

Bull, Lions & Dogs

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the critical nature of prayer and seeking God's presence amidst life's challenges, illustrated through Psalm 22.

Duration: 35:30

Scripture: Psalm 22:1-16

Topics: "Trouble"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses a prayer from the book of Psalms, specifically Psalm 22. The prayer is a plea for God to not be far from the speaker, as trouble is near and there is no one to help. The speaker emphasizes the emotional and desperate nature of this prayer, comparing it to a child crying out for their parents in times of distress. The sermon encourages listeners to turn to God in their own times of overwhelming circumstances, acknowledging that even as Christians, we can still be beaten down by people and situations.

Transcript

Oh, what a good pastor I would be if at the end of it all they could say about me, he helped the people in the church to pray. He taught them, he encouraged them. He prayed himself.

That's the ultimate compliment for a minister. Not eloquent, but to make contact with God and be able to receive answers from God through prayer. And what a sad pastor I would be if I never prayed for you, never thought about you.

And then when you're away from the church and you have an emergency, the choir knows the words to the song, but they don't know how to pray. What kind of church would that be? How's the song gonna help you when you're under the attack of the enemy? And one of the most remarkable things in the New Testament is you constantly, as you're studying the life of the Son of God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you see him praying. Well, if Jesus couldn't make it through the day without praying, what does that tell us about us? How many, it's obvious to you that if Jesus needed to pray and be in communion with the Father, we need it a million times more.

Would you lift your hand and say amen to that? All right, so I wanna teach you a one verse prayer, not the Lord's prayer. I'm gonna give you another prayer today that the Lord has laid on my heart. I wanted not to speak on this, but he must know who's here from wherever or our own people behind me, not only in front

of me, but behind me.

And it's found in one of the most interesting Psalms, Psalm 22, so let's look at it. If you have a Bible, turn to Psalm 22. If you don't have a Bible, ask the person next to you, could I look in on your Bible? If the people next to you don't have a Bible, look at them and say, what's up with us? We don't even have a Bible.

Psalm 22, now, of all the Psalms, Psalm 22 is the most messianic of all the Psalms. What does that mean? It's the most prophetic messianic of all the Psalms. This Psalm was written 1,000 years, approximately before Jesus came.

Many people believe that this is the Psalm that Jesus was reading over and over the week before he was crucified, because we know he was crucified. He read the word, grew up as a Jewish lad, and studied the Old Testament, the law, the prophets, the writings of the psalmist and the other writings in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. And this Psalm has sentences in it and things that happen that are prophetic.

The psalmist who's writing it, David it's ascribed to, went through, in some sense, these extreme things, but he was actually writing with a double application. It was a prophetic Psalm, because he was going through a lot, but he actually was writing about things that the son of David, the Messiah, would go through, so it has a double meaning, some of it. It has a meaning to the psalmist, but then it is a prophecy of what would happen to Jesus when he was crucified.

Written 1,000 years before, how in the world could David write something 1,000 years before and would be fulfilled on the cross of Calvary and it not be supernatural by the hand of God? So just look at a couple of the passages that are prophetic. Verse one, 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? Look up here, what did Jesus say on the cross at the very end when he bore the sins of the world and he died for our sins and your sins? What did he say, my God, my God? He quoted right from Psalm 22. Go further down and look at verse seven.

All who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the Lord.

Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him. Was that fulfilled at the cross? Remember when they hurled those insults at him? Look at verse 14, 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 pot shirt 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. Verse 17, I can count all my bones. People stare and gloat over me.

They divide my garments among them and cast lots from my clothing. A thousand years before the Romans did that, David already foresaw it. Oh, God is an awesome God.

Can we put our hands together? What a proof of the inspiration of Scripture. How in the world could David, a thousand years before, make sure that the Romans would fulfill that by gambling for his garment? No,

it's the word of God. Praise God.

Now, let's look at another part of it. Here's the verse we're gonna learn. Let's look at verse 11.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there's no one to help. Many bulls surround me. Strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. And then in verse 16, dogs have surrounded me. A band of evil men has encircled me.

The name of this message is Bulls, Lions, and Dogs. I couldn't think of a better title. What can I tell you? Bulls, Lions, and Dogs.

And here's the prayer, one verse. Verse 11. Some don't have a Bible or reading from a different translation, so I'm gonna say it phrase by phrase.

Look at me and then repeat after me. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. There is no one to help.

Do not be far from me. Do not be far from me. For trouble is near.

For trouble is near. And there is no one to help. And there is no one to help.

Okay, now let's try to say it all together, okay? Look up at me, don't cheat, look at your Bible. Ready, one, two, three. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

And actually, if you look at the Bible and they put the words that are added in, in italics, so you'll know that they added it for smooth reading, actually what this verse says is this. Do not be far from me, trouble is near, no one to help. That's actually what David said, literally.

Do not be far from me. Notice the play between far and near. Do not be far from me, trouble is near, no one to help.

Now that's a prayer. And that's a prayer I want us to learn and maybe learn something about praying from it. But did you notice it? There's only one sentence that's a prayer.

Two of the phrases are just description of a fact. What's the prayer part? The first clause, do not be far from me. What are the other two? It's not prayer, it's sentences that describe a situation.

For trouble is near, that's not a prayer. Trouble is near. Clause number three, no one to help.

Do not be far from me, come close to me, don't leave me alone. I can't make it without you. Why? Because trouble is near.

I'm surrounded by it. And there's no one to help. Not a soul in the world can help me.

You know, Samuel Chadwick, a great Methodist writer from 100 years ago said that one day as a child he went out to do an errand for his mother and he had to go to a Mrs. Wilson's house and he knocked on the door and nobody answered. And what he did was he looked through the window to see if anyone was home and there was Mrs. Wilson on her knees praying. And he tiptoed in as an inquisitive little kid can do and he just stood at the doorway and he heard her praying.

And he said, from that moment on, I knew Mrs. Wilson knew God and walked with God. Because when you hear a person pray, you learn a lot about a person. And we learn a lot about this psalmist, don't we? David made huge mistakes in his life.

David was not a perfect man. Some of his humongous mistakes are described in the Bible. But one thing we know about David, we know more about his praying than anyone else in the Bible because most of the Psalms are written by David, a good number, and most of them are prayers.

Some are adoration and praising God and all the rest, but how many times do you get a picture of David's soul as he's calling on God, primitive, from his heart, a cry to God? And this is what made David so special to God is he knew how to pray and run to God and find refuge in God. So let's just analyze what he's saying here and see if we can learn something to help us pray better today and to prepare our hearts for Tuesday night. You know, right now, praying a prayer like I just described and we learned could precipitate a miracle right now in your life because there's something about life that we have problems.

I've been guilty of this so many times. We have problems, and instead of giving them to God, we worry, we get depressed, despondent, we tell other people, and the one person we don't talk to is the only one who can help us. Am I right or wrong? I said, am I right or wrong? We have problems, we have pressures, and you would think as Christians, we would know what to do, but the devil blocks us because he knows when you're talking to Titichina or your friend or whoever, they're not gonna help you.

But when, and when you feel bad for yourself, that won't help. But how many know when you get to God, something is gonna happen? Come on, let's say amen to that. Let's see if we remember the verse.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help. Good. Do not be far from me.

That's the prayer part. How primitive that is. How heartfelt that is.

Really good praying does not come from here. Really good praying comes from here. This is not an intellectual prayer like, do not be far from me, Lord, while you're texting someone.

No, this is, I can't make it without you. It's almost like a mommy, daddy kind of feeling. Do you know that when women give birth and they're in extensive pain, do you know that doctors will tell you, and it's been going on for hundreds of years, that a lot of them, when they can't take in and can't go on, they start crying out for their mommy? When my wife gave birth to our first child, Chrissy, she told me that somebody in the labor room was crying, mommy, mommy.

I just finished the most unbelievable book I think that I've ever read in my life, about World War II, with the sweetest ending that I could never even imagine, and it's a true story. I still can't believe that it's true. It's called Unbroken, story of a Italian guy out in California who was a great runner and then ended up in the war when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

He was captured by the Japanese army and underwent a lot of torture and went through things you can't imagine. But he says that a lot of times the strongest, bravest men would crawl up in a fetal position and just say, mommy, help me. That's what real prayer is.

When you crawl up in a spiritual fetal position, and you say, do not be far from me, I can't do this. You know, God loves when you tell the truth. You don't have to use King James language, you don't have to sound like anyone else, but from in here, when you reach out and say, God, I can't go on without you, do

not be far from me.

Be close to me, because I can't make it. Now, that's a prayer God's gonna respond to. A lot of prayers I've prayed, I was just saying prayers.

But by the help of the Holy Spirit, number of times in my life, I've really prayed. I can say this, when God's helped me to pray, and it's come from deep inside, I've seen the most remarkable answers that you could imagine. When you call, God says, I'm gonna answer.

And when you seek for me, and you'll seek for me with all your heart, I will be found by you. So David teaches us something great. You don't have to be eloquent, but there's a desperation and an aggressiveness in this prayer.

Do not be far from me. I need your help. I have no plan B. I have no plan C. If you have a plan B or a plan C, then you're not desperate for God to answer.

And that's what stops a lot of our prayers from going above the ceiling. We're throwing it up because we're supposed to, but we're not desperate. God, do not be far from me, because I can't make it.

I can't get through this. So we learn this very childlike. To pray good, you gotta become a child.

Except you become like a child, you can't enter the kingdom of heaven. And a lot of us have become sophisticated. We learn a lot of verses, and in that sophistication, we lose our ability to pray.

I remember when one choir member, Wanda, was pregnant with her first child, and the signs were very bad for that child during the pregnancy. On a Tuesday night, we were praying, and it was desperate. They were saying some very ugly things about what could be happening in that birth and the child.

And I felt impressed to ask Karen Melendez to pray. And the Holy Spirit came on Karen. She prayed a prayer.

I was in awe. I was in absolute awe. That wasn't her praying.

It was her voice, but the Holy Spirit took her. She led the whole congregation up to God. We were so desperate, like, God, you don't help us here.

We're sunk. That's the kind of praying God loves to hear. No option B or C, but God, you have to do it.

Now notice the trouble that a great man of God was in. Lord, do not be far from me, for trouble is near. A lot of people have the misguided conception that if you serve God and you love God and you're sincere, even with your mistakes and my mistakes, I have the most, but that things will just go smooth because you're a Christian.

No, sometimes you're attacked extra because you're a Christian. And if you've broken the curse in your family, the attacks will be especially heavy on you. How do I mean break the curse? A lot of people, some here, some out there, you're the first ones that are Christians in the heritage of your family and everything's been away from God, away from God, away from God, no honoring Jesus, no serving God, sometimes with accompanying patterns of sin like drugs, alcohol, immorality of all kinds, whatever, and now God breaks into that family line and saves you.

And you become a light, not just to the world, but to your family. What do you think Satan's gonna do when he sees that? Cheer you on or attack you? Attack you. In fact, it seems as you read the Bible that God's choicest saints undergo the most horrific situations.

It is what it is, just the way it is. But they come out with a testimony and a victory where they can help other people. So no matter what the devil does, God uses it for good so that they were a blessing before, now they're a greater blessing because Satan attacked them.

Come on, let's put our hands together, say amen. Do you believe that? Clap your hands if you believe that. Whatever the enemy does, God works it for good.

So, do not be far from me. I can't live far from you. I gotta sense your presence.

I gotta know that you're holding my hand, God. I can't be alone, God, I can't be alone. I gotta know your presence is with me.

I can't make this without you. No ifs, ands, or buts. Secondly, for trouble is near.

God, don't be far because trouble is near. What kind of trouble was he in? In this case, we'll talk about David, the psalmist, and we'll just refer secondarily to the Messiah, Jesus, who it's prophetically about. It was people.

And he uses three animals as pictures for what he was up against. But I'd like to suggest to you, sometimes it's not just people, it's circumstances, it's pressures, it's difficulties that you go through in life. Number one, strong bulls are against me.

You ever see a strong bull? Anybody here ever been close to a live bull? Lift your hand if you've ever been close, real close to a live bull. I was in Madrid, Spain some years ago, and I went in to eat in a restaurant, and it was the most different restaurant I've ever been in in my life, Pastor Burgos. It, tables, good food, and all of that, but on the walls around it were the heads, is this bullfighting country, right? Madrid.

There were seven or eight heads of the bulls with the horns, and in between the bulls' heads were pictures, not of bullfighters doing something fancy, but every picture was the bull over the years, real pictures of the bulls goring the bullfighters. Being tossed up in the air, one guy impaled. This is why you're eating, you're looking at this.

Whose idea was that, who opened that restaurant? And there's pictures that will just take your breath away of bulls getting into the matador. Not the matador killing the bull, none of those. The bulls getting the matadors.

And I looked at one of the heads of the bulls, oh my goodness, who in the world would get into a bullring with an enraged bull, the head. I said to one of the guys who was running the restaurant, I said, that's real, or is that enlarged to scare you? He said, no, that's a bull, what's wrong with you? That's the head of a bull. There's bulls that big, and you stand there and it's passing by you by two inches? And David says, strong bulls are all around me.

In other words, they're too strong for me. You can't be far from me, because what's against me is too strong for me. You see, when you and I pray, God doesn't want us to have a stiff upper lip and say, I can handle this.

He wants us to do the opposite. I cannot handle this, and that's why I need you. Do not be far from me.

Because these bulls are too strong. Bulls speak of strength in the Bible. They're nasty, they can be nasty too, but they speak of strength.

Lions are after me, lions who are vicious predators. Lions have no feelings. David says, I'm up against people who are not only too strong for me, they have no feelings, no human feelings.

They're like lions. Lions, you know, like I told you, I think last year, I saw that video on the National Geographic channel of this animal, they were all running from the lions, but this one animal pulled or broke a bone or something and was limping. You think the lions ran up to it and said, no, I'm gonna let you go, it's not fair, you got a bad leg.

Bad leg, nothing. They attack like lions. And David says, what I'm up against, it's too big for me and the opposing forces are vicious like lions.

You know, when the devil attacks you, there's no feeling. When demonic forces, some of you might be here and you don't believe in demons and all that, read the Bible and then according to your faith, let God teach you what's right and what's wrong. I don't wanna argue about that.

But when satanic forces, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against what? Principality, you think those principalities and powers, you think they have any feelings? You don't think they're gonna destroy, minister's son is doing 40 to 70, 40 to 70 years. You think that the devil cares that his father is a minister? No, it's like lions, destroy everything. Destroy everything.

That's why we gotta pray for each other. That's why you gotta call on God because there's no mercy with the enemy. Strong lions, vicious lions roaring against me.

And finally, I'm encircled by these dogs. You know, I learned from a friend who lived in South Africa who told me of all the animals that the people are afraid of in the area where he lived in South Africa were the wild dogs. I thought it would be lions or something like that.

He said, no, these wild dogs. He said, not, what are those other dogs, those other animals that come? Hyenas, not hyenas, these are those wild dogs. They're smaller than hyenas.

But they come in herds and they circle you. They are afraid of no one, he told me. He said, they'll go after a lion.

If they can separate one lion and the lion is a little older, the dogs will come after a lion. Snappings, and what they do, they encircle you until you don't know which way to turn and then you wanna just give up. And David says, it's not just that they're too strong and they're vicious, they're like wild dogs.

Dogs have encircled me. You ever go through a time in life where everywhere you look, there's a problem? Anybody ever have one of those? I mean, you look here, then you look there, and you're looking for some place where you can rest, some place that Jason could look at and say, well, that's cool, that's good. No, David says, everywhere I look, there's trouble, like Jesus on the cross, just everywhere.

Maybe God brought you here today because you're in a David type of situation. What's against you is too strong, you realize it. You've done your best, it's too strong.

You don't have to be ashamed to say that. David said it, it's too strong. And they're vicious, too.

Lord, no wonder he says, do not be far from me. Would you please help me? Hold my hand, let your presence be with me. I cannot go on another day unless you help me.

Why? Because trouble is near, trouble is near. Bulls, lions, filthy dogs encircling me so that I feel like I, this is why a lot of Christians give up and do crazy things, is encirclement. When you get encircled and everywhere you look, there's a problem, it makes you wanna give up.

Anybody wanna say amen to that? It's true. You wanna give up because you say there's no rest. I got trouble everywhere.

Up in the balcony, trouble everywhere. Right up back up there, trouble everywhere, right? So do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there's no one else to help. Now, God helps in many ways in the Bible and many times he uses people.

And I know in my life he's used people to help me. He's used my wife to help me. He's used you to help me.

He's used other ministers to help me. He's used a choir to help me. But David's in one of those unique situations where he says, there's no one to help me, like Jesus on the cross.

Nobody could help Jesus on the cross. Sometimes God permits you get in a situation where even people and situations that have blessed you in the past, he cuts you off from that so you have no one. Nada.

Nadia. No one. So you're forced to look up and say, don't be far from me.

You have to help me, God. You have to help me because trouble is near. You can't be far and there's no one else to help.

I have no plan B. I got nobody I can depend on. But I have you and I wanna declare to you today that God wants to help you. You don't have to go to God today and twist his arm and say, would you help me? He wants to help you.

Jesus said, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. Come boldly to the throne of grace. I'll give you the mercy.

Anybody need mercy here? Anybody messed up this week so bad you feel soiled, maybe in your heart to even be sitting in the building? And the devil's accusing you, even while everyone was singing, the devil's accusing you. Resist him. Rebuke him.

And come to a God of mercy and say, God, don't be far from me. Help me, forgive me, cleanse me, get me back on the right track. Or maybe you're overwhelmed by circumstances.

And you can't take it anymore and you feel you can't go on. Listen, I've been in a couple situations in my life, I got so low and my nerves gave way on me a couple times where the sound of a phone, somebody ringing a phone and I would start to cry. Thought I was losing my mind.

Weeping for no reason. Think of a verse, think of this, that. I'm in tears.

I mean, you know, sometimes in life, even though you're a Christian, you can get beat down. Does anybody relate to anything I'm saying here? Just lift your hand. Even though you're a Christian, you can be

beat down by people, by circumstances, by whatever, and you don't know where to go.

You don't know what to do, but oh, thank God for this prayer. Let's say it. Be not far from me, for trouble is near.

And there is no one to help but you, Jesus. No one to help but you, Jesus. Anybody in a Jesus-only situation here today? Jesus only.

Only Jesus. That very situation qualifies you to pray a great prayer. Because the more desperate you feel inside, the quicker God's gonna come and help you.

Yes, he will. Well, I've said my piece. What can I tell you? Bulls and lions and dogs.

Now, it must be that God would lay this on my heart. I've tried to get away from talking about this verse in five or six different ways that God knows. It must be that somebody behind me or in front of me is in a David kind of situation.

Don't be far from me, God. Stay close to me, because trouble is near. And there's no one who can help me now.

Anybody just backed up against the wall like that? Close your eyes. No wonder now, I get it, God said my house shall be called not a house of preaching, not a house of singing, not a house of Bible study. All of those are so important.

But my house shall be called a house of prayer where people can come and say, do not be far from me, for trouble is near. And there's no help. No help but you, God.

You're the only one who can help me through this day, through this situation, through this valley. I'm stuck in mud and I can't get out. Would you lift me, God? Would you lift me? Anybody behind me or in front of me? Says, pastor, that was for me.

And I have faith that I can pray with David and God's gonna hear me like he did David. He's gonna rescue me from every device, every dog, every lion, every bull. I'm gonna put my foot on the neck of every one of those.

Because God's gonna bring me through. Greater is he that's in me, but God has to help me now. He has to revitalize me.

He's gotta revive me. Get out of your seat and come up here. Stand here in the front.

Lord, we don't know what's gonna happen, but there's a sense that some very difficult times are gonna come on the earth. And your people are gonna have to be a people of prayer. Other resources will be cut off.

But thank you that there's nothing that can stop me from praying to you, God. Heaven's door is always open when we come sincerely in the name of Jesus. Now, Lord, you know who you brought here this morning? You know why all these have come forward? Do not be far from them.

In the name of Jesus, do not be far from them. For trouble, it's not just near, it's everywhere. And we want you to know there's no one who can help us but you.

We give up all of our futile efforts to try to solve it with our own strength. And we cast all of our cares upon you today, God. We ask you to stretch out your hand and undertake for your people, God.

We're your children, we're coming to you, God. What father doesn't take care of his children? So don't be far, be near. And we know you're stronger than all the bulls and the lions and the dogs.

You give us victory, we're more than conquerors. And we want you to know we love you today. We love you that we can always come to you, we can always pray.

Make us a people of prayer, make us a church that prays. Make me a pastor who prays, a choir that prays, deacons that pray, pastoral staff that prays, balcony that prays, downstairs that prays, Lord. Thank you, Lord.

Let the children pray, let the teens pray, transitions pray, let the married couples pray, let the seniors pray, Lord. But do not be far, for trouble is near. And there's no one to help but you.

Thank you for hearing us today. Now we're gonna expect to see help coming from heaven. For we've asked this in Jesus' name.

In Jesus' name. Everybody lift your hands and just start to praise God out loud that he answers prayer. Come on, nobody quiet, nobody in the building quiet.

Come on, praise God out loud. We praise you, God, that you hear and answer prayer, that you've delivered us time and time again, Lord. What a track record you have with us, Lord.

We praise you out loud, we praise you with our voices, God. Who is a God like you, Lord? Who runs to the help of your children? You run to help your children. Now let your face shine upon your people today, Lord.

This whole day we devoted to you, God, because your word says, draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you. So let us take these steps of obedience to draw near in prayer and worship and listening to your word. Let us listen to your word today.

Lead them by your spirit. Grant your people peace, the shalom of God. Not to be anxiety-ridden, not to be nervous, but to know that God is with us, who can be against us.

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