

Good Friday / April 3, 2026

Psalm 22

"My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?"

These words of David which begin the 22nd Psalm are forever associated with Jesus' dying on the cross. As death neared and His agony heightened to a crescendo, Jesus cried out in Aramaic, *"Eloi. Eloi, Lema Sabachthani,"* which translated means *"My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?"* To those watching below, familiar with what we call 'Jewish intertestamental literature,' His words sounded like a cry, not to God, but to the prophet Elijah, whose appearance was expected to coincide with the appearing of the Messiah. Those standing beneath the cross weren't Jesus' supporters. They were His enemies. They were those who did not believe He was the Messiah, some of whom had mockingly said, *"He saved others but He can't save Himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."* But in the midst of their doubt, a shadow of belief remained. Some, hearing Jesus' cry out said, *"Behold, He is calling Elijah."* Another ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to Him in an attempt to encourage Him. Then they sat back and waited, saying, *"Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down."* But Elijah didn't come. Jesus died. Once again, He had failed to meet their expectations of what the Messiah should do and what should not happen to Him.

We all have expectations of Jesus, some are informed on the basis of scripture, others are the product of our own and our culture's religious imagination. Has Jesus ever failed to do something you wanted or expected Him to do? Perhaps you prayed for healing, or for the life of a loved one but your prayer was unanswered, the pain remained, the affliction was not cured or your loved one died. Maybe a voice inside your head said, 'Didn't Jesus say, *"Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened?"* Didn't Jesus say whatever you ask the Father in my name; He will do for you?' Yes, Jesus said all those things, but when He prayed, He also said, heavenly Father, "Yet not my will, but your will be done." Jesus did not meet the religious expectations of popular first century Judaism, which expected the Messiah to reign over an earthly kingdom as a powerful human king. Every time He seemed on the cusp of doing what the people expected the Messiah to do, He did something else, like suffer and die. Hadn't He read the script? He was supposed to have called legions of angels to His defense, overthrow the Roman Authority with the blast of His breath and established Judea as the preeminent kingdom on earth, enslaving the Gentiles and their kings. Even

His own disciples thought those things. As insiders, they expected good positions in the coming kingdom of Israel. James and John wanted to be one on His right and the other on His left when He came into His kingdom. Jesus said, *"You do not know what you are asking."* Even after He had risen and was preparing to ascend on high the disciples asked, *"Lord, will you now restore the kingdom to Israel."* False expectations die hard it seems, whether it is the answer to all our prayers, the healing of our bodies or the extension of life in this fallen world where death though it delays, always comes.

Jesus didn't call out to Elijah; He called out to God. Elijah didn't come to save Him, but neither did God. Nobody saved Jesus. Jesus died. It would seem His last prayer went unanswered, like the prayers of many others over the ages, perhaps like some of ours. Psalm 22 is an interesting psalm. It was written by King David as he dealt with some great trial in his life, however what that specific trial was is not specified. David had lots of enemies. King Saul was perhaps the greatest. The King of Israel, Saul identified David as an existential threat to his throne and the royal line of his descendants. The king of Israel was a powerful adversary, David had no friends among the Philistines either; especially after he befriended them when Saul was his adversary and then turned on them after Saul died. David's own son Absalom tried to usurp the kingdom from him. David had lots of enemies, including his own sinful nature. He was an adulterer and murderer. Perhaps his cry to God was inspired by a sense of guilt and a powerful feeling of remorse at his sins, feeling as if God had forsaken him. Sometimes we too may feel everyone and everything is against us, that our sins accuse and condemn us and that God is against us and has forsaken us.

Psalm 22 begins with an awful lamentation of feeling forsaken by God. However, that's just the first verse and not the whole psalm. Beyond the initial cry of forsakenness, it concludes with the affirmation that God has not forsaken him, 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."* King David had many enemies and the Lord didn't take them away. Instead, the Lord used David's enemies to keep him humble and draw him closer to His heart in faith and faithfulness. The Lord uses our adversaries to teach us forgiveness. He uses our adversities to draw us closer to Him in faith and faithfulness. David's great adversary King Saul, had a descendant who many centuries later cried to the Lord to heal him and relieve him of a great affliction, which he called a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to harass him. We know that descendant as the Apostle Paul, but his Hebrew name is Saul after his great ancestor King Saul. The Lord

healed many people, but He didn't heal St. Paul. Instead, The Lord said, *"My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness."* The Lord used Paul's physical affliction to keep him humble and to draw him closer to Himself in faith and faithfulness. The Lord draws us close to Himself in all the adversities, trials, sins, sicknesses and sufferings of our lives to give us strength, hope and encouragement as we fight the good fight of faith. He doesn't promise to answer according to our will. He promises to answer according to His holy will, to preserve our faith in time and bring it to fulfillment in eternity. He promises to never leave or forsake us. No one saved Jesus, which is good, because Jesus saved us from sin, the devil and eternal death through His death on the cross. Because God didn't send Elijah to save Jesus, He died to atone for your sin, my sin, the world's sin. Because God didn't save Him, as his accusers mockingly taunted Him, Jesus accomplished the Father's will for human salvation and became the Saviour of all people, the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in Him.

Psalm 22 is the clearest foreshadowing in scripture of the circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion and death. Jesus speaks the opening verses of this psalm from the cross. It describes His enemies casting lots for His clothing, fulfilled by the Roman soldiers who divided His clothing beneath the cross and cast lots for His expensive tunic of one piece. There is the mocking and tongue wagging of his enemies who surround Him and their mocking call for God to save him if He wants him. Foreshadowed in David's words, *"He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord deliver him; let him rescue him, for He delights in him."* And of course, there is the piercing of His hands and feet, which occurred when His body was fastened to the cross. The most important aspect of Psalm 22 is the affirmation that no matter how God forsaken our lives seem to be, that "God 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." God heard David when he cried. God hears us when we cry. God heard Jesus when He cried. Jesus cried, *"My God, my God why have you forsaken me."* But God had not forsaken Him. He waited to receive His spirit and He received His sacrifice to atone for the sin of the world.

Whenever you are so low that you feel even God has forsaken you, remember He has not forsaken you. He has not despised your affliction or hidden His face from you. He has given Jesus in your place to bear your sin. He gives Jesus into your heart as your Saviour. He gives Jesus to stand with you and for you in every trial, tragedy and sorrow of life. He gives Jesus to carry you through the valley and shadow of death. Jesus has a place prepared for you in His presence, where in the fulness of time He will receive you, wipe every tear from your eyes, erase every memory of

sorrow and sadness and fill your soul with joy and gladness that will never end. He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted and He has not hidden His face from Him, but He has heard when he cried to Him. In Jesus' Name. Amen.