*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

July 31 – August 5

“Psalms of Lament”

**Monday, July 31 Psalm 22:1-11**

*“Do not be far from me”*

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The opening words of this psalm have become so familiar to us from Jesus’ use of them from the cross that it is difficult for us to separate them from that much later context and read them as an integral part of Psalm 22. If we read these words *only* as words spoken by Jesus, we ignore the original and continuing word of God to us this psalm in its entirety represents.

These opening words summarize the agony of the first two-thirds of the psalm. David feels totally abandoned, twice contrasting his current sense of God’s complete absence with past reports of God’s very present help in time of trouble. The first contrast is in verses 2-5 which focus on God’s *silence*, while the second in verses 6-11 is concerned with God’s *failure to act.* God’s lack of reply to David’s repeated cries is not because God is unable to speak or is unaware of David’s plight or is unable to do anything about it. It is the very fact that God is able to both respond and act but chooses not to that fuels David’s painful confusion and dismay.

*There are times, Lord, when you seem far from me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 1 Psalm 22:12-21**

*“My enemies surround me”*

David depicts his enemies as fearsome beasts that surround him and cut off all escape. Their fierce attack reduces David to fear and weakness. His strength departs like water poured out on the ground, so that his body feels awkward and out of control (“all my bones are out of joint”). Similarly, David’s heart (courage) melts away like wax before a fierce lamp. He has a bad case of “cotton mouth” (“my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth”), fearing the approach of death. The enemies, anticipating the fast-approaching end, stare and gloat and even raffle off their hapless victim’s clothing before he is dead.

The passage shifts at the end to a direct and succinct plea for deliverance. The desperate nature of the circumstances becomes apparent in the urgency with which David calls for aid. As a soldier surrounded and about to be overwhelmed by the enemy in close hand-to-hand combat might call out to his comrades for assistance, David calls out to God for deliverance: “To my aid, hurry!” (the literal translation of verse 19b).

*When I need deliverance, Lord, I cry out to you for help. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 2 Psalm 22:22-31**

*“I will praise you”*

The final third of Psalm 22 turns decisively toward praise. The passage is subdivided into two segments (verses 22-24 and 25-31), each introduced by David’s address to God promising to proclaim God’s praise to his fellow worshippers in the temple. In each segment, David’s promise is followed by David’s encouragement of others to praise God by a rehearsal of reasons God is praiseworthy.

In the midst of despair David finds support in the worshipping community of the faithful. The enemy may dehumanize and threaten death, but in the congregation of God’s people the righteous power of God is still proclaimed. When our faith is undermined by our circumstances and we are tempted to despair altogether, sometimes our only remaining hope is to place ourselves within the worshipping community of God’s people. There he is praised even if we are unable to praise him. There the mighty acts of God are proclaimed even when we cannot see them. There God is present though he remains absent from our own experience.

*Among your people, Lord, I find support in times of forsakenness. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

July 31 – August 5

“Psalms of Lament”

**Thursday, August 3 Psalm 70:1-5**

*“Come quickly”*

The psalm is framed at the beginning and end by David’s pleas for speedy assistance. This repetition emphasizes his sense of desperation and immediate need. The reason for his distress centers around those seeking to destroy him, believing they have found something in his life with which to bring him disgrace: “Aha! We’ve got him now!” In response he desires God to mete out reciprocal punishment on his opponents. He wants those who desire to shame and humiliate him instead to experience their own shame and humiliation.

While those around David seek to put a humiliating “spin” of shame on the circumstances of his life, he turns to God. There is an intentional contrast developed here between “those who seek” his ruin and “all who seek” God. The former say “Aha!” while the latter cry out “Let God be exalted!” David concludes the psalm with an acknowledgment of his state of neediness before God, not in material or economic desire but in his spiritual and emotional dependence on God. In these areas of need God is his help and his deliverer.

*While some may put me down, Lord, I will lift you up for you save. Amen.*

**Friday, August 4 Psalm 71:1-13**

*“You are my refuge”*

Psalm 71 introduces the theme of refuge. In his time of trouble, the righteous God offers a place of refuge for the beleaguered David who uses several terms for this place of safety such as “rock of refuge” and “my rock and my fortress.” The refuge God provides is always available to those in need to enter, and it is here that God will “rescue,” “deliver,” and “save.” The first (“rescue”) depicts the initial act of “snatching” prey out of the claws or mouth of the foe. The second (“deliver”) pictures the liberated prey being “brought safely out” of the environment of danger; while the last verb (“save”) envisions the final product of deliverance: complete salvation.

Verse 9 makes it clear that he is speaking from the experience of old age, and that his sustaining hope is based on a lifetime of confident reliance on God. David has leaned on God for support from his very birth, and he knows that even before his birth God was caring for him. But, now David’s enemies are trying to exploit his current difficulties by proclaiming that God has deserted him and has thereby made him vulnerable to their schemes.

*You are my refuge, Lord, and in you I find rescue, deliverance, and salvation. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 5 Psalm 71:14-24**

*“I will keep on hoping”*

This passage emphasizes David’s vow to testify to the mighty acts of God. Beginning in verse 14, a series of verbs and expressions for speaking/proclaiming pile up, illustrating his determination to make God’s deeds known. In verse 18 David pleads to God not to be forsaken in old age so that his lifelong testimony to the praiseworthy acts of God can be transmitted to a new generation, thereby extending the value of his praise and testimony beyond his own lifetime. David goes on to proclaim that his repeated promise to proclaim the praise of God is due to his awareness of God’s righteousness and mighty acts.

“Who, O God, is like you?” The question is, of course, rhetorical – anticipating no answer – as indeed there is no one who can compare to Israel’s God. Because of who God has been, is, and will continue to be, David anticipates deliverance and restoration. The “many and bitter” troubles experienced “from my youth” are no barrier to his faith or the saving work of God who will “restore,” “lift me up,” “increase my honor,” and “comfort me once again.”

*My hope is in you, Lord, for you are my comfort. Amen.*