

The “Y” Word
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Series: The Rest of the Story; Psalm 22

It was a winter day sometime around 1970 which would make me about 7. I grew up not too far from Valley Forge National Park which has fabulous hills for sledding.

So on this particular day I was at the park with my dad and 2 older sisters swishing down the hills on our toboggan and our saucers. Now we did this quite a bit in the winter time as the conditions allowed. But this particular outing stands out in my mind because on this particular outing...my family left me behind at the park! I had saucer-ed myself down the hill and after I trekked back up I looked around for those familiar faces and they were gone! I looked around in a panic. I distinctly remember the fear. Then I noticed the car about one hundred yards away....exiting the park!

I sprinted down the hill in the direction of the car, arms flailing, sobbing. No easy task when you're dressed like Randy, Ralphie's little brother from The Christmas Story!

It was about this time they either noticed me flailing down the hill or noticed I wasn't in the car but hallelujah! the car stopped. I was rescued! But when my fear subsided I was flooded with another emotion – hurt. How could a father forget his child? Leave me – abandon me? My sisters' thought my hysteria was hysterically funny. I did not. Have I forgiven them? Well...yes, of course. Have I forgotten it? Obviously not!

Have you ever been left behind like that – seemingly abandoned? While my reaction might have been a little irrational the fear I felt was genuine. And that's the trouble with fear. Whether real or imagined, rational or irrational, it can cause genuine panic, hurt, hysteria, and maybe, even cause you question whether God the father has abandoned his child.

You might suspect that, of all the people in the Bible, King David would be the least likely to doubt God's presence in his life.

Depicted as an 'acclaimed courageous warrior, and a poet and musician credited for composing much of the psalms contained in the Book of Psalms (our current sermon series), King David is widely viewed as a righteous and effective king in battle and civil justice. He is described as a man after God's own heart in 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22.' (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David>) By all accounts, The Lord was by his side.

Psalm 22, however, tells a different story and demonstrates even faithful followers of God can feel alone. David is one of the great heroes of the Bible. He was a man of faith, imperfect, but faithful and yet here he is feeling abandoned and alone. We don't really know what the circumstances are surrounding this Psalm, but we can clearly see how he felt.

In the very first sentence David cries out to God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent." Psalm 22:1-2

Ah, the "Why" word. "*For what reason or purpose?*" David asks. When we question it usually means we are experiencing a moment of doubt. And at this point David has every reason doubt. Look at how he is suffering:

"Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

Psalm 22:12-18

Not only is he physically tortured. Those that surround him are working to undermine his faith. And David wants to know why God isn't stepping up like he did with his forefathers:

"In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered *them*. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed."
(v.4-5).

'You helped them, Lord,' David cries. 'What about me? Why have you abandoned me? I've trusted you from the day I was born (see v. 9-10). Now my enemies are taunting me. 'So you trust in the Lord,' they shout, 'Let's see if the Lord will rescue you. If you love God so much, why doesn't He save you?' (see v.7-8) Do not be far away from me, now that trouble is near and there is no one else to help me. Rescue me. Deliver me. Save me' (v. 11, 19-21).

David cries out. But God is strangely silent. Where is God in David's suffering? And more to the point why doesn't God explain what's going on or better yet – put an end to it? If He's there, if He's listening why doesn't he make himself more obvious? David, who is trekking through some overwhelming trials here in this Psalm must be wondering if God exited the park.

Where are you God and why don't you answer? David is wrestling with a question we all struggle with. But "why" is a dangerous word. It tempts us to believe we should get an answer. The truth is we may never know why, for what reason or purpose.

And... "Yet."

Yet. A very different "Y" word. A small and very powerful word: "Yet" another way to translate it is "but at the same time; but nevertheless" as in "the path was dark, yet I slowly found my way"

David has a decision to make about how he's going to respond to God's silence. He says:

"Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel."

'But at the same time You are God. Nevertheless, even if you don't answer me, you are the praise of Israel.'

We may not like silence; we don't like unanswered questions. But what we must do, John Ortberg advises in his book *Faith and Doubt*, is choose how we will respond when we don't hear God's voice or get the answers we expect. One way, he writes in the chapter aptly entitled "The Strange Silence of God" is to paraphrase atheist Bertrand Russell, and assume:

"You are the product of causes that have no purpose or meaning. Your origin, your growth, your hopes, fears, loves, beliefs are the outcome of accidental collections of atoms. No fire, heroism, or intensity of thought or feeling can preserve your life from the grave. All the devotion, all the inspiration, all the labor of all the ages are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system. The whole temple of human achievement must inevitably be buried in the debris of a universe in ruins. That's what we're headed for."

Or you can choose this: "You are the uniquely designed creation of a thoroughly good and unspeakably creative God. You are made in his image, with a capacity to reason, choose and love that sets you above all other life forms. You will not only survived death, but you yourself were made to bear an eternal weight of glory you cannot now even fathom and you will one day know." (Pages 115-116)

What will you chose to do when you wonder if there is a God? When you face a time when all you can do is cry out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Friends, we must choose to believe God hears that prayer. And that my God, your God answers that prayer. Because our God, a Son of David, *chose* that prayer.

On a dark Friday afternoon, a cry went up from a wooden cross; Jesus repeating the very words of David, "My God, my God, why have your forsaken me?"

Did Jesus, in his human suffering experience a moment of doubt? Just as David, for a time, felt completely alone and abandoned, Jesus could have gone through his own cycle of despair. His hands and feet were pierced and His bones were stretched out of joint on the cross (Ps. 22:14,16; Luke 23:33). His mouth became so dry that His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and His strength dried up (Ps. 22:15; John 19:28). The crowd that gathered around Him mocked Him, insulted Him and shouted, "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him" (Ps. 22:7-8; Matthew 27:43). They stared and gloated over him while they divided his garments and threw dice for his clothing (Ps. 22:17-18; Mark 15:24). Finally His life was poured out like water and they laid Him in the dust of death (Ps. 22:14-15; John 19:34).

His body is broken; he is taunted by his enemies. And yet, he knows his death is the fulfillment of the scriptures. He knows how the Psalm ends. He knows ultimately he is not alone. And perhaps He's trying to tell those gathered – his followers and his enemies, that this is their chance, our chance, to finally understand His death means God chose us. We can choose to believe that His death will not be the end of the story. We can choose to believe and declare that the Lord will be glorified through Jesus' death and resurrection. We can choose to proclaim God's righteousness so that the nations will bow before Him. We can choose to believe He will never leave us. For this was God's plan along:

“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins... God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill his own good pleasure. And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan. Ephesians 1:4-11

In Psalm 22 what David ultimately chose was to accept that, even if he could not understand why he did not hear God's voice or feel his presence, he would praise and proclaim God's wonders. And to declare of a time to come when: “The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him – may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.” v26-28

David saw the future fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Israel. And maybe Jesus was using his last few breaths to quote David to remind us that yes, his death would be the end of his earthly life – and yet, it was just the beginning.