

# Loneliness – Psalm 142, John 16, 2 Timothy 4:6ff

## Introduction

- Loneliness is a painful inner emptiness everyone experiences at times
  - a lack of good relationship – persons who care about us, who we can be open with
  - loneliness can include isolation, depression, self-criticism, restlessness and anxiety
    - a desperate desire to be *wanted* and *needed* by at least one other human being
- Loneliness arrived with the fall, sin driving a wedge between God and us, each other
- Different people cope with loneliness in different ways
  - some retreat into themselves, others act the fool to be *noticed*, some get angry
  - some try to find escape in substance abuse
  - others escape into pornography (which Henri Nouwen calls *intimacy for sale*),
  - some of these “coping mechanisms” can provide *temporary*, though illusory relief
- What causes loneliness?
  - An individualistic society, and more technological: more contact, less relationship
  - Issues in childhood: lack of attachment growing up (divorce etc.), lack of acceptance/being ignored/criticised, lack of social skills
  - psychological causes: low self-esteem, self-defeating attitudes, depression, fear, ...
  - situational causes: newcomers, working far from home, coping with alzheimers
  - spiritual causes: *our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee* (Augustine)
- Bible: broken human relationships are consequence of broken relationship with God
  - solution to loneliness is being reunited with God, and through Christ to each other
  - human relationships are wonderful – but true life is knowing God, and Jesus Christ

## David: On the run, lonely and desperate (Psalm 142)

- David is twice recorded as hiding in a cave – probably the first time that he wrote this
  - at the start of his having to flee Saul, having just also had to flee the king of Gath
  - 1 Sam 22:1 – David is alone at the Cave of Addulum, before anyone else joins him
    - 1 Sam all but skips that time all alone – is this possibly his song from that time?
- David feels trapped, wretched, exhausted and powerless – and incredibly alone

- he has Saul as pursuer, and this cave as a sort of prison for his soul
- David's faith is like too little butter spread on too much toast, but he knows God cares
  - all that David can do is to cry out to the God who knows him – telling how he feels
- 4 – David feels that nobody cares to know him – except God *does* know and care
  - in fact, God was sending David's family and others to join him
  - he did have a helper at his right hand – the place of a protector
    - God was – and is – David's permanent right-hand man and portion
      - although he was all alone, he could ask God to keep him safe, to protect him
- Loneliness is feeling cut off from anyone who cares for us, who we can be open with
  - David knew that God was and is concerned about him – which is why he prays
- Although feeling lonely, David wasn't the isolated figure he felt himself to be
  - 7 – Yes he longed for the time when he would be surrounded by the righteous
    - but the righteous One – God eternal – never had or would abandon

## Jesus: abandoned but not alone (John 16)

- In John 16, Jesus is telling them about how he wouldn't abandon them, but would send the Spirit – that they would never be alone – David's certainty *multiplied!*
  - tells them plainly that he came from the Father, and would return to the Father
    - They said they understood – but Jesus knew how feeble their trust in him was
- Jesus knew that they would all desert him – knew what was about to happen
  - Praying in the garden – so desperate he was sweating blood – they slept
  - then, betrayed by Judas & arrested, the other disciples ran away to save their skins
    - Peter and John followed after a fashion – but even then Peter *denies* Jesus
    - Jesus faces his trial all alone, the agony of scourging alone, the agony of Calvary
- But Jesus knew – even more than David – that though alone, he wouldn't be alone
  - *his Father* would never leave him (16:32) – God is faithful love, always right there
- True, there was one point where even the Father turned his face away: Jesus felt that
  - but even there his cry from Ps 22:1 – a Psalm that ends confident of God's help
- Jesus suffered ultimate agony – the weight of lonely sin – but was raised to life!

- His Father allowed him to bear lonely sin, but didn't abandon him to the grave
- Jesus wanted the disciples to know that he wouldn't be alone
  - because very shortly they would feel very alone – and desperately sad
    - they thought Jesus had gone – that it was all over – we too can lose hope
  - says Jesus: whatever happens: here's my peace: I have overcome the world!
    - Jesus has undone sin, brought about reconciliation, torn the dividing curtain
  - and we too overcome the world, if we stay true to the truth about Jesus
    - Why? Because God himself remains in us by his Spirit through his Word!
      - And stronger is he that is in us than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4)
- So, Christians should never feel lonely, because God lives in us by his spirit?
  - Well, no. Christians do still feel lonely – just as much as non-Christians
  - God is a trinity – relationship stands at the core of who God is
  - When God made us, he made us like himself – as relational beings
    - before the fall, Adam could relate perfectly with God
    - but even there, he couldn't do everything God intended us to do – needed help
      - so God made for him a helper – Eve
    - Eve was there to help Adam with ruling and subduing and filling the earth
      - but what made her suitable was that she was *like* him
        - Adam could relate to her in the same way that he could relate to God
  - As a result of sin, Adam and Eve no longer had the same sort of relationship with God
    - But they could still relate to each other – although sin definitely mars that too
- Jesus came to fix the damage of sin, by bearing it's cost on himself
  - adopted us into his family – reuniting us with God – who will never, ever leave us
  - but also invited us to relate to each other *the way we were always meant to*
    - loneliness is a symptom of this broken world – not of life with God
- True – we still battle with sin – and so loneliness still has a very real presence
  - life can be messy, and sometimes we don't *want* to reach out to the lonely
- God has defeated loneliness, and will never leave us – but we haven't yet seen him

- but until Jesus returns and we do, he has a physical presence here: *the church*
  - we can reach out, be Christ to others, share life together, encourage each other
- Of course, we sometimes get it wrong – and we can't be everywhere at once
  - at the end of his life, in prison, Paul wrote to Timothy saying how abandoned he was, and that he wanted Timothy to *please come as soon as you can*.
  - He knew God was with him, but wanted someone to encourage and work with him

## Towards solving loneliness

- Speak to someone about it! Sounds simple, but it can be hard
  - loneliness isn't something to be embarrassed about – everyone experiences it
- Get involved with Christians in the church – take part in activities, accept it when people want to befriend you, join small groups, go on the social outings etc.
- And church: *love* each other – pro-actively befriend each other
  - Challenge: befriend somebody in the church you *aren't* already friends with
    - and not superficial friends – go with the intent of going deep
- As a church, help people cope with change – welcome packs for lonely newcomers
- Encourage each other to see ourselves as God sees us
- Spend time getting to know God, reading his word and speaking with him
  - for though everything else might fail, God *never* will.