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Honest To God

Psalm 44 & 22

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It's been a hard week... a hard year. Let's pray:

Dear God, we have heard the most *amazing things* about You – how you set the captives free, and how it was not by their might but by Yours. You are my hope. Because of You, I can stand. So I don't trust in my own ability –my own good works and wisdom – but in Your wisdom. You have saved us. In You, Oh Lord, is our boast, and we thank you and praise you over and over ...

But now, it's like You've abandoned us, left us, and disgraced us. We're like dead meat, we've been chased from our home and scattered. We must not be worth much to You at all! You've made us a joke to other churches, friends and neighbors think we're nuts meeting downtown. All day long, I'm embarrassed by what happened this past year. I wear shame like a black hood over my head. I'm constantly reminded –everywhere I look – every conversation I have...

And this has happened to all of us. But we haven't forgotten You. We haven't been unfaithful. Our hearts are good. We've stuck to the truth. But You ... You have treated us like *dogs*. Sometimes, I just want die. If we'd been unfaithful to You, You would have known about it. But we stuck out our necks for You. We put our heart on the line for You, and You just let us get butchered, like a piece of bloody meat!

So, wake up, God! Why are You sleeping? Why are You hiding? Why don't You even care? We're dying down here, dying in the dust. So get up! They say that You are Love and all that. Well, if You're so great, why don't You *show it to us!*?

Amen

Now, I have to ask you a question: Did my prayer make you nervous? Just a little?

Now, turn to three or four people, introduce yourself, and tell them why my prayer made you nervous.

So why did it make you nervous?

Do you ever feel like that?

It's rather interesting that my prayer makes us nervous... because actually, God, like, wrote it. It's Psalm 44. I basically just paraphrased it for us, and then toned it down in a few places that made *me* nervous.

Let's read it from the English Standard Version.

[Psalm 44]

To the choirmaster, a maskil, of the sons of Korah.

(A Maskil appears to be some type of liturgical song or poem used in the temple. The Sons of Korah were Levites and musicians. This Psalm was probably sung responsively in the temple. The King would sing part, and the congregation would sing other parts. You see, the book of Psalms means: "Book of Songs" The book of Psalms is the Hebrew hymn book. Psalm 44 is in God's authorized corporate songbook.)

O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds You performed in their days, in the days of old: You with Your own hand drove out the nations, but them You planted; You afflicted the peoples, but them You set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but Your right hand and Your arm, and the light of Your face, for You delighted in them.

You are my King, O God; ordain salvation for Jacob! Through You we push down our foes, through Your name we tread down those who rise up against us. For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But You have saved us from our foes and You have put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to Your name forever.

But You have rejected us and disgraced us, and have not gone out with our armies. You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoil. You have made us like sheep for slaughter, and have scattered us among the nations.

You have sold Your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them. You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples. All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten You, and we have not been false to Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way; yet You have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death.

If we had forgotten the name of our God, or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For He knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Awake! Why are You sleeping, O Lord? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do You hide Your face? Why do You forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of Your steadfast love.

Isn't that amazing? That's in *the Bible*... but not *just* the Bible. In the *songbook*! That means God told His people to sing it. In fact, there's a whole genre of songs and poems in Scripture just like it. They're called Psalms of Lament. And yet you don't hear many songs like that on Inspirational Christian Radio. You sure wouldn't find anything like that in the Koran. There are no songs, and no poetry in the Koran, and certainly no songs about how Allah has really let us down or been a disappointment.

No songs in the Koran, and few songs (if any) like it in the Christian Music Industry. And you can see why: It's *terrible* P.R. It's lousy marketing. You know, as a young pastor, and still today at times, I think my job is to be like God's P.R. Guy... His Marketing Manager. So, like, if you call out to God, and He doesn't seem to answer, or He doesn't seem to work, my job is to come along and put a positive spin on it... do some P.R. work and explain Him to you.

In this world of pain and sorrow, I am to be God's ordained and seminary-trained Spin Doctor. And that stresses me out for several reasons, not the least of which is: God doesn't seem all that concerned about His own spin.

I mean, if God needs P.R. or spin doctoring, Psalm 44 doesn't make much sense. If God is a program, a system, or a religion we're trying to market (you know, like, "Do this things, and God will work for you!"), well, Psalm 44 doesn't make much sense!

If God is *at all* insecure about His reputation or image, Psalm 44 doesn't make much sense.

But ... you know, the God of the Bible seems to be incredible secure.

Now I've always been rather insecure, and that's made genuine relationships something of a problem for me. You know, part of why we get married and enter into that marriage covenant is so that we might be secure enough to risk being honest enough, to risk having a genuine, honest, real relationship with at least one person in this world.

Well, I'm insecure, and Susan is insecure, and we argue. I'm more verbal than Susan. I mean, I'm better at *arguing* than Susan, and because of some wounds in her past, she's often tempted to just "shut down."

Sometimes arguing with her, I'll suddenly realize she's right, and I'm wrong. In those moments, I know that I could win the argument; but for the love of her, and if I'm secure enough, sometimes I'll help her argue against me. I'll become her advocate, her counselor, and suggest some words. I'll say, "You must be thinking..." or "I bet you're feeling...", etc.

But now it's different with God. He's *never wrong*, right? Never wrong. But you know, even if I'm right and Susan is wrong (which is rare), I still need to help her speak. I need to help her express what's on her heart. I need to say, "I bet you think I'm a moron right now, don't you?" If I

don't, she may honor me with her lips, but her heart will be far from me.

So, a good husband helps his bride express her heart, even if he gets crucified in the process. You know who made the nails that they drove through Jesus' hands? He made the iron in those nails... that something to think about.

But the good husband helps his bride express her heart, because he doesn't simply want her consent, her obedience, or even her respect as much as he wants her heart to commune with his heart.

Sometimes, especially when we were first married, I'd say something and hurt Susan, and then she'd just shut down. I'd say, "Honey, what's wrong? Are you mad?" And she'd say, "I'm fine, nothing's wrong, I'll be whatever you want, I'll do whatever you want." When that would happen, it would scare me to death. Nothing was worse, for I no longer had access to her heart. It was locked away in a dungeon of resentment and pain.

You know, God referred to Israel as His bride. Maybe He didn't simply want her consent, maybe He didn't simply want her obedience, maybe He didn't even want her respect (as in Fear and Awe). Maybe He wanted her *heart*... to commune with her heart. And so He'd say, "You honor Me with your lips, but your heart is so far from Me." (Is. 29:13) In other words, "I know you're angry, I know you're hurt, I know you've shut down; so next time you worship, say this ... sing *this*: Psalm 44. Sing this and be truthful. I'll give you the words. I'll help you be truthful... honest to God."

You know, I'm not even sure that some of the things in Psalm 44 are *technically* true, and yet they're *truthful*. I mean, the Psalm says, "Why are You sleeping, God?" Is God sleeping? No, I don't believe He is or was. But did

Israel feel like God was sleeping? Yes, she did. Even if she was terrified to say it, she did.

Years ago, Susan and I got into an argument about something or other. And just when I expected Susan to shut down her heart, she spun around and screamed, “You _____!” She called me a name, and the name implied a deed... a deed I had not done. It was not true, and YET it was truly how she felt. And all at once, we both burst out laughing. I said, “Wow, that’s good! I think I know how you feel.” You see, at that moment, in our marriage, it was a gift; for I had her heart, even if it was hurt and angry.

Now listen, I’m not telling you to curse anyone. Don’t ever do that. And I’m certainly not telling you to curse God. And yet I am telling you that you must tell God how you feel, even if what you feel is untrue. You must surrender the lie. Sometimes we’re untruthful, because we’re harboring anger and resentment, and we don’t want to die to a lie. And I think when we choose that, it’s called hell. We take refuge in hell, death, hades. Well, even if what you feel is untrue, you must be truthful with that untruth. You see, you can speak something that is objectively untrue, and yet be very truthful: “Why are You sleeping, God?”

On the other hand, you can speak something that is objectively true and not have an ounce of truth in you. Satan quoted Scripture to Jesus, and the Scripture was true. Yet Satan has no truth in him. He is never honest, and is always untrue.

Well, Bride of Christ, did you know that you’re married to Jesus? He’s very secure, He’s always right, He can win any argument with you, and He’s definitely more verbal than you ... He is the Word. And yet, He wants your heart. He wants you to be truthful. In John 14, He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He is the way *to* the truth and

the truth is life. It's all Him. He is the way, and that way is truth. I'm trying to say you can't arrive at THE truth without being truthful." The truth is the way... the road.

So if you say, "Pastor, which way should I go – to seminary or medical school?" I should answer, "Go truthfully, the way is truth."

Soren Kierkegaard writes:

*The road comes into existence only when we walk upon it. That is, the road is truth ... Worldly wisdom teaches that the road goes over Gerizim, or over Moriah, or that the road is certain doctrines, or certain behaviors. But all this is a deception, because the road is how it is walked. It is indeed as Scripture says – two people can be sleeping in the same bed – the one is saved, the other is lost. Two people can go up to the same house of worship – the one goes home saved, the other is lost. Two people can recite the same creed – the one can be saved, the other is lost. **How does this happen except for the fact that spiritually speaking, it is a deception to know where the road is, because the road is: how it is walked?***

In other words, you can't arrive at the truth until you are truthful. And indeed, why would you want the truth if you didn't want to be truthful? If you didn't want to be truthful, you'd only want the truth so you could use the truth, break the truth, or crucify the truth. And Jesus is the Truth.

To know the truth, you must be truthful, and that means: faith is *not lying*, worship is not an act, and righteousness is not a con job.

I heard someone say, "Faith is believing what you know isn't true." Well, that's not faith. That's lying to yourself.

- Faith is not pretending someone's healed when they're not healed.
- Faith is not ignoring evidence.
- Faith is not pretending there are dinosaur footprints next to human footprints somewhere in Texas, because you think it makes God look good.

Faith is truth - fullness – it's a love for truth.

And Jesus is the Truth.

In high school, I had a million questions, and I wondered if Jesus was true. I've told you that the closest thing I have to a conversion experience was the night in high school that I wept beside the bathtub crying out to God, telling God that I didn't think I could believe in Him any more.

That experience has always puzzled me, because that was my turning point – when I, Peter Hiatt... not my parents, but **I** – really began to believe. Now I think I'm starting to see that when I said I didn't believe, I was speaking to the one in Whom I did believe! But He wasn't simply the truth *out there* (objective truth), an object. He was the truth *in here*, in my heart.

So I wasn't sure about the truth *out there*, but without realizing it, I confessed my faith in the truth *in here*, in my heart. I confessed that I believed that I had to be full of truth. I wanted truth! And do you see that Jesus is the Truth? And He is the Way. So that night I stepped onto the Way.

Now, I believe *All of Scripture* is true. Like Campolo says, "I even believe the cover of my Bible is genuine Moroccan leather." I believe! I believe, because that night, I sought the truth. "Seek and you will find," said Jesus.

So faith is *not lying* and worship is not an act.

You know I've always struggled with "Christian Music", because so much of it seems untrue. I don't mean doctrinally untrue, like they're messing up the doctrine of the Trinity, but emotionally untrue.

If we sing, "I'm never alone," that's true.
But if we sing, "I'm never lonely," that's a lie.

If you sing "Our God is an awesome God," that's true. He is. But if you sing, "I always think You're awesome," well, that could be a lie ... it could be flattery.

Psalm 78:3 tells us that this was the sin of the Israelites in the desert against God. "They flattered Him with their mouths. They lied to Him with their tongues." Yet in a bunch of places, Scripture says their sin was "murmuring" or "grumbling." Do you get the picture?

Don't ever *murmur* the contents of Psalm 44 into the air. I mean, don't just complain about God into the air, and don't grumble about God under your breath or by whispering to a neighbor. Never gossip about God. When the Israelites "grumbled" about God among themselves, it was a sin that sent them to their grave. But when the Israelites "grumbled" about God *to God*, it was called worship. He even prescribed the words: it's called the Bible, and Psalm 44 is poetry. Poetry is emotional. God wants intellectual honesty, emotional honesty, and personal honesty, given to Him.

He already knows what you're thinking. He already knows what you're feeling. He wants you to tell Him. He wants your heart. But do you know? And will you tell Him? He wants your heart.

So, faith is not lying, worship is not an act, and righteousness is not a *con job*. It's tempting to think that's what God wants. Religious Institutions may want it, but God doesn't need your P.R. He doesn't want you to do any spin doctoring on his behalf. You cannot advance the truth by telling lies, no matter how prudent they may seem, and no matter how nice they may make Jesus look. In other words, I really think God wants us to be real... to be a real church in an unreal world.

But folks can only arrive at the truth by being truthful. No matter how much lies may seem to work, they cannot build God's kingdom.

Last year, I was a little *too* real, and it was bad for P.R. I asked questions the Establishment didn't want me to ask. So they required me to affirm two statements that I did not believe. At that point, it really didn't matter whether the statements were *objectively* true or not true. If I affirmed them, I would be untrue. That is, I would be lying – saying I knew something I didn't know. So, short of someone convincing me the statements were true, I could not affirm them without being *untruthful*.

Well, I think that was incredibly frustrating for some folks. For what appeared to be just a little lie (a business lie) would in their minds do *so much good*: preserve the building, the budget, the programs, the establishment. Well, it might have preserved the establishment, but it wouldn't have built the Kingdom – the Kingdom of Truth. And it would've left me alone in Hell, dead on the inside. What I mean is: it would have cut me off from truth, the truth in my inmost being. It would have cut me off from the truth, and Jesus is the Truth and the Life. He is the King of the Kingdom, of which I long to be a part.

We're married to Truth, we're the children of Truth.

Regarding my marriage and my children, *nothing* scares me as much as a lie. When my wife says, “Peter, do whatever you want, you’re right, I’m wrong, I’m fine,” but she’s not fine... she doesn’t think I’m right, and she resents me, when she “honors me with her lips but her heart is far from me,” nothing scares me as much. Because then she’s cut off. The lie cuts her off. If she’s yelling at me, at least we’re still connected. But a lie, even a nice lie, cuts her off, cuts my kids off.

When my kids lie to me, they’re lost. They’ve cut themselves off. When we lie, we cut ourselves off from the Father and His Word, and we imprison ourselves in death. Because He is the Life... the Truth is the Life. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” said Jesus.

Nothing has convinced me of the danger of lies as much as praying for people who struggle with demonic oppression. The demonic literally takes refuge in darkness and lies, but cannot bear the truth. To cast out a demon is to expose a lie. It is to shine the light on a little piece of Hell.

So when we live with resentment, bitterness, and anger toward God, but flatter Him with sweet words, we construct the Kingdom of Darkness in our hearts, and a refuge for evil. And God will do anything and everything to shatter our little kingdoms of darkness, and help us speak truth to Him, from the dust and the ashes of our soul. Like this:

[clip from “Forest Gump”]

You know, shrimp is not a problem for God. Buildings, budgets, programs, houses, cars, bank accounts, programs, establishments, armies, and empires... they really aren’t a problem for God.

But to get you to speak truth from the depths of your heart, to get you to speak truth from the darkest corner of your soul, to get you to speak truth from your kingdom of darkness ... for that, the Truth Himself became flesh, hung on a cross, endured the storm, and descended into our Hell, *speaking*.

God will arrange the storms of life to get us to speak the truth to Him, like he did with Lieutenant Dan. Like He did with Israel. He would give Israel a storm of invading armies; yet even more, He gave them the words to speak in the midst of the storm. He gave them Psalm 44 to help them express their hearts. He gave them His Word.

But you know that His WORD is far more than pages in a book, or ink on a page. His Word is living and active and has become flesh, and has even descended into our death. And I think you realize that Psalm 44 isn't the only psalm of lament. In fact, Psalm 22 is one that's far more famous. It begins with these words: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Several years ago, I had an experience that changed my life. It happened praying for our friend, Elaine. I've never met anyone who has weathered as many storms as Elaine, or anyone who knows Jesus like Elaine does. She shared her story several months ago, so you may know a little of the context.

Elaine was raised in a Satanic Coven, and ritually devoted to Evil. She's experienced more horrifying things than anything I've ever seen portrayed in any Hollywood movie. She had always been able to remember most of her life, but there was a year as a young woman that she had forgotten. It was a year that had filled her with shame. She had repressed it later in life in an effort to construct a new life as a normal, Christian, church lady. She left that year in darkness; that is until, in prayer one night, several years

ago, Jesus began to reveal it. He literally appeared to her in a vision and gave her heart back to her. He had been holding it, to guard it.

Well, the experience that changed my life happened around that time in my living room, it must have been 3 or 4 in the morning. Susan and I were praying for Elaine and battling various demons... even Satan ... I know that's weird, but believe me, it was one Hell of a storm. Elaine was wrestling with demons that would assault her in the night. But even more, she was wrestling with the shame, frustration, anger, and resentment she had tried to keep in the darkness for so long.

At one point, Jesus revealed something to Elaine, or she remembered something, or some demon said something, and wouldn't leave. (I can't remember exactly.) But I remember it seemed to me at that moment that God was absolutely no longer working. It seemed that there was no hope. I was utterly horrified that God would allow such evil in His creation, and I was utterly horrified that now it seemed that Evil would win. The storm was raging, and suddenly Elaine fell to our living room floor, and she cried out, "What do I do NOW?!?"

And I didn't know what to tell her. And then it hit me, for at that moment, only one thing seemed true. So I dropped to the floor, and I held her, and I said, "Elaine, say this... say these words ... say, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" Then, with the utmost agony, I heard her scream those words. She gasped for air, I felt her whole body go rigid as if she were transfixed by something, and the something was painful. And then, after only a moment, it was like her entire being just melted into absolute *peace*.

Later, she told Susan and me that as soon as she said those words, she had a vision: She saw that old licentious self get nailed to the cross, and then she saw her church lady

self who hated that old licentious self get nailed to the same cross. And then she saw Jesus get nailed to the same cross, along with those two false selves, those two lies – the worldly lie and the religious lie... sinner and Pharisee, license and law... Then she watched, as together, they all died.

And then as soon as they died, she saw herself suddenly standing at the foot of the cross, radiant, glowing, and clothed in a beautiful white gown... a wedding dress. She truly is the Bride of Christ, the bride of the Truth. And you know, I don't think God ever forsook Elaine... the true Elaine. He forsook the lie that Elaine believed to be Elaine. I don't know... But I do know this: The true Elaine is not simply Elaine. She's not alone. And I do know this: It wasn't only Elaine that cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" It wasn't just her. It was my King. For He had descended into the dust and the ashes, speaking Truth. He had descended into Hell, where He destroyed the works of Satan.

You See, Jesus is the Truth, the Truth *out there*, but He suffered and died and descended in order to become the Truth *in here*. He descended into death and Hell, He descended into your death to help you speak to His father and your Father *truth-fully*.

Psalm 22 begins with this line: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus began that song on the cross. I believe He finished it in the dust of Hell. Psalm 22 ends like this:

... before Him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve Him: it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generations; they shall come and proclaim His righteousness to a people yet unborn, that He has done it."

It is finished.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, would You help us now, through the power of Your Spirit, to speak truth fully to You, our Father.

Descend into our darkness and lies, and help us speak You –the Truth– Jesus. Speak in us to Your Father.

Amen