

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Great Father of all, creator and sustainer of creation, redeemer of all and originator of love. Help me to recognise immediately when You speak to me or call me to do some task, and grant me the courage to respond to You without delay. Then, as I do my best to do Your will, make me a part of the renewal of Your Church in our times, I pray. Glory be to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

**1. For yourself**

*Praise God for everything He has done for you this week*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Make it your aim to bless your family and friends by being positive and encouraging to them all, this weekend*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray for the life of your church, and make it your intention to do all in your power to encourage and help any at church who are struggling and in need of help.*

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

*Ask the Lord to help you witness to Him in your conversations with others. You need intent, then you will be ready when God can give the opportunity.*

### Meditation

The love of God is constantly offered,  
Even when we don't deserve it:

It is infinitely expressive and overtly joyful,  
Even when we are gloomy or sad:

It is forever undeserved and supremely generous,  
Even when we have sinned against others:

It is overwhelmingly happy and totally kind,  
Even when we are complaining and grumpy:

It is powerfully caring, and utterly unselfish,  
Even when we are absorbed by ourselves:

It is completely satisfying and full of reward,  
Even when we are impossible to satisfy:

It is awesomely true and profoundly real,  
Even when we are contrary and stubborn.

For the love of God is available for all  
And remains so from now and for ever.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – Psalm 22: 12-18

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls surround me;  
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

<sup>13</sup> Roaring lions tearing their prey

- open their mouths wide against me.
- <sup>14</sup> 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.
- <sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
you lay me in the dust of death.
- <sup>16</sup> Dogs have surrounded me;  
a band of evil men has encircled me,  
they have pierced my hands and my feet.
- <sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones;  
people stare and gloat over me.
- <sup>18</sup> They divide my garments among them  
and cast lots for my clothing.

## Review

As we have already discovered in our studies, Psalm 22 is about how God overcomes evil. Today's reading continues this theme, but it is by far the most gloomy part of the Psalm. The two sections of it that follow (22:19-24, 25-31) resolve the awfulness we read about here, but for now, we must dwell on this most terrible of Scriptures. As we have already seen in previous studies, Psalm 22 prophesies not just about any evil, but about the horror of Jesus' own death as God's Son, but at least we know that He suffered on our behalf, and ultimately for our salvation.

The pictures we are presented with are distressing; the horror of being surrounded by ferocious bulls (22:12) lions (22:13) and dogs (22:16), and a description of the physical effects of being petrified by fear (22:14,15). On top of this, verse 15 describes death itself, with dogs circling to eat rotten flesh (22:16), with people staring at the spectacle (22:17) ghoulishly grasping at the belongings of the one who has died (22:18). What are we to make of such things within Scripture?

To begin with, we should be aware that some of these potent images describe the demonic. It is likely that people did not believe in Satan and his demons in David's day, nevertheless, the poetry of this verse certainly links with word pictures of evil found in Jewish writing of later years. In the centuries before Jesus, Jewish writing was influenced by Persian and Babylonian beliefs about evil powers, and they certainly contain material describing evil in terms of bulls and lions and dogs. Such language crops up in other parts of Scripture, for example, Peter describes the devil as '*prowling around like a roaring lion*' (1 Peter 5:8). The threatening picture of '*the bulls of Bashan*' (22:12) refers to cattle of the North Eastern region of Israel bordering the tribal lands of Manasseh, renowned for being frequently invaded by the surrounding nations throughout Israel's history (Deuteronomy 3:1-14).

All this may not speak to everyone, but we can still readily recognise the plain description of evil within this text. Verse 14 appears to describe the physical consequences of sheer terror, something only a few people really experience, but which we think we understand because of the gratuitous violence shown in so many TV shows and horror movies commonly watched today. Verse 15 describes the awfulness of famine, from which we are protected in the Western world today though the world is not yet rid of its curse, particularly in parts of Africa. In addition, the last three verses remind us perhaps of the terrible brutality still found in some parts of the world where people fight for money and power.

So why does Psalm 22 speak about such things? What does it say to us now? If we follow our interpretation of the rest of Psalm 22, then after considering all it meant to people of the past, we should at least consider that it is ultimately a description of the inhumanity foisted on Jesus Christ in his life. This is because It speaks of an extreme form of spiritual, intellectual, and physical rejection that ultimately led to the death of Jesus on the Cross. The demonic forces described here are then the forces of evil that drove Jesus to Calvary, including rejection by His own people (John 5:16, 7:1 etc.), spiritual rejection by the Pharisees (Matthew 12:14), and ultimately rejection by those He loved, at the end (Matthew 26:35).

Most people who read this passage today are familiar with the New Testament stories of Jesus' death and they spot more specific connections with what happened to Jesus on the Cross. The phrase '*I am poured out like water*' (22:14) speaks prophetically of the water that came from Jesus' side (John 19:34), and verses 14 and 15 remind us of Jesus' own thirst while dying (John 19:28). Then, and it seems as if these prophecies are not exactly in chronological order as far as Jesus is concerned, verses 16 and 17 speak powerfully of the piercing of Jesus' hands and feet, which is a phrase that escapes almost every other possible interpretation. In the same way, Psalm 22 speaks of those gathered round the dead Jesus gloating

over his death (Matthew 27:39,40), and the soldiers dividing his garments; the material benefit they obtained from doing their duty (Matthew 27:35).

Certainly, before the death of Jesus, Psalm 22 still meant a great deal to the Jewish people who read it and used it as a prayer, because it spoke to them of the ultimate horrors of life they believed God was capable of overcoming in His power and glory. As a whole, Psalm 22 presents conviction that God will have ultimate authority over all things and be victorious even over death. But it is only in Christ Jesus that these things become real. This is why the Christian is entitled to read this passage as a prophecy of what is ultimately achieved through the death of Jesus Christ.

The words have read today are difficult and dour, but we read them remembering that Jesus Christ has died to set us free from the consequences of sin and death. However difficult it is to read this passage, the fact is that Jesus Christ has overcome all evil, even the worst we can imagine, so that through His love and compassion we might be saved and be with Him in eternal glory.

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. In your opinion, which of the images here of death and evil connects most strongly with the death of our Lord?
2. How does God work through all things to bring about His purposes, even through the death of Jesus?
3. Do you think that the stories attached to the 'stigmata' (the injuries in Jesus' hands and feet) are helpful for faith, or unhelpful?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Read this passage carefully and see what they say to you about some of the difficult experiences in your own life, perhaps when you have been threatened, for example. Read through the whole of Psalm 22 to receive its message of hope, and take hold of what God says to you through this Psalm.*
  - *Look on the internet to try and find out about people who have died for the faith in recent times, search on Christian martyrs for example. Make yourself aware of these things by doing this and pray for those who are persecuted throughout the world today.*
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## Final Prayer

Eternal Lord, You are forever. You see me not just now, but You see my beginning and my end. Lift me out of my self-centred concerns and take me into the spiritual realms of Your knowledge and power. Teach me Your will, and show me how to be responsive to the mysterious and magnificent movements of Your Holy Spirit. Thank You, Lord.

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