

Prayers

Opening prayer

Almighty God, bring quietness to my heart and soothe it by the wonder of Your love and the mysteries of Your grace. In Your mercy, You calm the pressures and sorrows of my life, You ease the wounds of my spirit, and You bear the burdens of my soul so that I might be free. I praise You for the way You work in my life to bring me peace, and I worship You this day: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

1. For yourself

Read a favourite psalm and listen to what the Lord has to say to you about your life and your lifestyle

2. For your friends and family

Listen to what the Lord would have you do for your friends and neighbours, it may be that he needs you to do something important but you have not yet heard ...

3. For the church and its work

Reflect on recent church meetings or worship services you have attended. What do you believe Jesus has been saying to your church or fellowship? Pray about this, and talk with others

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

Listen to what the Lord is saying about the state of the world at the moment, use, for example, a Christian news website, such as the 'the Christian Post' or 'Christianity Today' (they have versions for different countries and regions of the world)

Meditation

By Your gracious love, Lord God, You continue to speak to us.

You are firm when we need to be guided;

You are gentle when we need to be loved.

You are direct when we need to hear instructions;

You are silent when we need to make our decisions.

You are challenging when we need to be confronted;

You are encouraging when we need to be affirmed.

You are heartening when we need to be courageous and act.

You are cautious when we need to take care of ourselves.

You are critical when we need to know our mistakes;

You are accepting when we need to know Your care.

By Your gracious love, Lord God, You continue to speak to us.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 22: 6-11

⁶ I am but a worm, not a man,
scorned by others
and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

⁸ 'He trusts in the LORD;

- let the LORD rescue him.
 Let him deliver him,
 since he delights in him."
- ⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
 you made me trust in you
 even at my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ From birth I was cast upon you;
 from my mother's womb
 you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Do not be far from me,
 for trouble is near
 and there is no-one to help.

Review

Psalm 22 begins with the famous words '*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me ...*', (22:1) so it is not surprising that as we read on the psalm from verse 6, this theme of rejection occurs yet again. But in just the same way as the first five verses, our reading today begins with a sense of rejection (22:6-8) and then turns the reader back to God (22:9-11). Indeed, the whole Psalm 22 is about turning from darkness to light, and although we have not yet reached the climax of this great Psalm, there is a great deal within this reading to inspire us in our belief that God alone can rescue us from trouble and save us from our distress.

The first three verses describe someone who has been the victim of violence. The words '*I am a worm, not a man*' (22:6) are the words of someone who has been pummeled into submission and who has lost any sense of self-worth. The Psalm continues with a description of someone being insulted and bullied, and in particular, being persecuted for having faith in God. Even today, someone can be insulted in this fashion in the workplace or at school, but does this passage mean here in the Old Testament?

The great men and women of God in the Old Testament all experienced rejection for their trust in God. Joseph was mocked by his brothers and by the Egyptians (Genesis 37f.), Moses was mocked by Pharaoh, and even, at times, by his own people (Exodus 10, 33), and Jeremiah, notably among the prophets, was mocked for his absolute trust in the word of God (Jeremiah 37). This theme of suffering at the hands of other people is very important in the Old Testament, and the Lord reveals to Isaiah an amazing fact, that he will use even the suffering of his own servants to achieve His will. Supremely Isaiah 53 contains a remarkable prophecy telling us that against all human expectation, God will work for the redemption of all through the suffering of His own Servant, the Messiah. If you read this chapter of Isaiah, you will find that it has many connections with Psalm 22, indeed it is tempting to think that Isaiah had the psalm in mind as he prophesied.

Yet throughout the Old Testament, great men and women of God prevailed through placing their trust in God in the midst of the most awful of circumstances. Their stories confirm this, and is it too simple to imagine that those who came after King David were inspired to do this by reciting Psalm 22?

The second half of our passage today turns the reader towards gratitude to God as the One who has made all things and indeed has made each individual '*in the womb*' (22:9). This is a powerful poetic picture of the truth of the conception of each man and woman, and it is one that appears to have come from the pen of David on more than one occasion (see Psalms 71:6, 110:3, 127:3 and 139:13). In this beautiful way, Psalm 22 reminds each one who reads it of their dependence upon God, a dependence that is more fundamental to human life than a child to its mother. God is author of all and the Creator of all, and if we will turn to this fact even in the midst of persecution and distress, then we start on the pathway of placing our trust in God. He alone is the One who can help us in the midst of our earthly trouble (22:11).

Thousands of people must have read this Scripture in ancient times and been encouraged. Jesus Himself spoke the first few words of Psalm 22 on the Cross, and in this way showed us that He knew the Psalm and was fully aware of what it meant. He had been born in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit in a unique way, and in this special sense, He was '*cast upon God*' from conception (22:10).

As soon as we read Psalm 22 in this way and make the obvious connections between what it says and the life and death of Jesus, then we touch into this Psalm as not merely poetry, but prophecy. In the early days of the church, Christians quickly realised that Psalm 22 spoke to them about the life and death of Jesus in a very special way. So, to this day, Christians read what Psalm 22 says about someone being mocked and scorned (22:6,7) and discover that it speaks to them of all that Jesus endured in His final hours as He stood before the authorities and was cruelly mocked by soldiers (Matthew 27:26f.). Thank God that Jesus did indeed place His trust in God despite His abandonment on the Cross, because the result of that terrible day was the salvation of which we so gloriously benefit.

In the light of all this, the words of verses 9 to 11 are for us a statement of faith and of hope. Confessing that God is our Maker, we place our trust in Him for help, and know that He will save us both from earthly peril but also from the eternal peril of death. Where no-one on earth can help, Our God saves!

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What is the most important lesson we can learn from looking at these verses from the perspective of the Old Testament?
2. What can we learn from this passage by thinking of it as prophecy that has been fulfilled in Christ?
3. How do these verses apply to our lives today?

Discipleship challenges

- *Look back on your own life and recall those times when you have felt most rejected either by friends or by members of your family. In prayer, place these things in God's hands, if necessary, write them down and hand them over, and then place your trust in Christ for the future.*
 - *As you go about your work today, look around you for signs of people being mocked and scorned by others, perhaps bullied or put down. Pray about what you see and seek to do something in each situation that reflects your faith and belief that God wants to save people from such torment, whether they deserve it or not.*
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Final Prayer

Lord God and Almighty Father. You have repeatedly intervened in human history to bless and help those who are in need of You. You are a compassionate God, and we place our trust in You. So may our hopes never be dashed, and may our love always be inspired by the way You work within this world. AMEN
