

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

All power belongs to You O God, You who made all things and who will complete all things in Your own time. In Your wisdom, You have saved us through the life and death of Jesus Christ Your Son, and You are here with us now in the power of Your Holy Spirit. Reveal Your will O God, for our lives and for the future of this whole earth, so that we might live our lives in harmony with You, our Saviour and Redeemer. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme for the week: HEALING

**1. For yourself**

*Pray for spiritual healing. Our spirits can be broken by disbelief, trouble at church, and disenchantment, for example, and these things can have a physical affect. Commit these things to the Lord and seek His healing*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any of your friends and family who do not know the Lord; pray for their salvation and redemption*

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

*Pray that the Christian church of our age will be healed of its divisions and godlessness*

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

*Pray for the healing of the nations; pray for godliness to triumph over ungodliness and for good to triumph over evil in every item of today's news*

### Meditation

Teach us, Lord God, what we need to know,  
So that we may be useful in Your Kingdom.

Teach us, Lord God, what we do not want to know,  
So that we may learn Your spiritual disciplines.

Teach us, Lord God, what we ought to know,  
So that we are strong to face the enemy.

Teach us, Lord God, to learn again what once we learned,  
So that we are not presumptuous about our faith.

Teach us, Lord God, what we fear knowing,  
So that we may face the truth and stand tall.

Teach us, Lord God, what we can never fully know,  
So that we embrace the mysteries of grace.

Teach us, Lord God, to maintain what we know,  
So that we never let go of Your love.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – Psalm 22: 19-24

<sup>19</sup> But you, O LORD, be not far off;  
O my Strength, come quickly to help me.

<sup>20</sup> Deliver my life from the sword,

- my precious life from the power of the dogs.  
<sup>21</sup> Rescue me from the mouth of the lions.  
 From the horns of the wild oxen  
 But You have answered me!  
<sup>22</sup> So I will declare Your name to my brothers;  
 in the congregation I will praise You.  
<sup>23</sup> You who fear the LORD, praise Him!  
 All you descendants of Jacob, honour Him!  
 Revere Him, all you descendants of Israel!  
<sup>24</sup> For He has not despised or disdained  
 the suffering of the afflicted one;  
 He has not hidden his face from him  
 but has listened to his cry for help.

## Review

Psalm 22 is about the victory of God over all evil. This theme can easily be found in the first five verses of the psalm, which begin, *'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* and then declare the praises of the God of Israel, *'in you our ancestors trusted, they trusted, and you delivered them.'* This pattern is repeated in verses 6 to 11, which start with despair, *'I am a worm ... scorned by others and despised by the people'* but turn to trust in God with these moving words, *'On You I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore you have been my God.'* This pattern is then repeated for a third and last time. The previous passage to ours today describes evil of a most pernicious and evil kind (22:12-18), but now, in our reading today, the psalm turns once again to confidence and trust in God as the one who saves His people.

Verse 19 reiterates the cry we first heard at the beginning of the Psalm; it is a cry to God imploring Him for help in dire circumstances. Evil is at hand, described dramatically as yapping dogs, ravenous lions and ferocious wild animals (22:19-21). But God is far greater than all these things, however terrible they appear, and the believer calls out to Him, asking for help (verse 19), for deliverance (verse 20), and for salvation (verse 21). Then, at the end of verse 19, something dramatic happens, as the Psalm continues *'but you have answered me!'* Now at this point, I must tell you that if you read any of the most commonly available Bible translations, this is not what you will find. The NIV for example, reads *'from the horns of wild oxen you have rescued me'*, but if you look carefully, you will find that there is a small footnote attached to this translation, warning that the word translated *'rescued'*, really means *'answer!'*

All this sounds rather technical, but why should we bother with it? We should be concerned about this because for centuries, translators have got it wrong. This is one of only a few occasions in my own writing where I insist that a different translation from that normally found is the right one. Having studied the Hebrew text, I firmly believe that for scholarly and technical reasons, the phrase *'you have answered me!'* must be translated exactly like this, sticking closely to what is written in the Hebrew, because it is essential to our understanding of the whole Psalm. Psalm 22 begins with the cry *'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* and the answer to this desperate cry is found here at the end of verse 21. Psalm 22 does not leave the reader high and dry with no real resolution to the distress of evil. It celebrates God's victory over evil, and offers an answer to this most desperate of human cries for help.

Even a casual read through Psalm 22 will show that the whole tenor of the Psalm changes at the end of verse 21. The perils of evil have been described three times, emphatically, and now we have the answer. In His own time and according to His own eternal purposes, God responds to the human cry for help. But we are not talking in abstract about God replying to anybody who calls on Him for whatever help they need. God responds to the human cry for help when the one who calls out experiences that most terrible power of evil which drags the soul down to death (22:12-18). He responds to a cry of faith, the faith of one who has heard about God and is willing to trust Him in the most extreme of circumstances. When we look at it as a whole, this surely is the only interpretation we can give to Psalm 22.

In our study this psalm, we have already discovered that it speaks prophetically about Jesus Christ. The power of God has been shown supremely in saving Jesus from the power of death, and this is the hope of all Christians. Because Jesus Christ has been raised, and the powers of evil and death have been defeated on the Cross, we can have confidence that God will in His own time and according to His own will, save those who call upon Him from evil and death, and lead them to eternal life.

Once we have begun to read the Psalm in this way, verses 22, 23 and 24 come to life. Verse 22 is a natural response of the soul to the saving power of God. It speaks of witnessing to the saving power of God in the

midst of the congregation of God's people, and offering Him praise for what he has done. It is surely natural to want to thank someone who has helped and saved you, and so giving testimony to the specific saving work of God must surely be an essential and joyful part of the journey of faith, for anyone. The life of God's people has stunted if it is starved of the testimony of those who know that they have been saved. Verse 23 continues this theme by calling upon all God's people to hear the testimony of one who has been saved, and worship Him, honour Him, and revere Him.

The very last verse of our reading today, verse 24, says a little bit more; it tells us that God does not *'despise or disdain'* the suffering of one who has suffered, He does not *'hide his face'* from anyone who has cried out to Him to help. Prophetically, this speaks of God's love of Jesus Christ, his Son, and God does not despise what Jesus has done through His death on the Cross, because He uses this appalling act of history to put evil in its place and offer salvation to all who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ. In this sense, we may say today that God never turns away from the cry of one who calls out to Him, who knows his or her sins and the power of sin to draw the soul to death. He has already acted to deal with this sin in the death of Jesus Christ, and He longs for us to place our trust in Him, so that He may save us.

Of course, once we know this, our souls are opened up to the glorious truth that God's power to save is sufficient for all human need, as well as this ultimate one. But everything we have discovered about Psalm 22 suggests it is about extremes; it is about ultimate sin, and ultimate salvation. However, Psalm 22 has not yet reached its conclusion! If we think we have already discovered enough, then God intends to bless us even more! Tomorrow we will discover further powerful and enthralling truths embedded in this, one of the most important psalms in the whole book of Psalms.

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. Share with one another your personal experiences of God answering prayer, and assess how often the Lord does this.
2. What places testimony has within the worship life of your church? How can it be given a higher profile than at present, and how can objections to its use in public worship be overcome?
3. Is joy always the result of an experience of deliverance or salvation? Discuss verse 22, 23, and 24, to see what might be expected of God's people, as a response to God's salvation.

### Discipleship challenges

- *Make a list of the prayers you frequently say, especially those that have not yet been answered. Also, make a list of those prayers of the past you know have been answered. Now, when you pray about those things that have not yet been answered, praise God for what he has already done, and expect him to do more.*
- *Make a personal resolve to speak about what God has done for you with other people, in whatever situations as life are presented to you. You will not find yourself willingly giving testimony, unless your heart intends to do so and is so full of the love of God that it wants to.*

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## Final Prayer

Thank you Lord Jesus will all that is done for me on the cross. I praise you for your glory of salvation; give me a heart to share my testimony with other people, so that they too might know that you are the powerful God, and that you have done wonderful things. Make me a channel of your blessing to others, I pray: AMEN