11-1-26

Why Bother?

Psalm 22

I suppose this message may be more for my own benefit than anyone else's. Perhaps a more introspective message, than an informative one.

When I get exhausted or depressed or lack motivation or direction, I find myself turning to the Psalms. They are my sounding board.

Or better yet, they are like that solo trip you take to the woods where you hike for a good hour, then look around to see if you're all alone so that you can release an unintelligible scream that sounds more animalistic than human.

It's my attempt to release frustration that has built up over time and comes to a head when I finally admit that I'm not where I want to be in terms of my spiritual life or my spiritual condition.

Perhaps we could call it spiritual discontentment or unrest, and sometimes we become so vexed by the situation that all we can do is scream. Has this ever happened to you?

The writers of the Psalms rarely hold back their feelings and frustrations concerning life or the way God seems to be relating to them. They just spew them out to God. And this is okay, because God is big enough to handle our grievances and frustrations.

Now I'm not saying that I've gone through any life - threatening situations like David has – his enemies hot on his trail ready to run him through with a sword or other treacherous activities his enemies might have been plotting against him, but the questions he asked, I've asked a time or two.

Why have you forsaken me?

Why haven't you answered my prayers?

How come I can't feel your presence?

Why are my enemies having their way with me?

Are you even real?

Do I have complaints with God? Sure.

Are they legitimate?

Hardly, but I must work through them if I am to come out on the other side in a better place – in a more spiritual place – a more mature and faithful place.

And the best way I can do this is by sometimes venting to God ... It's like a prayer of desperation - and hopefully after I vent, I'll be in a better position to listen to God.

This is sort of like the parent / child relationship when junior throws a tantrum when he doesn't get his way. You, as the parent, hold up the pillow and let junior reign blows down upon it until he expends his frustrated energy. When he's exhausted, maybe he'll be more receptive to our instructions.

Are my feelings real? Yes.

As my counseling professor reminded me: Feelings are neither right nor wrong; they just are.

But whether my negative feelings are a product of my lack of faith in God and his word, or if they are positive ones that may come from some place else like fortuitous events in my life, they remain suspect until we give them over to God.

I never want to minimize our feelings. They are a significant part of who we are as human beings, but we're fallen human beings and like all the other parts of us, our feelings need to be redeemed by God as well. They too must come under God's rule and lordship.

Perhaps this is partially what Paul means when he writes that one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control, which I think means ...

Don't trust your feelings unless they've first been filtered through the Holy Spirit and allowed to be sifted and weighed by God's truth.

And this is what I think happens in Psalm 22. In the first two verses David spill his guts to God:

You've forsaken me God!

You've abandoned me!

I try to pray to you, but even my words don't seem to come out right.

I'm groaning and groveling before you day and night and still I hear nothing from you.

You're silent, and I'm desperate.

Why do I even bother?

Have you ever asked this about your particular situation?

Why bother?

Sometimes I say "why bother" when I'm trying to make a point to my child and, and they're not in the right frame of mind to listen. I end up saying, "why bother"?

Sometimes when I get frustrated with my personal health issues, and I get discouraged when I don't see the progress I was hoping for, so, I say to myself, why bother?

There are so many life- situations that we can be faced with that can really knock the wind out of us, and we become resigned to experiencing a less than satisfactory result, and then we say to ourselves, "why bother"?

Why expend the mental, physical or emotional energy to make something better when it doesn't seem to get any better?

Have you ever thought this about church or your spiritual life?

God wants me to be transformed into the likeness of his Son, but I'm so far removed from that. I've been trying to improve for years.

Why bother?

I don't want to harbor ill- will or bad feelings toward so and so. God calls me to extend love, mercy and kindness, But I can't seem to muster it. I can't seem to let this grudge go or be better in a certain situation.

I want to come to church on Sunday morning and sense the presence of God and experience healing and joy in my life but it's just not happening. Why bother anymore?

It's okay to admit that you have those thoughts and feelings.

We've all been there, but how do we move on from here?

How do we finally experience some movement toward God – even if our present situation doesn't necessarily improve?

Maybe David, who wrote Psalm 22 and raises these sorts of questions, can help us with the answer.

Verse 3: *"Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; You are the praise of Israel."*

David sees his bitter situation - one of abandonment, aloneness, and desperation, but doesn't let his eyes remain fixated there. Instead, he lifts them heavenward to the throne room of God and reminds himself of ultimate truth: His God is King over all, and deserves all his praise and all the praises of his people no matter what's going on around him.

The starting point of leaving the question "why bother" behind us maybe to break the trance we have on our problems and lift our eyes to God.

Does it mean that our problems will magically disappear?

Hardly. It only means that maybe now we can face them because we realize we're not alone.

But is this truth enough to change David's attitude?

I don't know about you, but a glimmer a light in the darkness does seem to breathe hope into the hopeless, and causes a person once again to fight - to once again move toward God in faith.

A while back, I read a book called "The Greatest Survival Stories of All Time." (You'd think a book like this full of inspirational stories would cause me to readjust my thinking, and be more optimistic, but I'm not sure it has.)

I read stories about people surviving many days in the jungle after a plane crash, shipwreck survivors, young boys trapped in a flooded cave, coal miners trapped in a mine after a large explosion, and a marathon runner who lost his way during a race through the desert because of an unexpected sandstorm.

In every single one of these events, the victims could have easily just rolled over and decided that their time was up.

They could have just said, Why bother? - and I'm not sure I would've blamed them for a second. But instead of giving up, they fought for their lives.

What about us?

Will we fight for our spiritual lives or will say ...

Why bother? There are too many things against us.

Look at what surrounded David: *"Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions open their mouths wide against me."*

I'm doomed, David is basically saying. I'm doomed, I'm afraid, I have no strength to go on.

In one story I read, a marathon runner got lost in the sandstorm. He became so hopeless that he actually tried to find ways to do himself in, and yet obviously he didn't accomplish his goal or his story would have never made it into this book!

Well, I could finish this sermon by saying something trite like we should do what David did. Keep praying!

Recall God's faithfulness to you even when you were in your mother's womb. David did this: *"Yet you brought me out of the womb, you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.*

I could say to you ... make a promise to God that if he gets you out of this latest conundrum, you'll promise to go to church more. David sort of says this: *"I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you."*

Now is this the type God we serve?

One who is interested in making deals like that? I don't think so. And yet, David's willing to try anything at this point.

Don't you love the honesty of the Psalms?

So how am I to end this sermon?

I don't want to give anyone false hope and tell them that if you say the right prayer God will rescue you from a certain situation. If I did this, I'm no better than those false teachers who preach a health and wealth gospel or a prosperity gospel claiming that if you just give a little more money or say just the right prayer, all your problems will go away. I don't believe this for a second. I'm too much of a realist, some would even call me a pessimist.

But what I can say is this:

Despite God's apparent silence in the midst of our trials,

despite our inability to see God rescue and redeem, because it's not splashed over all the headlines, and because God is invisible – and this is one of the most difficult things for a believer to deal with – the invisibility of God -

Despite that we see the enemy advancing on the horizon to drum a beat that seems to get louder and faster every day, we win with God even if our earthly life is taken from us at the most inconvenient time.

And do you know why I know this?

Because this psalm, Psalm 22 is the very Psalm our Lord and Savior quoted as he hung on the cross just before he breathed his last: *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Now, we all know the answer to the question ... Why bother".

Jesus bothered so that you and me could be God's inheritance and the praise of his glory!

The prophet Isaiah puts it this way in chapter 53:

"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

So, the next time you get to the point in your life or a certain situation when you start asking the question, "why bother?" remember your Savior and Lord.

He could have said why bother with these people who are stiff-necked and rebellious and foolish and full of pride and selfishness?

Why bother with humanity who has been given so much time to repent from their evil ways and turn to me for forgiveness but have yet to do so?

Why bother with the church that has been given the gift the Holy Spirit to cheer and to guide and above all to give new life and yet they seldom submit to my teaching?

Through Jesus Christ, God bothered to not leave us stranded in our spiritual doomsday scenario that would lead to only one place. A place where divine benediction would never shine on us again.

Instead, God's Son bothered himself all the way to the cross, and as Paul put it, *"made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a slave, and humbled himself becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross."*

Why bother?

Because Jesus did, and in doing so, secured for us eternal life with Him and, peace hope joy and purpose, just to name a few. Amen.