

Psalms 22 & 23

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[0:00] Well, I'd like us this morning to turn back to the passages that we read in the book of Sands. And today I want to do something that's maybe just a little bit different from normal.

Usually when we come to the sermon, we focus on one passage, one chapter, one paragraph, even one word. Today I want to do something slightly different. I want us to take both of these Psalms and look at them together. Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 sit next to each other, and in many ways they are two of the most remarkable Psalms. Psalm 22 has such powerful moving imagery. And Psalm 23 is a Psalm that for so many of us we've known since we were a child, and it speaks words of such comfort and hope. And so I want us to look at these two Psalms together because, as I'll explain in a moment, I think that there is a beautiful sense in which these two Psalms do belong hand in hand. Whenever we are looking at a passage from the book of Psalms or from any part of the Old Testament, it's important to remember that passages like these can function really in two ways. At one level they tell us about the life of the person who wrote these Psalms. And so you can see that both of these Psalms were written by David. And so when you read Psalm 22, when you read

Psalm 23, both of these things are telling us something about David. They're an insight into his experience. And in many ways poetry, which is what the Psalms are, poetry or songs can be such a powerful window into somebody's experience and into their lives. If David had sort of said, you know, came up to you and said to you, I'm a shepherd, and I find it helpful to remember that God's a bit like that. I don't think that's quite the same as reading Psalm 23. When David's experiences as a shepherd are put into a song that's so powerfully described the way he views and knows God. So both of these Psalms are telling us something about David's life. And I think that's a really important thing to remember.

Whenever you go to the Old Testament, this is telling you something about stuff that happened then at that moment. But very often in the Old Testament, and in a way you could almost say always, it's not just telling us something about David and his life or events that happened then. It's also pointing forward. And in many ways everything in the Old Testament is pointing forwards to what the Bible is really all about, which is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's the centre point of scripture, of history, of all creation, the fact that Jesus was coming into the world. And so when you read through the Old Testament, yes, you're learning something about them, but you're also learning something about Jesus.

And Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 are brilliantly clear examples of that. Because as we read these Psalms, yes, we're getting an insight into David's life, but we are also learning so much about our Lord Jesus. And there's a word that we use to describe that sort of thing. It's the word typology, where we're saying that things in the Old Testament are a type of Christ. And so David would be a very good example of somebody who is a type of Christ. And typology, that's the kind of word that can seem a wee bit unfamiliar to us. If you just basically think of it like this, it's like saying deliberately a bit likeology. So typology is just deliberately a bit likeology. So there's things about David, there's things about Abraham, there's things about Moses that are deliberately a bit like Jesus. And that helps us to understand more and more about the person and work of our

[4 : 32] Savior. And that's really the whole point of the Old Testament. It's pointing us forward to Jesus. And it can be helpful for us to remember that when we come to passages like this. David was deliberately a bit like Jesus in lots of ways. He was a type of Christ, particularly because he was a shepherd and he was king. And throughout David's life, we see various hints and examples of this deliberately a bit like Jesus'ology. As I said, some are maybe just hinting towards this, but some are very, very obvious. And Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 are brilliant examples of that. That's why we can say that these are messianic Psalms. They're pointing towards the Messiah, pointing towards the Christ, towards Jesus. And that's what I want us to really focus on today. We'll touch on David a wee bit, but it's really what we learn about Christ that I want us to focus on. And as we do so, what I want to encourage you to do is to do something that maybe today sounds a little bit weird. I want to encourage you to meditate. When I use the word meditate, we can tend to sort of think, you know, that sounds a bit odd. You know, some people tend to meditate and you imagine to be someone sitting with their legs crossed and hands in the air and stuff like that. And that's what we can sort of associate meditating with.

But meditating is a very biblical concept. And you'll see the word in the book of Psalms and in other places quite frequently. And all it means is to allow something to go over and over and over in your mind. And the Psalms are a wonderful place to do that because they use powerful imagery that you can just picture in your minds. And you can allow it to go over and over and over as we learn more and more. So that's what I want us to do today.

So just tundle through these Psalms and looking at various bits. And as we do so, I want you to meditate on what's in front of us. I want you to go over and over in your minds. And as I said, I think there's two, there's, I think there's a key way in which Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 go together because there's two key things that I want us to see in these Psalms. Psalm 22 shows us what Jesus experienced because of us. Psalm 23 describes what we experienced because of Jesus. And so these two things I want us to reflect on today.

So let me just go through Psalm 22. I've got the verses on the screen. I won't be reading them, but I just wanted to have them on the screen. I won't read all of them, but I wanted to have them on the screen for you. I've got the first half of the Psalm there before you. It opens with such powerful words. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? Now for David, he obviously wrote these words because he felt abandoned by God. And whatever he was experiencing in his life had left him feeling like God had forgotten him or maybe wasn't there. Now I'm almost certain that everybody in here has felt like that at some point in their lives.

Never think that there's this category of like super Christians who never have doubts or never have struggles or never think, you know, God, are you really there? It's something that David felt. It's something that I felt and I've got no doubt that it's the same for all of us. Sometimes life can do that to us. It can leave us thinking, where is God? Why has he abandoned me? That's how David felt. That's how we often feel. But as I'm sure you know, the incredible thing is that these are the words that Jesus cried out on the cross. He said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? I'm going to come back to those words towards the end. What I want us to do first is just to go through a little bit more of what the Psalm speaks about. And as we can see, it just points so powerfully towards what Jesus experienced on the cross. If you move down to verse six, you have this description where the Psalm says, I'm a worm and not a man scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord, let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him. Now for

[9 : 36] David, he must have felt at this time in his life that everybody was against him, that people were mocking him and that they viewed him almost as less than human. And again, that's maybe times something that we've maybe experienced, maybe if you've been bullied at school or maybe when you felt ostracised from your peer group at work. There may be times when you felt despised. But I think that as we meditate on these words, as we let them go over and over in our minds, it's so clearly pointing us to what Jesus experienced on the cross. So Jesus went to the cross not in kind of triumph and not with people cheering him. He went to the cross with people mocking him and spitting on him and viewing him as worthless. And I find that when I read those words, all who see me mock me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads. I don't immediately think of David in the Old Testament doing something. I think of Jesus on the cross. And you can imagine him there and people looking on and disgust. And there were people saying, well, you know, he saved others, he couldn't save himself. If he's the son of God, bring him down. And all of this mocking is going on. And here is where we need to take a tiny step back and we need to remember some of our big theological truths to really get the impact of this. We know from the teaching of scripture that it was through Jesus that all things were created. And so when we think of creation, we don't just think of that as the work of the Father, we think of that as the work of the Father through the Son. Jesus taking that role in creation. Indeed, the Holy

Spirit was involved as well. And the pinnacle of that creation is humanity made in the image of God. And here you have a description of the image bearers of God so broken that they're mocking the Creator. And they actually view him as less than human, like a worm. If you move down into verses 9 to 13, you see a picture of someone isolated, threatened and vulnerable.

Verse 11, be not far from me, for trouble is near. There's none to help. Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of patience around me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion. Now verses 12 and 13 are using animal imagery to express something very powerfully. I was about to walk yesterday and we actually had to walk past some cows because they were just sitting on the path as they do. And it was, my pure dog Rosie was terrified of the cows. And she kind of stopped and she wouldn't go past them. So we were a bit worried that the dog might frighten the cows as it happened. The dog was terrified of the cows and we had to get the dog to go right round so that because the dog was terrified of these cows. Now thankfully the cows were very friendly and very nice. But to be surrounded by friendly cows is a wee bit scary. To be surrounded by aggressive bulls is an image of real danger. And you can imagine that in your minds. You can imagine a ravening and roaring lion. And it's all pointing us towards the isolation and danger that Jesus faced on the cross. And when you think of Jesus on the cross, he was there defenseless, exposed and vulnerable. And then we come to verses 14 to 18. I'll just read them out and you can just please just try and let the imagery just shape the way you're thinking. I'm poured out like water. All my bones are at a joint. My heart is like wax. It's melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a pot shirt. My tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me and company of evil duers encircles me. They've pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them. And for my clothing, they cast lots. And if you go on to read the narratives of the crucifixion in the gospels and towards the end of any of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, you'll see so much here. That's just so accurately corresponding to what Jesus experienced. Jesus is thirst. Jesus is clothing and being stripped from him and the people casting lots for it. His hands and feet pierced.

Now the phrase I can count all my bones. I don't completely know what that means because it might refer to the fact that Jesus's bones weren't broken, but I think maybe it's more likely to refer to the fact that in the position of crucifixion, you're kind of stretched and gaunt. And you know, you could just like when someone's stretched like that, you can see their ribs and you can see their bones as as they're sort of, you know, stretched and vulnerable like that. And it's a little bit of a kind of unpleasant image, but that's what it was like. It's a picture of physical agony. And the poetic imagery of Psalm 22 is so powerful. And sometimes I think it's really helpful to actually read, you know, when you read about the crucifixion, it's actually really helpful to read Psalm 22 at the same time because, you know, in the narrative of the crucifixion, Jesus says, I thirst.

But I think Psalm 22 just unpacks that a wee bit where it says, strength is dried up like a pot shined. A tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death. And that's really what what the words I thirst would have felt like and meant for Jesus. And so all of this imagery is giving us a powerful insight into what Jesus experienced. And I think it all culminates in the cry of verse one, which of course, Jesus cried out on the cross. Mark 15 tells us that so does Matthew 27. Mark 15 34. At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi Eloi, Lama Sabachtani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And I wanted to leave that to last because even though it's the first version, Psalm 22, it's really the pinnacle of the suffering that Jesus experienced because the physical agony was awful. And the verbal and emotional abuse from surrounding for people surrounding him was terrible and the sense of vulnerability would have been immense. But what made the cross so so awful for Jesus was the sense of being forsaken by his own. And that eternal union between God, the Father and God, the Son, that beautiful bond of fellowship that they know you think of how many times Jesus just went off up a mountain to pray to his father. His father is just like his best friend. Just that that contact, that union, that love. And here, he said to God, why have you forsaken me? And that of course, all of our theology helps explain that because our theology explains to us that Jesus went to the cross to carry the implications of our sin, to carry the punishment that sin deserves and to experience death as an atonement, as a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of God. And of course, all of that means that Jesus was cut off from his father. And so when he said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's just describing what happened. That's what the cross involved. And so Psalm 22 is helping us to see what Jesus experienced. But what I want us to recognize is that all of that is because of us. Psalm 22 shows us what Jesus experienced because of us. Because it was in order to save you that he did that. It was to carry your sins and mine that he went to the cross. It was all so that you can be saved. And the more you can meditate on the magnitude of what Jesus suffered, the more you will understand how much he loves you.

[20 : 07] The more you'll understand what you are worth to him. The more you'll understand how far he will go to save you. Let me ask you a question. In the whole Bible, what verse do you think tells you most clearly that God loves you? So verses like John 3.16 will come to mind, won't they? For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that you ever believed in will not perish but have eternal life. Verses like Matthew 11, 28, come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. First John 4.10, in this is love that the Father gave his son to be the propitiation for our sins. And there's many, many other verses that speak of God's love. But I want to suggest to you today that the verse that tells you most clearly how much God loves you is verse 1 of Psalm 22 as quoted by Jesus in Mark 15 and Matthew 27. Because when Jesus cried out to God, why have you forsaken me? The answer is because of how much God wants to save you. And I think that tells you more powerfully than any other verse, how much you are loved by God. And the amazing thing is that as a result of what Jesus experienced on the cross, you can experience something amazing. Now when I say you, I mean every one of you, you as a Christian or you as someone who I hope will become a Christian. And if you're not quite sure where you stand then we can maybe talk about that together more if you want. But for all of us, because of what Jesus has experienced, we can experience something amazing. And that's described to us in Psalm 23, which we can pop up onto the screen. Because when we come to trust in Jesus, these words of David become our words as well. We can say the Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want. And I think that's so true because that's one thing that will happen to you if you become a Christian and that one thing, one thing that every Christian here can testify that when you come to know Jesus, there is a gap that's been in your life that you never have to tie in full again. There's a peace and a security that nothing else compares to.

Now that doesn't mean that life isn't hard and that doesn't mean that there's still stuff that we want or desire or long for. And that can be a really good thing. But there's just a fundamental whole filled by Jesus. And it's amazing. And you have this beautiful image of him. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me by still waters. You've got to be in the summer to preach on that verse, I think, because we can. You could even just, you could just walk down outside the church building after the service today and you could go and lie down in green pastures beside beautifully still waters in the river and it's awesome. And that tranquility and beauty and enjoyment is what Jesus wants to give us. He restores our soul, leads us in paths of righteousness. And even though we might walk through difficult times through the valley of the shadow of death in the language of the sun, we do not need to fear. Now, once it's really important to notice what we are being delivered from there, you're not delivered from the valley. So being a Christian isn't saying you're never going to go through a valley, you're never going to go through a difficult time, you're never going to face troubles. That's the Bible never promises that and that's a very shallow promise anyway. What the Bible does promise is that when you do, you don't need to be scared. Britain today is full of people who are scared. And the pandemic showed that so clearly, so many people are scared. And the great promise that Jesus gives us is that he keeps us so safe that we don't need to be. We do not need to fear evil. Instead, he is our comfort and our strength. Verse five, you have a beautiful picture of banqueting a table prepared in the presence of enemies. And their head is anointed with oil, a cup overflows such a beautiful picture of abundance, a beautiful banquet. And the picture of being in a banquet before your enemies is not the idea of having to eat before someone whacks you. It's the idea that peace has come. That you no longer have to fight, you can sit down, you can eat, you can banquet and enemies have been overcome.

And there's just this beautiful picture of abundance of our cup overflowing. And verse six, verse six, it's just speak so beautifully. Goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. It's an amazing picture of what we experience as Christians. It doesn't mean you're always feeling great as a Christian.

But it does mean that you can always go to Psalm 23 and say that is true and know that is true. And in many ways, these two Psalms belong together because I think Psalm 22, Psalm 23 helps explain Psalm 22. You start off Psalm 22 and it says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And you see Jesus repeating those words and you think that can't be right. How can that happen? And it seems, you know, almost unthinkable. But Psalm 23 helps explain it. Because all the suffering and anguish of Psalm 22 is explained by the fact that all the blessings and richness of Psalm 23 is what God wants to give us. And in order to do that, Jesus had to go to the cross. And that's why there's a great sense in which when Jesus said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? There's a sense in which there's separation between God the Father and God the Son there, isn't there?

There's a great separation there. But at the same time, and simultaneously, there's an amazing union. Because in the separation, in the punishment and suffering of the cross, God's will was done. And God's plan was brought to completion. And so the abandonment of the cross immediately becomes the accomplishment of God's great saving plan. The forsakenness of the cross becomes the fulfillment of everything that the New Testament has been pointing towards.

[28 : 35] The suffering achieves salvation. And the two belong together so beautifully. And that's why I think that you can actually merge these Psalms into one. And I want to just do that as we close. I want to just read out Psalm 23, not from David's perspective, but from Jesus' perspective. And I want to use Psalm 22 to help me to do that. And as I do so, I just want you to listen to these words. So from Jesus' point of view, he says, I'm the Lord. I want to be your shepherd so that you shall not want. I was raised up on a cross and nailed to it so that you can lie down in green pastures. I was surrounded by the rules of Baytians, by dogs encircling me, by a company of evildoers so that you can lie down by still water. I poured out my soul so that I could restore your soul. I was led to the place of execution because I want to lead you in paths of righteousness. I walked right into the valley of death itself so that if you walk through the shadow of that valley, you do not need to be afraid. I was isolated with none to help so that you will always know that my rod and my staff are symbols of my commitment to comfort you. I cried out,

I thirst. My strength was dried up like a potard. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth so that I could prepare a table for you in the presence of your enemies so that I could anoint your head with oil so that your cup would keep on overflowing. Surely wrath and punishment followed me all the way to the cross so that goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of my life. And I cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me so that you can dwell in the house of the Lord forever? And I think that's why the question in verse 1 of Psalm 22 is answered by the last verse of Psalm 23. Why did Jesus, why was Jesus forsaken? Why did he cry out those words? Why did he have to experience that? What is the answer to his question? Why have you forsaken me? And the answer is because God is saying I want, and please put your name in this sentence, I want him or her, I want Thomas to dwell with me forever. The ultimate answer to Jesus' question is you. That is why Jesus is so amazing. And I want you to go away and think about that.

I want you to keep on meditating on that. If you've been a Christian for a long time, I hope that those words will just stay in your mind and remind you more and more of how precious you are in God's sight. If you're not yet a Christian or not sure and want you to think about all of this, want you to really think about it all, and I want you to think about it in terms of life now, but also in terms of the future. And I want you to just ask yourself that question. You read Psalm 23 and guess that's the question. Do you want that to be true for you? Because I tell you I want it to be true for you. And I can testify to you as someone who's been a Christian for 20 odd years that knowing that that is true for me because of what Jesus has done is the single most incredibly brilliant part of my life. And we just want you to know that too so that whether you're a young child growing up, whether you're kind of in the middle like me, not really young anymore but not old, or whether you are just kind of on the doorstep of the last chapter of your life, that you have the safety and security and peace that this Psalm speaks about. So please keep thinking about Psalm 22 and Psalm 23. The first one will tell you what Jesus experienced because of us. The second one will tell you what we experienced because of him. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we are so thankful that we have the words of Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 before us.

And they speak to us so powerfully about how awful the cross was and about how amazing your salvation is. And we just bow before you and say thank you. And we want to live for you. And you are everything. And we just thank you for the massive difference that you've made in our lives. And oh God, may that just be what we all experience and understand.

[35 : 52] For everyone here and for the people we know and love in the community around us, we pray that you would open all of our eyes to see these things more clearly. In Jesus' name, amen.