

Armagh Baptist Church – 1st July 2009

Psalm 22:1-31

‘Christ on the Cross’

Introduction

You can't read Psalm 22 from a New Testament stand-point without coming to the conclusion from the very first verse that it is talking about Christ on the Cross. Even though it was written by David 1000 years before the cross, we all know that those immortal words in v.1, *‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’* were one of the seven things that Jesus said from the cross, while he hung there separated from his Father because of your sins and mine.

But that is not the only link between Psalm 22 and the Cross of Christ.

It is C.H. Spurgeon who suggests that Psalm 22 could actually have been ‘repeated word by word by our Lord when hanging on the tree’ (p.324 Treasury of David Vol.1) He goes on to say, “It begins with, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ and ends, according to some, in the original with ‘It is finished’.” (NIV ‘he has done it!’) In between those opening and closing verses we have many insights into what Jesus suffered for us on the cross and the sort of things that went through his mind while he hung there for us. Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the Cross. So let's take a closer look at Christ on the Cross this evening.

1. Forsaken by God. (vs.1-11)

How could the Second person of the godhead, the Son, be forsaken by the First person of the godhead, the Father? How could that happen? Why?

It was because of our sins. Sin separates us from God. (See Isaiah 59:2)

*“But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*

That is the consequence of our sins: separation from a holy God. So to pay the price for our sins, Jesus had to bear that punishment in full – so He had to be separated from His Father and during those hours of dark separation on the cross he had to take upon himself all the suffering and punishment that we deserved for our sins, in our place. *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”*

(1 Peter 2:24)

This was also prophesied in another place in the Old Testament 700 yrs before the cross. Isaiah 53:4-6 says:

*“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our*

iniquities;

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Now the opening words of Psalm 22 might have referred to something in David's own life – some trial or suffering or tight corner that he found himself in. And under those circumstances he felt abandoned by God. In vs.1 & 2 he feels totally abandoned by God. He feels that his cries for help are not being heard – his prayers are not being answered. Day and night as he cried to God for help, no answer ever came back.

And yet in spite of that David still referred to God as “My God” - his personal God. He had a personal relationship with God, but there were many things in his walk with God that he didn't understand. Many questions he still needed answers to, and those answers weren't forth-coming. Have you ever felt like that? In some situation or predicament, but all your cries to God for help seem to be to no avail.

But as David thinks about his situation he remembers God's faithfulness in the past. In vs.3-5 he says, *“Yet (in other words despite how I'm feeling now) you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.”*

In other words, ‘God, if you helped our forefathers in the past (for example when you brought them out of the bondage of Egypt) then why can't you help me now?’

When you begin to think like that, the devil has a field day, putting you down even further. You feel insignificant, rejected by God. You feel that you're not even important enough for God to worry about, or to do anything for you. ‘He helps others, but He's not helping me – there must be something wrong with me!’

And that's how the Psalmist David begins to feel in vs.6-8, using words that again take us back to the Cross of Christ.

“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.” A worm is almost the most insignificant of all creatures. You can step on a worm and cut him in two without even knowing about it, as you walk through a field. That's how David felt – insignificant, worthless.

But whatever the situation was that David found himself in, it was nothing compared to what his descendant Jesus faced and experienced. (v.7-8)

*“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:
‘He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him’.”*

Remember this is prophecy, written 1000 years before the event of the cross ever took place. It would be one thing for Jesus, the eternal Son of God to take up the words of this prophetic Psalm upon his lips. In one sense there's nothing very strange about that, since he came to fulfil all the prophecies of the Old Testament. He knew God's Word, so he could quote it off by heart no problem when in a similar situation. But the amazing thing about these words in Psalm 22:8 is that they were fulfilled and actually quoted, not by Jesus, but by his enemies, the Jewish Chief Priests, as they

stood around the cross watching him die. Without knowing it, they were fulfilling Scripture against themselves. They didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and yet as they said these very words, they were just proving further that he was the Messiah after all. Read Matthew 27:39-46.

Even though the Psalmist David was feeling sorry for himself because of whatever difficulty he was passing through, he could still look back on his own life and know that he had trusted in God from infancy and He had never let him down. But even though the words of vs.9-11 could be coming from David's lips, they become even more truthful as we hear them coming from Jesus' lips:

"Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no-one to help."

Both David and Jesus were utterly cast back upon God. They had trusted in their heavenly Father all along throughout their lives, even from their mother's womb. He had never let them down before, but they both needed him now even more than ever.

In the next section, maybe David was literally surrounded by bulls and lions. He certainly had to face bears and lions as a shepherd boy, but the more you read into this section the more you can see this passage as the experience of someone hanging on a cross to be crucified. This is all the more amazing when you realise that crucifixion as a means of execution was only invented by the Romans about 100 years before Christ, whereas David was writing these words, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, 1000 years before the Cross of Christ. This is an insight into how Jesus felt and what he experienced as he hung there on that cross for you and for me. Not only was he forsaken by God, he was also crucified by men

2. Crucified by Men. (vs.12-18)

"Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.

(1) ***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.

(2) ***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.***

(3) ***Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, They have pierced my hands and my feet.***

(4) ***I can count all my bones; People stare and gloat over me.***

(5) ***They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."***

Notice the further links between this Psalm and the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion.

(1) The effect of hanging by your hands and feet, having to lift yourself up for your next breath to allow your chest cavity to fill up with air, could have the effect of

making particularly the joints of shoulders, elbows and wrists feel out of place. It would be like having your arms pulled out of their sockets. What a terrible way to die!
(2) Because Jesus was being crucified in the middle of the day, under the full heat of the sun, with no shade for his head, he would very quickly feel his strength draining away, and because he was parched with thirst, and death was near, his tongue would be sticking to the roof of his mouth – a phrase used of children dying of starvation in a famine in Lamentations ch.4. He was about to be laid in the dust of death - but what kind of death?

(3) “*Dogs have surrounded me*” the Jews referred to the gentiles as dogs, none more so than the Romans! Well the Jews handed Jesus over to the Gentile Romans for them to unleash their most wicked of all forms of death on him – death by crucifixion! These dogs were a band of evil men who had encircled him, not just in the soldiers’ mess room were they stripped him and beat him and spat upon him and flogged him, but they encircled him at the foot of the cross – and then we read, “*They have pierced my hands and my feet.*” There is no other explanation for that except crucifixion. And we have to keep reminding ourselves that this was written as prophecy hundreds of years before man’s inhumanity to man had even invented it!

(4) “*I can count all my bones – people stare and gloat over me.*” What a humiliating way to die. Stripped naked, all his bones sticking through his thin flesh that had already been bruised and battered and beaten and torn, and then instead of being allowed to cover himself up modestly, people actually came to stare and to gloat over him! What a way for the Son of God to die? What a way for us creatures to treat our Creator! What a humiliation the cross was for Christ!

(5) And just to finish it off – the very last detail of this prophecy was fulfilled at the cross of Christ – The soldiers at the foot of the cross ‘*divided his garments between them*’ and then with the under garment which was all of one piece (John 19:23-24) ‘*they cast lots for my clothing.*’ (Psalm 22:18) Both parts of that statement were fulfilled and John is careful to record that detail for us. All these prophecies were fulfilled at the Cross of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah indeed!

So we have seen Christ: Forsaken by God, and Crucified by Men, but then comes a prayer for deliverance:

3. Prayer for Deliverance. (vs.19-21)

“But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.”

In our English Bibles all of vs.19-21 is recorded as a prayer asking for help, asking for deliverance, asking to be rescued from the sword, the dogs, the lions and the wild oxen – from death.

But the translators may have missed something in the translation at the end of v.21.

The problem is in the translation of “save me” in v.21. As the NIV footnote has it, v.21 could read: “*Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;*

and from the horns of the wild oxen,

you have heard me, OR you have answered me!”

In other words what the translators may have missed out is this note of victory, or assurance that the one who has been suffering so much, has come to know that they have been heard by their God, and that God was going to answer them! God hadn't totally abandoned them to the grave, as Psalm 110 says, “*He would not let his holy One see decay.*” He would deliver him, not from the experience of death, but from the place of death – from the grave. He would be raised to life again!

Of course we know this was uniquely true of Jesus. He was not delivered from death, he had to go through death for us, he had to experience death for us, he had to die our death, so that he could deal with our sins, and purchase forgiveness for our sins. But he *did* purchase our deliverance through his death, ultimately by rising again from the dead. That was how he defeated death once and for all. He took the sting out of death once and for all, not just by dying, but by rising again. And the wonderful thing is that because we trust in Him, and belong to Him by faith, because he has been raised, we too will be raised also. Because he lives, we shall live also! This is the note of victory that perhaps our English translations miss – Many of the commentators mention this.

And that is why the whole tone of the Psalm changes after v.21. From desperation and despair it changes to hope and praise from v.22 onwards. This is the turning point of the Psalm. Peter has a phrase for it in 1 Peter 1:10-12. In the middle of that section he talks about ‘the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.’ (v.11b). Well having looked at the tremendous sufferings of Christ this evening, let's finish with the glories that would follow - The blessings that flow to us from the cross of Christ.

4. The Blessings that flow from the Cross. (vs.22-31)

Psalm 22:22 is quoted by the writer to the Hebrews in ch.2:12.

So if we take Psalm 22:22 as again applying to Jesus, we can then put the rest of the Psalmists words into the mouth of Jesus and hear them as coming from him.

In v.22 Jesus praises the Lord for his deliverance from death – i.e. for his resurrection.

So in v.23 he invites all who fear the Lord to also praise him for his death and resurrection. All the descendants of Jacob and Israel, i.e. **the Jews** should honour and revere him (The Christ) the very thing many of them refuse to do to this day, because they don't believe he was their Messiah!

(v.24) Why should the Jews worship Jesus as their Messiah? Because God has not despised, or disdained, the suffering of the Afflicted One (cf. The Anointed One).

He has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help.

You see the Jews just couldn't accept that their Messiah would die a humiliating death on a Roman Cross – that was the furthest thing from their minds– they thought he

was coming to reign on his throne in Jerusalem, and when he didn't, they rejected Him.

But God says to them, no, you shouldn't rejected the Messiah who died on a cross, because I have listened to his cry for help, I have not rejected Him. I have delivered Him, by raising Him from the dead! So Accept Him and Trust Him as your Saviour!

But you know the blessings of the Cross of Christ are not just for the Jews. (vs.25-31).

(v.26) Those who seek the Lord from among **the poor** will be satisfied and live forever.

(v.29) Likewise from among **the rich** many will come and worship him and kneel before him too.

(v.27-28) But it's not just for the rich and poor within Israel. Verse 27 says:

*"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,
for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations."*

The Cross of Christ, is the Gospel for all Nations of the world, no-one is excluded! "No Psalm of prophecy contains a grander vision of the extent of the throng of worshippers who will join in the praise of God's saving acts." (NIV Study Bible 22).

And so we are taken from Psalm 22, 1000 years before the cross, to Revelation 7, at least 2000 years after the cross to that great multitude that no-one can number!

But the blessings of the Cross weren't just for the people of those days 2000 yrs ago, they are for us too in our generation! – Look at vs.30-31.

*"Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.*

They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn –

The Cross of Christ is not old-hat, or at least it shouldn't be. Paul said in Gal 6:14:

"God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He also said in 1 Cor 1:18:

*"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God!"*

The message of the Cross of Christ still needs to be heard today, and if the Lord doesn't come back it needs to be heard in the next generation too.

So it is our responsibility not only to share it with our generation today, but to make sure we pass it on intact to the generation coming after us, so that the people who are yet unborn might hear it too, and so be saved.

Conclusion:

This is a great missionary Psalm. It has a great missionary vision. We should have a great missionary vision too - a desire to play our part in bringing the message of the cross to people groups and nations all around our world, so that they too might hear

about Jesus and believe and be saved. The Psalmist David only got a glimpse of how this might happen because he lived the far side of the cross – 1000 years before it. We live 2000 years this side of the cross, after the cross of Christ in history, so we should have an even greater missionary vision and zeal than he had, but do we?

All this is possible because Christ's death on the cross was a finished work. He purchased a perfect salvation for each and every one of us who would believe it and accept it as our only means of getting right with God.

The Psalm began with a saying of Jesus from the cross – ***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*** He was forsaken and he was crucified because of our sins. But he prayed for deliverance from death, and he *was* delivered from the realms of death by his resurrection, but that was so that this great message of the cross would resound around our world until Jesus comes again, because it offers men and women from whatever class or creed a finished work, a perfect salvation to trust in.

*(Why?) v.31- “**For He has done it!**” It's complete. It is finished! And - It's for us!*