

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, bless us when our lives are hard,
meet us when we do not understand the way,
heal us when our bodies are scarred by illness,
comfort us when our hearts are numbed with pain,
and in the midst of each and every trial and hardship,
become so real to us that we sing Your praises!
AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme for the week: HEALING

1. For yourself

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over all the difficult situations you face, so that you do not succumb to the temptation to let troubles overpower you

2. For your friends and family

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over difficulties within your family life

3. For the church and its work

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over the church and all who profess His name

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

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over the troubles of the world, whether close by to your home or far away ...

Meditation

The freshness of each glorious day anticipates God's blessings
He gives His amazing spiritual gifts to all who will receive Him:

The treasure of cherished moments reading the sacred Word;
The riches of quiet times and peace to revitalize the soul;
The opportunity to love again, where yesterday we failed;
The chance to be creative each day in discipleship and faith;
The challenge of sustaining work that it is important for us to do;
The excitement of always knowing that there is more to find in life;
The privilege of following Christ, and seeking to serve the poor;
The freedom to pray with others about our troubles, hopes and joys;
The wonder of resting in God at the end of a working day.

Is it possible for us to give adequate thanks to God for all He's done?
May be, but the more we do it each day the more we will know His peace.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 22: 25-31

²⁵ From You comes the theme of my praise
in the great assembly;
before those who fear You

- will I fulfil my vows.
- ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied,
they who seek the LORD will praise Him:
may your hearts live for ever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth will remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before Him,
- ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and He rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before Him:
my soul will live because of Him!
- ³⁰ Posterity will serve Him;
future generations will be told about the LORD.
- ³¹ They will proclaim His righteousness
to a people yet unborn:
for He has done it.

Review

Psalm 22 has lead us on an extraordinary journey, and we have now arrived at its climax. We have turned three times from despair to trust in God, and each time, the psalm speaks powerfully of God's desire to overcome all evil, indeed, even the ultimate evil of death. So now, in these last seven verses, we read a magnificent paean of praise to Almighty God for His saving power. The first few words of Psalm 22 were dramatic enough, *'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me ...'*, but the praise and worship we read about here rises above all misery and despair, for God is with His people and powerful to save, and they praise Him.

Looking carefully at our reading today, you will notice that it has three parts, verses 25 to 26, verses 27 to 29, and verses 30 and 31. Each one of these describes something different, and before we look at what each one says, you will see that the last sentence of each section stands out. After looking carefully at the Hebrew text, I have come to the conclusion that these three sentences are shouts of praise to God:

'may your hearts live for ever' (22:26)
'my soul will live because of him' (22:29)
'for he has done it' (22:31)

Together, these express the worshipper's confidence in God, and they speak forthrightly of the hope of eternal life. In recent decades, scholars have written expressing doubt as to whether Psalm 22 does in fact speak about eternal life. I strongly disagree, for these three phrases show conclusively that from before the time of Jesus Christ, the people of Israel hoped in God for something beyond the grave, and they believed that it was their heritage to claim this blessing even if they did not fully receive it.

But we should not be sidetracked by technical issues. Each of the three sections of our reading reveals something significant. To begin with, verses 25 and 26 describe a gathering of people to praise God *'in the great assembly'* (22:25). Although the Old Testament sometimes speaks of the great men or women of Israel praising God by themselves, it invariably calls on Israel to gather together for worship. If we read about worship in Deuteronomy and Leviticus (see Deut. 12:17f. and Lev. 7:15f.), they reveal worship centred around the three harvest festivals of Israel's calendar. So we should not be surprised to find that Psalm 22 describes worship as a feast, at which *'the poor will eat and be satisfied'* (22:26). But it is far more than a feast, it is a perfect feast to satisfy all needs, especially those of the poor, and it will nourish the soul forever; the shout goes up *'may your heart live for ever!'*

If verses 25 and 26 speak of an earthly feast of worship, verses 27 to 29 go further, and describe a heavenly feast. It is a vision of the whole world being drawn together in the worship of Almighty God, an event at which *'all the families of the nations will bow down before Him'* (22:27). This is one of those truly wonderful passages of the Old Testament, where the writer looks beyond the boundaries of Judaism to perceive that God is Lord of all the world, and He cares about the whole of His creation, not just Israel. A great deal of the Old Testament is locked into Israelite nationalism but clearly not all.

The vision here describes God's '*dominion*' over all things. The language of the psalm here alerts us to the fact that this is a vision of the end times, when those who worship God are saved. Verse 29 is a fascinating description of those who will be saved, specifically, the '*rich of the earth*', but who are the '*rich of the earth*'? Does God favour the rich? Not at all, if we look at the Hebrew poetry in this verse, we will discover that the phrase '*rich of the earth*' is parallel to the phrase coming next, which speaks of '*all who go down to the dust*'. So both these phrases describe people who have submitted to God and call upon him for the salvation! The rich in this verse are those who have called upon God while on earth, and they are confident that God will supply their needs. Their cry goes up '*my soul will live because of him!*' (22:29)

In contrast to all that goes before, the last two verses of Psalm 22 does not describe a feast. Here, Psalm 22 delivers it's final and conclusive message, and although it speaks prophetically about a God who will indeed save his people, it is intended as a message of pure joy. It declares forthrightly that the truth about God's saving love will be taught to future generations (22:30). God's saving love will be made known, even to those who will exist in the future, beyond the power of the human imagination to think of the future (22:31).

Psalm 22 is a magnificent Psalm describing God's power to save, and it speaks prophetically both of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, and also his return in glory to rule the world. God's people will bear this testimony firstly to each other, but eventually to the whole world, so that they might have the opportunity to believe.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What place does 'feasting' have in the worship life of your church? What are the possibilities?
2. What can you learn about worshipping God from this passage of Scripture, and how can this be applied to God's people today?
3. How can the Christian give testimony? Discuss the different ways each one of us can give testimony to others of the power of God to save?

Discipleship challenges

- *Read again through the whole of Psalm 22 to check out the structure we have discussed. Look again at what it says about the saving power of God, and ask yourself whether you experience God's love in this way.*
- *How can the Christian church declare its faith to the world? Think about this question and write down a list of answers, and then discuss this with a friend at church. What is it that stops people from doing new things at church and how may this be overcome?*

Final Prayer

Help me, Lord Jesus, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, so to open my heart that I may appreciate my brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they may be, and in whatever churches they worship You. Inspire me to learn from them more about the Body of Christ, and be encouraged by their worship of the true and Living God. AMEN