When Our Father is Silent

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My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. 3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. 4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. 5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. 6 But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; 8 'Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver - let him rescue the one in whom he delights!' 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. 10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. (Psalm 22:1-11)

1. Forsaken by God?

Four years ago, a ferry disaster occurred in Korea. The ferry was carrying 476 people, mostly high school students and teachers and sank, killing 304 people. Almost all of the killed were students and teachers. The passengers were on a school trip to Jeju Island to celebrate their high school graduation. 298 bodies were recovered, but four students and two teachers who were on board remain missing.

About a month ago, seven parents of the victims visited Boston. Korean Christians living in the Greater Boston Area met with them to comfort them. When I got to meet them, they were still angry at the owner of the ferry, the rescue team, the Korean government, their church pastors, and God. They told us how painful the experience has been during the past four years.

The victims' parents who used to go to church do not go to church anymore. Many of them are so disappointed and are mad at God for doing nothing when their children were drowning. They asked their pastors where God was when their children cried out for help.

2. David's Complaint

King David is known as the author of Psalm 22. In verse 1 & 2, he says, "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest***." We do not know the exact situation of David when he wrote this Psalm, but we know he must have been in trouble. He asks why God forsakes him and does not respond to his

prayers for help. David thinks that God is silent. David is not the only one who feels like this in these times. Many people in the world find themselves in the same situation.

3. Jesus' Complaint on the Cross

Psalm 22:1 is well known as one of the seven words Jesus says on the cross. Matthew 27: 46 says, "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?***" Jesus cries out in desperation, quoting what David said in Psalm 22:1. I am sure that you may remember what Jesus says at the Gethsemane, "***My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want***" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus knows what the will of God was and is willing to die on the cross. Yet he expresses disappointment while on the cross.

Has God forsaken the victims in the ferry disaster, King David, and Jesus on the cross? They felt forsaken by God. But we know they are not. We know that many places in the Bible remind us that God will not abandon his people.

In Genesis 28:15, God promises Jacob, "***Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you***." Moses tells the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:31, "***Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them***." In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promises to his disciples and us, "***And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age***."

Have you ever felt like you had been forsaken by God? I am sure you have. Does God really forsake you and me? Not at all. Psalm 121:7 & 8 say, "***The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.*** [8] ***The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore***." This psalm expresses assurance and hope in God's protection day and night. What do we do then when we feel God has forsaken us or when God is silent?

4. What Can We Do When God is Silent?

Psalm 22:4 & 5 says, "***In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.*** [5] ***To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame***." David recalls God's protection for his ancestors and his people in the past. He confesses his trust in God. The past experience of God's people is a ground of trust. Many people before David cried to God, and trusted God. If they were delivered because they cried, David believes that his cries will be answered sooner or later.

In verse 9-10, David confesses that in the middle of his terrible suffering and forsakenness, he remembers that even in his mother's womb, he was

protected by an unseen hand. If he was in God's protection even before he was born, he can't complain about God's absence.

So, in Psalm 22:22 and the following, David says, "***I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: you who fear the Lord, praise him! All your offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all your offspring of Israel***" (vv. 22 & 23). When David remembers what God has done in the past, he would praise God in the congregation as a public testimony. David encourages his people to praise the Lord and glorify him. I am sure you have something that you are grateful to the Lord.

Please allow me to share my story. When I was in early twenties, I worked full time and, in the evening, I took college courses. Every day, I went home after 10 p.m. I was usually tired. A year later, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis. I had to stop working and studying. I took medication every day and went to see my doctor to have an injection once a week.

One day, I was invited to attend a revival service at a mountaintop retreat center. I prayed earnestly as Jesus prayed. "God, do you want me to die in my early age? If that was your intention, why did you create me in my mother's womb?" I was so sad because I felt I was forsaken by God. For three days, God was silent. But on the last night, I felt my heart burning, and I felt something happen to me. Even before I confirmed with my doctor, I threw away all my medicines that I had. The following day, I went to see my doctor and after he took an x-ray, he said my disease was gone. This experience reminds me always that God never forsakes me. Whenever I need God's help, I turn to the Lord and wait for his direction.

5. Moving Forward

Some people do not believe that God hears our prayers. Psalm 94:8 & 9 say, "***Understand, O dullest of the people; fools, when will you be wise?*** [9] ***He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?***" We do not know who the author of Psalm 94 is. He simply confronts those who say that God does neither hear our prayers nor see when we suffer with rhetorical questions. The writer affirms the ability of the Lord and challenges us to be in harmony with God's ways because God will never forsake his people.

When we are convinced that God would never leave us, we can move forward in spite of any challenges and trials. In Numbers chapter 13 and 14, 12 men-one from each tribe of Israel-were selected to check out the promised land. When they came back 10 of them were filled with terror and dissuaded the people from moving forward into the promised land. "***They said to each other, we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt***" (Numbers 14:4).

However, two of the 12 men, Joshua and Caleb, believed that they could take the land. They trusted that it was theirs to inherit. They knew God was with them and had faith in his promises. Although the promised land was full of giants and impenetrable enemy walls, the promise of God remained true. They believed that as long as God was with them, nothing would be impossible.

What about Jesus? Psalm 22:6 & 8 seem to say what happened to Jesus. "***But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.*** [7] ***All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads***; [8] ***'Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver - let him rescue the one in whom he delights!***" Although Jesus was humiliated, despised, and mocked, Jesus moves forward to fulfill God's vision.

6. Conclusion

When God is silent or when we feel that we are abandoned by God, we often think God is not near us. However, today's scripture tells us to remember what God has done for us and for our ancestors. When we recall what God has done, we can praise God and give thanks to Him for what God has been doing. When we remember what the Lord has been doing, we can trust God with our future.

7. Application

When we think of our future, we need to ask ourselves what our destination is. The symbolic term in the Old Testament for the destination is "the promised land." In the New Testament our destination is "the kingdom of God." When the Israelites moved toward the promised land, a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire guided them in front of the people. A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire were their GPS. What do we follow in our life journey? What is our GPS? Do we go wherever we want to go or are we following the way that God leads?

When we get older, we visit doctors and have eye and ear exams. Have you ever had your spiritual eye & ear exams? If our spiritual eyes and ears are closed, we cannot see the presence of God and hear what God says to us. If we do not open our spiritual eyes and ears, we can't recognize what God shows us and tells us. When we see that God is in front of us and guides us, we will be full of confidence and excitement about our future.

As we celebrate Father's Day today, let us remember what our heavenly father has been doing through us and around us. Let us praise God and give thanks to him. And let us decide if we will move forward or stay in the desert. Let us remember that whatever we do, our way of living will make a big impact on our children and grandchildren. Let us help our children and grandchildren learn more about our heavenly Father so that they trust the Lord and live their lives following God's direction. Amen.