

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, lover of my soul, You are my Redeemer, my Saviour and my Friend. I trust You completely and I delight to know Your love and receive the benefits of Your grace. May I never stray from the path of faith that I have chosen, and may I never exchange my relationship with You for anything else. You have implanted faith in my soul and I rejoice in it. ALLELUIA!

Prayer Suggestions

1. For yourself

Pray for the things you are doing today. Pray with gratitude for all that God does for you and anticipation that He will be present with you throughout the day

2. For your friends and family

Pray for those of your friends and family who are suffering illness at this time

3. For the church and its work

Pray for your church especially the services that will be held tomorrow

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for the leaders of nations in the news at the moment; for Barak Obama's initiative on work, for the relationship in the UK between banks and the government, and more ...

Meditation

Your Word is like a book as found on a shelf;

like a biography – an autobiography of You

like a text book – telling the clear truth

like a novel – true to life and true of life

like history – telling me what You have done

like a map – giving us directions

like a reference book – for me to find out what I need

But Your Word is not just one book,

it is a Library in which to browse,

containing the truth about God

and the truth about all people.

How much is there for anyone to find?

No-one knows.

Will you find within it what you need?

If you explore it, you will!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 22: 1-5

For the director of music.

To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning".

A psalm of David.

¹ 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?
- ² O my God, I cry out by day,
but You do not answer,
by night, and am not silent.
- ³ Yet You are enthroned as the Holy One;
You are the praise of Israel.
- ⁴ In You our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and You delivered them.
- ⁵ They cried to You and were saved;
in You they trusted and were not disappointed.

Review

Psalm 22 stands out as one of the most astonishing pieces of literature in the Old Testament. This is because people of faith can find within it an amazing prophecy of the work of Jesus Christ as Saviour. Remarkably, Jesus quoted the first verse of this Psalm as he died on the Cross at Calvary, and it is therefore likely that He knew the Psalm well and identified personally with its message. In this way, Psalm 22 makes an incredible prophetic leap from the Old Testament to the New, and at its conclusion (22:25-31) it points directly to God's plan of salvation for all.

The first verse is a shocking cry of dereliction; the words, *'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* sound like something said by someone who has lost faith! In reading through Psalms, however, we should by now be familiar with one of their most important features, which is that although they begin with a cry of despair, almost all of them direct the heart towards God as the One who will deal with life's ills and ultimately bring salvation (for example, see Psalms 4,5,6). Psalm 22 is no exception, and a quick read through its 31 verses shows that the whole Psalm leads up to a proclamation of God's everlasting salvation (22:19-31).

What then did Jesus mean by saying the words of verse 1 when he was dying on the Cross? It is quite possible that He did indeed feel abandoned by God on the Cross, though if he did, God did not count this as sin. But there is one other possible theory. People in Jesus' day, as now, will often quote the first few words of a poem or a prayer in order to refer to the whole thing. For example, people speak of saying the 'Our Father', meaning the whole of the Lord's prayer. So it might just be that when Jesus said *'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* He was calling to mind not just a feeling of abandonment, but everything Psalm 22 ultimately says about God's power to save. As with Jesus' other words on the Cross, His use of Psalm 22 could well reflect not just His own thoughts and feelings but also the mighty works of God!

The opening five verses of Psalm 22 do in fact contain the message of the whole Psalm in microcosm. Immediately after the first verse, the Psalmist continues by describing the ongoing anguish of feeling separated from God; *'I cried out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and I am not silent'* (22:2). On the one hand, this could refer to a feeling of abandonment by God that does not go away because of perhaps difficult circumstances in life. Most of us know what it is like to be at peace with God at one point in our lives and feel a long way away from Him at others, sometimes for extensive periods of time. This does not mean that we doubt God or his ability to save us, it is just that life is hard, and we submit our feelings about this to our Lord and God.

On the other hand, however, the Psalmist may be speaking about a different sort of abandonment. If the whole Psalm is about God's ultimate power to save, then these words could reflect the sinful state of humanity. Before Jesus came, there was no sure hope of salvation, and it would have seemed to those who hoped for it, that God gave no clear answer to the needs of sinful humanity. Nevertheless, the Psalm presents this doubt and uncertainty not merely for the sake of saying it, but for the sole purpose of making God's salvation known. This becomes clear in verse 3, where the psalm changes theme abruptly and says, *'yet you are enthroned as the holy one; you are the praise of Israel'* (22:3). It then goes on to describe the historic hope of Israel, which is that because God has already revealed Himself to the fathers of Israel and delivered them, He will do the same for their descendants; it says, *'they cried to You and were saved; in You they trusted and were not disappointed.'* (22:5).

This great Psalm has much more to say yet about the nature of God's salvation, and how it is achieved through His Servant, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the first five verses go as far as it is possible for the Old Testament to go in declaring God's power to save. Even today, whether as Jew or Gentile, our hope for salvation lies in God, who has shown himself faithful to His people throughout history. Christians today rejoice in the saving power of Jesus' sacrificed on the Cross, and for good reason. But they should not forget that Jesus came to do this great work to show God's faithful covenant love to those who trust in Him and belief in Him. God has been revealing himself as faithful and trustworthy for thousands of years, and if we feel abandoned for a time, then we should perhaps dwell upon this extraordinary, Biblical fact.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. When you hear the words of verse 1, what comes into your mind? Share your thoughts within the group,
2. What does this passage tell us about God's salvation, and has this been changed by the death of Jesus and His resurrection?
3. Why do we come to God with our troubles? If we are saved, should we not praise Him?

Discipleship challenges

- *Think about what it means to feel abandoned, and look back on your own experiences of feeling abandoned. Then think about what it must have been like for Jesus as He died on the Cross, feeling abandoned by God. Pray for those who are feeling abandoned by friends, family or indeed by God, and pray for God's salvation*
- *Read through this passage several times, perhaps memorise it. Then its words will come back into your mind when you most need them*

Final Prayer

Give me, O Lord a heart that is open to Your guidance and Your will, and prepared to go wherever You may call. Give me the courage to stand against all evil by using the gifts You have given me, and help me to serve others under all circumstances. May God may be glorified in all I do, and may my life always give glory to God. AMEN
