*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

February 6 - 11

“Wrestling Prayer”

**Monday, February 6 Psalm 22:1-5**

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

The opening words of the psalm have become so familiar to us from Jesus’ use of them from the cross that it is difficult for us to read them as an integral part of Psalm 22. If we read these words *only* as words about Jesus, we risk ignoring the word of God to *us*.

The first major section of the psalm emphasizes the theme of abandonment through two sets of contrasts between the psalmist’s current sense of God’s complete absence and past reports of God’s very present help in time of trouble. The first contrast focuses on God’s *silence* (22:2-5) while the second is concerned with his *failure to act* (22:6-10).

When God does not reply to the psalmist’s repeated cries, it is not because he is unable to speak or is unaware of the psalmist’s plight. Divine silence is for the psalmist an example of the mysterious exercise of God’s free will. It is this difficult circumstance – that God is aware and could answer but does not – that fuels the psalmist’s painful confusion and dismay. Further, in the past God answered “the ancestors” but now he does not answer the psalmist.

*You know my heart, Lord, and how difficult it is for me when you are silent. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 7 Psalm 22:6-10**

*“I am a worm”*

The psalmist feels reduced and degraded below the status of a human being by the taunts of his enemies. They view him as worthy of destruction. They express “scorn,” they “despise,” “mock,” and “insult” the psalmist, they “wag their heads” in ridicule. Their public articulation of scorn once again emphasizes the contrast between the psalmist’s experience of abandonment and God’s deliverance of the ancestors. His tormentors point out that his trust in the Lord is clearly misplaced, for the Lord has not rescued him.

The psalmist recalls events of birth and early childhood as evidence of his absolute trust and commitment to God, who is depicted as the midwife at his birth. The psalmist acknowledges that God “made me trust” while at his mother’s breast so that his commitment to God as “my God” dates from his mother’s womb. This sense of early protective care contributes to the growing feeling of abandonment that permeates the psalmist’s present. Where is the God who was so near in his infancy?

*How hard it is, Lord, when I am ridiculed for trusting in you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 8 Psalm 22:11-15**

*“My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay”*

The psalmist’s enemies are depicted as fearsome beasts that surround him and cut off all escape. The animals are introduced in a particular order – bulls (22:12), lions (22:13), and dogs (22:16) – that is reversed in the plea for deliverance: dogs (22:20), lions (22:21a), and wild oxen (22:21b). The bulls are depicted as surrounding him with a clear intent to do him harm, and the lions are shown in the midst of a grisly meal “tearing” at their prey and “roaring” to warn off any competitors.

The fierce attacks of his enemies reduce the psalmist to fear and weakness. The signs of physical weakness he experiences are common ones. His strength departs like water “poured out” on the ground, so that his body feels awkward and out of control. Similarly, the psalmist’s heart (courage) melts away like wax before a fierce flame. He feels weakened by anxiety and has a bad case of “cotton mouth” as “my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth,” fearing the approach of death.

*My strength alone, Lord, will not be sufficient to withstand evil. Amen.*

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February 6 - 11

“Wrestling Prayer”

**Thursday, February 9 Psalm 22:16-21**

*“They have pierced my hands and feet”*

Evil men surround the psalmist like dogs, piercing his hands and feet. This resonates with the crucifixion of Jesus, as does the further demonstration of the psalmist’s desperate circumstances illustrated by the physical deterioration of the body – the bones stand out through the skin. The enemies, anticipating the fast-approaching end, “stare” and “gloat” and even raffle off the hapless psalmist’s clothing before he is dead, reminding us of the soldiers who gamble over Jesus’ garments while he is dying on the cross.

Once again the psalmist pleads that God “be not far off” (22:19). This is a direct and succinct plea for deliverance, an appeal to God’s strength. The desperate nature of the circumstances becomes apparent in the urgency with which the psalmist calls for aid. In the two verses that follow this initial plea, the psalmist continues to seek rescue first from the more general threat of “the sword” and then from each of the metaphorical categories of attackers envisioned previously: dogs, lions, and wild oxen.

*Come to my rescue, Lord, and give me the help I need. Amen.*

**Friday, February 10 Psalm 22:22-28**

*“I will praise you among all your people”*

The final ten verses of the psalm turn toward praise, beginning with a vow to declare God’s name to the psalmist’s fellow believers. To declare or make known God’s name is the same as to praise the Lord, for to make known the name of God is to reveal something about his praiseworthy character. The psalmist’s promise to praise God now becomes a call to others – that is, the psalmist’s fellow worshippers – to join in the praise of God. Those who “fear the Lord” are those who adopt the appropriate attitude of trust and dependence on him.

The reasons for God’s praiseworthiness are clearly related to the psalmist’s need to experience the presence of God and the assurance of God’s concern for the psalmist’s plight. His hope and assurance are grounded in God’s past history of action for those who are afflicted. In this reflective meditation on God’s faithfulness the psalmist affirms that God has never despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one. While he has not yet been delivered, the psalmist is confident that God will rescue him for God is faithful to his people.

*You will save me, Lord, and I will praise you. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 11 Psalm 22:29-31**

*“Proclaim his righteous acts”*

The psalm closes by describing a continuing proclamation of God’s righteousness coupled with endless praise. This is described as taking place in two stages. First, God’s righteousness is recounted by the psalmist’s own generation to the coming generation; they in turn proclaim it to “a people yet unborn.” By this means the psalmist fulfills the vow made earlier to praise God among all God’s people.

God’s righteousness is not simply a quality of God’s character but the result of having done something. “Righteousness” describes the status of the one who has been determined by a judge to have done all that is proper in a particular circumstance or case. Therefore, when used of God (or of humans, for that matter) righteousness never describes a sinless quality or attitude but is an evaluation of one’s course of action. Thus, in this situation, God’s righteousness is declared by proclaiming “everything he has done” (22:31). God has in all things fulfilled the demands of appropriate action in relation to his people.

*You always do the right thing, Lord, and I am the one who benefits. Amen.*