,” “so far” from God. Twice he asks, “Why?” He’s been groaning, crying day and night, and still feels not saved, that he has no answer. There doesn’t seem to be anything David has done that would cause God to ignore him. For any faithful believer, there are times, even long stretches, when we may hear only silence and feel like David here.

But he doesn’t just say these things; how else does he pray? Read verses 3–5. He’s expressing his faith in God. David knows God is holy, not unrighteous. He knows God is “enthroned on the praises of Israel.” He means the entire nation has known how good God has been to them. Three times David repeats that in their history they *trusted* in God, and God delivered them, rescued them, and did not put them to shame. David knows and believes that *trusting in God* brings real salvation. But though he knows and trusts God, he has to be honest. Read verses 6–8. David tells God how low he feels: less than human, as low as a worm. He’s been scorned and despised. People are mocking him, even mocking his trust in God and commitment to God. Such mockery is unbearable.

Then he says more. Read verses 9–10. These are intimate words. David knows that from the beginning God is the one who's been deeply interested in his life, caring for and nurturing him. From his birth it's God who's been sustaining and protecting him. So he's implying, "*You wouldn't abandon me now.*" He's appealing to God's great faithfulness, speaking as a loving child to his loving Father. In this, David has the image of Jesus. His words to God here are so compelling. Finally, he makes one request. Read verse 11. He's simply telling him he's in trouble and there's none to help, and simply asking him to be near him. His intimate words and one simple request show us how to pray. Some people pray for many important and practical things. But they miss the *essential* one: *asking God to be near me*. It's not to solve anything or even prove anything; it's not epic; it's just asking God what we need most: his own presence.

II. "Do not be far off!" (12–21)

In this part David honestly tells God what's been happening to him. Read verses 12–13. "Bashan" was a place famous in Israel for its strong bulls. Lions were famous for ripping their victims apart, then roaring. David is surrounded not by powerful and dangerous animals, but by scary people, hungry to get rid of him. We saw in Psalm 18 how Saul raised his hand against David. Now it seems many more have surrounded him. What's going on? When David was just a shepherd boy, God prompted Samuel to anoint him to be king of Israel someday. But as the years passed and the time got closer for that to happen, many others were also hungry for that position. Perhaps this is what David saw here. Desire for power and position can still turn people into vicious political animals.

At this point, what is David's condition? Read verses 14–15. His strength is spent, like poured-out water. All his bones are out of joint, meaning it's too painful even to move. The courage of his heart has melted away. A "potsherd" is a broken piece of pottery, and David feels like a dried up one, ready to crumble even more. He's so dry, he can't even speak. He's sensing God may be about to lay him in the dust of death. Why does he feel this way? Read verses 16–18. He's been mauled, starved, shamed, and now they're gambling for his clothing, even before he's dead. It seems too late for anything to be done for him.

At this lowest point David prays again. Up to now he's been lamenting, questioning, and saying how he feels: abandoned, abused, and scared. But now he's crying out in faith to God once more. Read verses 19–21. David cries, "O LORD," calling on the one he knows loves him. He cries, "O you my help," the one who's always been right there with him, carrying him through it all. He cries, "Do not be far off!" He pleads, "Come quickly to my aid," "save me." When God comes near us, this is what he does. At our darkest moments, we need to know that God and only God can save us from our enemies, even death itself.

And notice how David suddenly says, "you have rescued me" (21b). The Hebrew phrase is literally, "you have answered me." We don't know how, but David's honest lamenting and sharing has finally brought him to a place where he can hear God's answer. It's the answer of

God's salvation. It holds another key to the world of prayer. It can seem so hard to start talking to God, so impossible even for him to help. But we need to persevere in speaking honestly with God and even crying to him. And like David, we need to keep asking God to be close. As we get closer to him, pouring out our hearts, we will surely hear his answer.

III. "For he has heard" (22–31)

When David realizes that God has answered his prayer, he bursts into praises. Read verses 22–23. It's really an awesome thing that the living God hears the prayers of his servant. When we appreciate God's answer to prayer, we can only stand in awe of him, glorify and praise him. We also should urge one another to praise him. It's amazing how David's words are transformed from such painful lament to such glorious praise as he experiences God's answer. His faith in God who answers prayer blesses the whole congregation.

Then he tells us the main point of this Psalm. It's why he praises God so wholeheartedly among his people. Read verse 24. God is just the opposite of sinful human beings. When we have some affliction, misfortune or sickness, people are quick to judge, despise, dismiss, or even hide from us. But David realizes God has not despised or abhorred him in his affliction. God has not hidden his face from him, but has heard him, when he cried to him. This is good news not just for David but for all afflicted, unfortunate, sick people. No matter how sick or troubled we may be, if we cry out to God, he hears us.

How can we have this faith? Ultimately, it's pointing us to Jesus. Psalm 22 has the most specific prophecies of his crucifixion. Jesus cried out from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (1)¹ Using the words of verses 7–8 the religious leaders mocked him on the cross.² Verses 14–18 describe his crucified body and how the soldiers gambled for his clothing.³ But it's about more than just prophecies fulfilled. Jesus forsaken by God was also raised from the dead. He was not really forsaken: God the Father answered the prayer of his Son. Through his Son forsaken, we, who deserve to be forsaken due to our sins, can now draw near our holy Father God and get right with him (2 Cor.5:21). When we receive Jesus, forsaken for us, all our sins are forgiven. We receive the Holy Spirit, and now we can call God "Abba, Father."⁴ Because forsaken Jesus takes away our sins, our holy Father God now hears our prayers.

Psalm 22 also shows us that our prayers don't have to be perfect. Sometimes prayer can be messy, emotional, confused, and questioning. But through our Lord Jesus, who was forsaken in our places, God hears us. We all need to pray with this faith. Sometimes he still seems silent. But he *does* hear us. So let's keep crying out to him, believing he really does hear us. Apostle John tells us, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask

¹ Matt.27:46; Mark 15:34.

² Matt.27:39–43; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 23:35.

³ Matt.27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34b; John 19:23–24.

⁴ Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6.

anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”⁵

In our ministry we have so many prayer topics: world mission, raising spiritual leaders, campus evangelism, discipleship, spiritual revival, our families, children’s ministries, those struggling with illnesses, and more. It’s good to be praying for it all. But Psalm 22 shows us how we also need to get honest with God, talk to him *personally*, tell him what we’re feeling, all the challenges we’re facing, and just ask God to be with us and help us. He’s ready to hear us.

For David, realizing that God hears us inspires us with authentic praises to God and renews and deepens our commitment to him (25). In God who hears us David finds great comfort and encouragement, not only for himself but also for all those still afflicted and seeking the LORD (26). And the fact that God hears us is good news for even more people. Read verses 27–28. David could see that when all the ends of the earth, all the families of the nations, experience that God hears us in our Lord Jesus, they will turn to the LORD and worship him as their true king. Both the prosperous and the helpless worship him as we return to the dust (29). Read verses 30–31. The message that God hears us needs to be passed down to our posterity, from generation to generation. It’s how new generations of people also join in serving him. We need to proclaim what God has done for us in Jesus, and that he hears us, even to those not yet born.

Read verse 24 again. So, do you feel like you are not heard, or that your suffering is overwhelming? May God renew our faith that he hears us.

⁵ 1 John 5:14–15; cf. Mark 11:22–24.