

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Psalm 23

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Psalm 23 is perhaps the most familiar Psalm among all the sweet songs of Israel.
 - A. In it God communicates His constant presences with His people, He will always be with us.
 - B. These are certainly great words of comfort.
2. If you remember only these words from this this sermon; remember that:
 - ☛ **God is real no matter how we feel!**
 - ☛ **God is for us and near us no matter how bad our circumstances might be!**
3. It is easy to serve and worship God when everything in our life is going great.
 - A. When we're surrounded by good friends and have a happy and supportive family, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - B. When things in our life are going well (happy circumstances, great personal relationships, positive finances, good health, likeminded brethren, peaceful church, etc.).
 - C. It's easy in such circumstances: it's like being on a mountaintop viewing a breathtaking sunset; or on a beautiful beach viewing the first rays of morning light; or peering into the bright eyes of your newborn baby or grandbaby.
4. But, life doesn't always provide such times.
 - A. I don't always live on "cloud nine," do you?
 - B. I've had some "mountaintop" experiences, but in the overall scheme of things they're rare.
 - C. I'm not complaining, but I've spent my share of nights in the valley of despair.
5. **** Proposition:** How do we serve/worship God when we don't feel like it?
 - A. How do we maintain our relationship/friendship with God when at times in our lives God seems so distant, so far very away from us?
 - B. I want to talk about the deepest level of service and worship, of faith and friendship with God.
 - (1) That's when we love Him, serve Him, and praise Him in spite of our pain.
 - (2) That's when we can thank Him in spite of the trial(s) we are enduring.
 - (3) That's when we trust Him when bad things happen in our life and we have no clue why.
 - (4) That's when we still love Him with all our heart despite He seems a billion miles away.
 - C. I'm not saying it's easy! But it can be done! In fact, it must be done!
6. All relationships are tested by 'separation'; whether human relationships or spiritual relationships.
 - A. The old saying goes: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."
 - B. Often this is true, but more often than not separation makes the heart (and relationship) grow weaker, because we lose our sense of connection and closeness (e.g., marital problems among Filipino Christians working overseas; close friend moving to another state; high school and college friends).
 - C. All friendships and relationships are put to the test by separation.
 - D. The same is true with our relationship with God. We are not always going to feel close to Him! There will be pendulum swings from one side to the other. That's when

service/worship gets hard, when faith gets difficult, when we find out the true depth of our friendship with God, the true depth of our faith.

- E. It may cause some Christians to shudder, but all Christians will face times in their lives when they feel forsaken and abandoned, even ignored by God.
- F. **3** We are not the only one to feel those things! **Psalms 10:1**: “Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble?”
- ☛ God, why do you hide when I need you the most?
 - ☛ Have you ever felt that way?
 - ☛ I have! We’re not the only ones! **Psa. 22:1-2** Dual passage (prophetic, but it is what David was going through and how he was feeling at that moment.)
Psa. 22:1-2: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? 2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.” **Psa. 43:2**: “For you are God, my only safe haven. Why have you tossed me aside? Why must I wander around in darkness, oppressed by my enemies?” (NLT)
- G. What I love about the Psalmists is they reveal their heart, they lay it all right out in the open, both to God and to us. **Psa. 89:46**: “How long, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?”
7. The truth: God did not leave David or these other Psalmists and God is not going to walk away from us! That’s the fact, that’s the truth! Quoting from Deut. 31:6, the Hebrew writer said: **Heb. 13:5**: “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”
- A. That doesn’t mean we’ll never have feelings of separation/abandonment, David and others had those feelings.
 - B. Did you ever feel like you were just going through the motions, your heart just wasn’t in it?
 - C. Or, did you ever feel that things in your life are so difficult that God must be far, far away?
 - D. “I’m a Christian, a child of God, why do I feel this way; what’s wrong with me?” “I shouldn’t be feeling this way?” You really beat yourself up!
 - E. Maybe the answer is: there is nothing wrong with you!
 - F. Does it never dawn on us this may be a part of the spiritual maturing process? A part of growing up in our relationship with God?
 - G. Remember, the same David that said, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Psa. 22:1) is the same man God said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.” (Acts 13:22)
 - H. The pendulum swings in all of our relationships, including our relationship with God. It did for David. There were times David felt totally disconnected from God, BUT in such times David’s feelings betrayed him. And so will ours! Feelings do that sometimes.
 - I. The same thing happened to Job. Like David there were times Job felt distanced and disconnected from God (**Job 23:8-9**: “Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; 9 When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.”).
- (I) Job is confessing the same feelings David felt. There were times he felt abandoned by God. On some level it’s obvious Job understood a part of all this was the fact he had to work through all these feelings of disconnect to develop and grow his faith. But, nonetheless he still very emotionally expressed his feelings of disconnect.

- (2) Now, very importantly, Job then (in verse 10) confesses what he knew to be true: *“But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”*
- (3) In other words, Job like David, felt these feelings of being distanced and disconnected from God, but then he stopped to think he knew God was really there all the time! God had not deserted him!
- (4) Job’s feelings and David’s sometimes betrayed them; and our feelings will sometimes betray us! They will trick us!
8. **4** Maybe we need to stop here and remind ourselves that there are times when God seems distant from us when He really is! When we make choices that are sinful (Isa. 59:1-2).
- A. Our feelings of disconnect and distance may be true because of sin.
- B. That’s what sin does! But, we are the one that walked away, God didn’t go anywhere, we did! So be careful we don’t blame God for something we’ve done (2 Cor. 13:5).
9. Important as that is, that’s not what we are talking about in this lesson. We are talking about feelings of abandonment, feelings of disconnect, feelings of isolation and distance that have nothing to do with sinful decisions and behavior.
10. The question then becomes: When we face times when our faith is tested, when we don’t feel God’s presence in our lives, when we feel as if He has abandoned us and is a million miles away...will we still love Him and serve Him?
11. Our study highlights a common mistake a lot of people make: When it comes to faith (or religion) people seek an emotional experience, a *feeling*, instead of seeking God.
- A. When we have the good feelings we conclude God is real and present in our lives.
- B. When we don’t have good feelings we conclude God has abandoned us, that He doesn’t care, that He’s far away.
- C. Do we ever stop to think God removes the ‘*feeling*’ because He knows it is not always good for us to depend on ‘*feelings*’?
- D. During those times in Job’s life and David’s life when they didn’t feel close to God; they openly questioned their relationship with God...so that’s not wrong! Don’t beat yourself up!
- E. But, even though they had such feelings they ultimately confessed what they *knew to be true*: That even though they felt God was distant they knew God was there with them all the time!
- F. *Feelings* and *facts* are two different things. Sometimes they harmonize and we feel what we know to be true.
- G. But, sometimes feelings betray us. And like David and Job, that’s when we have to remind ourselves to focus on the facts: *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Heb. 13:5)
- H. He is always near; He is always present. God’s presence in our lives is too profound to be measured by the roller coaster of emotions we experience in our lives by the varied good and bad circumstances we face. Emotionally we go up and down, up and down, but He stays the SAME! He goes nowhere! He’s always there!
- I. God wants us to feel His presence, but He wants something more: He wants us to trust Him even when we can’t feel Him!
- J. Can I do that? Can you do that? There will be situations in our lives when our faith will be stretched as far as it can go, it will be stretched to the very maximum. And if we just go by our feelings and emotions God will be nowhere to be found!

- K. Think about Job: He lost family, friends, wealth, health, he lost everything! And for 37 chapters he wanted to know “WHY!” And for 37 chapters God said “NOTHING!”
- L. So how do we keep on praising Him, worshiping Him, serving Him, loving Him when our life crumbles and literally falls apart all around us?
- ☛ How do we keep loving Him and trusting Him and praising Him when things happen in our lives that shatter our souls and we don’t understand why this is happening?
 - ☛ How do we keep worshiping and loving Him and praising Him when day after day and night after night we do exactly what Job did; we turn to the heavens and pray with all our heart, “God why, why has this happened to me?”
 - ☛ And the heavens remain just as silent for us as they were for Job.
- M. The Hebrew writer tells us to “fix our eyes on Jesus,” but how do we do that when our eyes are full of tears? Life can be very hard and sooner or later we all will face just such an experience (or two, or three, or...!).
- N. **5** I’ll tell you how we do it: Just exactly like Job did it; just exactly like David did it.
- (1) There are days we have to walk by the facts...when the feelings are not there.
 - (2) How, when my heart is empty and breaking, do I say as did Job: “...I know that my Redeemer lives”? (Job 19:25)
12. We can do so if we remember four simple things (write them down):

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **6** Tell God exactly how you feel:

- A. That’s what Job did! **Job 7:11**: “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”
- B. Job is saying, “I don’t understand why this has happened in my life and I’m angry.”
- C. God is such a trusted friend we can tell him anything. There is not a single thing we can tell Him that He can’t handle (not a friend who shrinks away when there’s trouble).
- (1) He can handle our doubts, our frustrations, our fears, our grief, our confusion, our anger, our questions, EVERYTHING!
 - (2) Did you ever have a friend like that? A friend you felt so comfortable with you could say whatever you needed to say...they cared that much about you?
 - (3) Most friends are not like that, you have to tiptoe around a lot of your inner feelings, the real Y-O-U. You have to watch what you say, therefore conversation is superficial. We don’t have to do that with God! **Heb. 4:16**: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
 - (4) That’s one of the purposes of the book of Job and many of the Psalms; to let us know we can completely bare our hearts to God; all of it!
I Pet. 5:7: “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”
Psa. 55:2: “hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught” (NIV)
 - (5) God let David and Job say whatever they needed to say; yet He still reached out and loved them.
 - (6) Think of yourself as a parent:
 - ☛ Do you want your kids to only tell you what they think you want to hear?

- ☛ Do you want your children to keep things inside that are really bothering them?
- ☛ Or do you not want them to come and tell you what is really in their heart/mind?
- ☛ Is it not 'ok' for them to come and discuss every problem they might have? Sure you do! So does God! **Lk. 11:9-13**

- D. It is only when we bear our souls to our Heavenly Father that we can take the first steps to understanding, healing, and move forward.
- E. As long as we hold it in there is a barrier there. We must tell God exactly how we feel. He already knows it, so we must bear our heart before Him (**Matt. 11:28-30**: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”).

2. **7** Focus on God’s unchanging nature:

- A. Regardless of how dire our circumstances and how badly those circumstances make us feel we have to confess what we know to be true.
- B. There are facts about God that we know are 100% true:
- (1) Regardless of what we might be going through we know down deep that God is GOOD!
Rom. 8:31-32: “If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”
 - (2) And that He loves us and cares for us and that down deep He understands what we are going through (**Heb. 4:15**: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,”).
- C. So, we must never ever doubt in the dark what God has told us in the light!
- (1) When Job’s life fell to pieces he still found things to be thankful to God for and through the book the patriarch makes statements of things he knew to be true of God (**Job 19:25**: “...I know that my Redeemer lives.”).
 - (2) We sing the song, *I Know That My Redeemer Lives*. It is a great song of inspiration and encouragement. We sing that song perhaps thinking that whoever wrote those words must have been having one of those “spiritual mountaintop” experiences.
 - (3) No they weren’t; they’re Job’s words, words spoken in the valley of despair!
 - (4) In the valley of suffering, discouragement, and despair Job confessed what he knew to be true (he didn’t write “I feel my Redeemer lives.”). He wrote “**I know** my Redeemer lives.”
 - (5) Job may have had various feelings of doubt from time-to-time, but in the end he came back to and confessed what he knew to be true about God; we need to do the same.
 - (6) We need to focus on the unchanging nature of God; He is going nowhere; He will always be there for us no matter how far away we feel He is (Heb. 13:5).

3. **3** Trust God to keep His promises:

- A. We have to rely on the promises of God not our feelings and emotions because they will play tricks on us.
- B. In other words, don’t be troubled by trouble (**Jn. 14:1**: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.”).
- (1) Don’t allow circumstances that come into your life rock and shake your faith.

- (2) Because the circumstances we face cannot change the character or promises of God.
 - (3) Nothing we go through can change the love of God or the grace (love, mercy) of God.
 - (4) Nothing can change what God said He will do; regardless of our circumstances God is still God and He will still do what He said He will do!
- C. Let's go back to Job 23: After Job speaks of his frustration (vv. 8-9) and after Job speaks of what he knows to be true (v. 10); he then says, **11** *"My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. 12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."* (vv. 11-12).
- (1) Why could Job do that? Why could Job say that? Because Job understood God would keep His promises.
 - (2) Job didn't understand how God would bring all of it about, but Job decided to trust God even when he didn't understand; even when his feelings told him not to trust.
- D. I don't know how God works everything out (Rom. 8:28), but I know He does and I have to put my full faith and trust in that!
- Psa. 37:25:** *"I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread."*
- Rom. 8:28:** *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

4. **9** Remember what God has already done for you:

- A. If God never did one more thing for me He would still deserve my love, my obedience, my praise, and my total commitment because He has already done more than I will ever deserve (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 1:3; **Rom. 5:8:** *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*).
- B. All of us have gone astray, but God has caused the iniquity of all of us to fall on Him (**Isa. 53:4-6:** *"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*).
- C. God deserves my best and my total commitment because of what He has already done!
- D. So we must be careful and not blame our problems on Him, but remember all the great things He's done for us (**Job 19:25:** *"...I know that my Redeemer lives"*).

10 When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

******Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will keep singing as the days go by.

******So, amid the conflict whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

******Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

III. CONCLUSION:

I. Remember: **II**

- A. Tell God exactly how you feel
- B. Focus on God's unchanging nature
- C. Trust God to keep His promises
- D. Remember what God has already done for you

2. How? We need to focus our energy on four activities:

A. **12 Meditate**

- ☛ Don't fret and beat yourself up for having such feelings!
- ☛ Think! Count your many blessings!
- ☛ Think! About what to pray for! **Rom. 8:26:** *"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."*
- ☛ Think! About God's word, especially His power, His promises (Heb. 13:5; Eph. 3:20; Gen. 1 & 2)

B. **13 Read**

- ☛ Romans 10:17; Psalms
- ☛ Memorize key passages: Eph. 3:20; 1 Cor. 9:27; 10:13; Job 19:25

C. **14 Pray**

- ☛ **Philippians 4:6-7:** *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*
- ☛ Ask God to bring the power of Eph. 3:20 to bear on your problems!
- ☛ Kneel! **Heb. 7:25:** *"...He always lives to make intercession for them."*

D. **15 Obedience/Trust/Patience**

- ☛ **Psa. 37:5:** *"Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass."*
- ☛ **1 Pet. 5:7:** *"casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."*
- ☛ **Rom. 8:32:** *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"*
- ☛ Patience! **Psa. 27:14:** *"Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!"*

Adapted from an audio sermon, "When God Seems So Far Away," by Wilson Adams.