

# 11) THE PSALMS AND JESUS (PSALM 22)

## 1) The importance of Psalm 22 in the Passion Story

Of the 13 Old Testament references in the passion stories, 8 come from the psalms and 5 from psalm 22. All 3 psalms referenced (22, 31, 69) are laments of an individual to God. This psalm type was clearly identified by the gospel writers as appropriate for the crucifixion account and gave voice to Jesus' experience. The church then has read these laments in the light of Jesus' suffering and death.

## 2) Uses in the Gospels

Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46 – My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. This is the first verse of Psalm 22. First verses like titles, give a picture of the whole psalm. It becomes a kind of prayer on Jesus' lips, expressing his experience of affliction.

Mark 15:29, Matthew 27:39 – All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads. This is more or less verse 7 of Psalm 22.

Matthew 27:43 – He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.' Psalm 22:8 states – Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights.

Mark 15:24, Matthew 27:35, Luke 23:34, John 19:24 – all focus on the soldiers activity beneath the cross, dividing Jesus' clothes. Psalm 22:18 states – They divide my clothing among themselves, for my clothing they cast lots.

John 19:28 – Jesus says, 'I am thirsty.' And he does this, we are told, to fulfill scripture. Psalm 22:15 states – my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

## 3) Does this psalm predict Jesus' Passion?

Perhaps the better question is: does this psalm capture the experience of Jesus? Is Jesus, like the psalmist, a righteous, innocent sufferer? Hebrews 5:7 gives us this picture: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his reverent submission." Jesus stands in the tradition of those afflicted who suffer righteously. Psalm 22 is Jesus' kind of prayer. But does the way Jesus dies inspire faith or fear, confidence or serious questioning? Answering this question is the heart of the gospel.

#### 4) Structure of Psalm 22

- a) Prayer for help – 1-21
- b) Song of praise – 21-31

Both a) and b) are further subdivided into 2 sections which repeat the main themes and strengthen both the prayer and the praise.

- a) Prayer for help – 1-21

i) 1-11 – 1-2 Why have you forsaken me. 3-5 Yet you are holy. 6-8 But I am a worm. 9-10 Yet you took me from the womb. 11 **Do not be far.**

ii) 12-21 – 12-15 Bulls encircle me. 16-18 Dogs are all around me. 19 **Do not be far.** 19 Come quickly. 20 Deliver my soul and my life. 21 Save me from the lion.

- b) Song of praise – 21-31

i) 21-26 – 22-24 you have rescued me and I will tell **brothers and sisters**. 25 praise in the **great congregation**. 26 **The poor and those who seek**.

ii) 27-31 – 27-28 Ends of the earth. 29-31 **All who sleep in the earth, all posterity and those not yet born.**

Confidence in God's deliverance is already anticipated and a time of praising is already predicted. There is also a widening movement of this praise, strengthening the experience of confidence. From the psalmist who feels isolated and alone, the psalm ends in all life past, present and future praising God for fullness and peace.

#### 5) Expressions of both plight 1) and confidence 2) in the psalm

1) My God, my God... The psalmist is part of the chosen people who have praised God for generations (3-5), who have witnessed God's deliverance time and again. The God who created the universe is "my God," yet at the present moment God is "far away." (1,11,19) This makes deliverance seem impossible. "I am a worm," "scorned," "despised," all express a dire situation. Animal metaphors reflect the sinister nature of the psalmist enemies, which may be real persons, but also other realities such as illness and other misfortune that can torment his spirit.

2) But the psalmist also predicts and imagines a time when he enters the sanctuary of the temple to offer worship of thanksgiving to God for deliverance. And he is joined by other likeminded faithful (brothers and sisters). He identifies with the great congregation of those who fear God, and also the poor (*aniwin*) – afflicted who are not just economically destitute, but seekers after God for their deliverance. This is the true Israel. But in the latter verses the congregation is widened even further to include all families of the earth, and even the dead, as well as future posterity not yet born. The idea of such a wide net of humanity submitting to God's rule and worshipping is a radical vision.

## 6) Who is the speaker of this psalm?

Clearly the psalmist is one who is afflicted severely, but who also experiences vindication and deliverance from God, leading to an experience of God's universal rule for all, which overcomes all conflict, animosity, fear and suffering. Is it any wonder that Jesus and the gospel writers found inspiration in it? The vindication and deliverance already point to Jesus' resurrection, and the universal thrust of the psalm already point to the gift of the Holy Spirit when the gospel is spread beyond the Jewish nation to all peoples.