

salvation through deliverance from death, and we will see this taking shape in the next few days.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In what ways have you been tempted to lack faith that God will truly save you from any difficult situation, and why have you been disbelieving? If possible, discuss this with someone else, and try to accept the perspective they have on your situation.*
- *Pray for people who are in despair because they see no way out of their own desperate situations. Pray that they can find help through other Christians or through the word of the Holy Spirit.*

Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Friend, give us peace in the midst of strife, joy in the midst of unhappiness, and grace in the midst of trouble. By this we know your love and affection. May we never take it for granted. AMEN

Prayer

Dear Jesus, we honour You;
We thank You for teaching us about the Father;
We praise You for giving Your life in the service of others;
We give You all the glory for enduring opposition on our behalf;
We bless You for standing firm against Satan and His works;
Dear Jesus, what you did for us led to Your death,
We are lost in wonder love and praise!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Charity

Pray about those who give their lives for others, working in charitable organisations according to Your call and for the love of others. Pray for their blessing and protection.

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks for Jesus' love in sharing Himself with us*
- *Pray for people who fear for their jobs at the present time*
- *Pray for leaders of nations who must deal with nuclear weapons*

Meditation

Let us eat a simple Paschal meal of bread and wine,
And as we eat the bread and drink the wine, remember Christ
He taught His faithful followers the deeper things of God,
He spoke the eternal truth yet stood accused of blasphemy.
He loved His chosen friends, though all of them deserted Him,
He healed the sick and suffering, yet bore the pain upon Himself
He preached 'Good News' to all, from God our Lord and Father
He lived to demonstrate its truth through death to eternal life
He looked at those in need and loved them with a glance
He bore the insults of the ignorant whilst witnessing to 'grace'
So when we've eaten all the bread and drunk the wine
May this become in us the real presence of our Lord

Bible Study - Psalm 22:1-8

For the choirmaster. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning". A psalm of David.

¹ *My God, my God, why have You
forsaken me?
Why are You so far from saving
me,
so far from the words of my
groaning?*

² *O my God, I cry out by day, but You
do not answer,
by night, and I find no rest.*

³ *Yet You are the Holy One;
enthroned on the praise of Israel.*

⁴ *In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered
them.*

⁵ *They cried to you and were saved;*

they trusted in you and were not disappointed.

they hurl insults, shaking their heads;

⁶ *But I am a worm and less than human, scorned by men and despised by the people.*

⁸ *'He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'*

⁷ *All who see me mock me;*

Review

Psalm 22 is famous because of its opening words, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' These are words that Jesus said whilst on the Cross, as reported by two of the Gospel writers (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:43). In the circumstances of the crucifixion, it is impossible for us to be certain why Jesus said this. At best, we can suggest some possibilities, which we will do shortly, but it is fascinating to read in both of these Gospels that people misunderstood Jesus at the time. Both Matthew and Mark record that those near to Jesus thought he was calling for Elijah to come and save him; then, believing that Jesus was hallucinating because He was near His end, they attempted to offer Him a 'sponge filled with sour wine' (Matt 27:48, Mark 15:35). Shortly after this, in both accounts, Jesus 'breathed His last', and died.

Today is not Good Friday, and you may ask why we have this passage to study now and not tomorrow. The answer is that so much happened on the last day of Jesus' life that we should not limit our study of Jesus' death and resurrection to one day. Although it seems a little out of 'order' at the moment, we will find that Psalm 22 is a very helpful guide to the time from now until Easter Sunday morning.

Jesus 'quotes' a psalm

The Gospel writers are agreed that what Jesus said in those moments before he died were a direct quote in Hebrew from Psalm 22:1. It is possible that Jesus used these words 'literally' in order to say that He felt abandoned by the Father on the Cross at the very point of His death; after all, Jesus is said to have carried all our sins as a burden whilst on the Cross (see 1 Peter 2:24). However, Jesus' exact use of the words of Psalm 22 in its original Hebrew form is so specific that most people believe something more profound was in His mind, and it has nothing to do with the theory of His 'abandonment' on the Cross (this can, and should, be worked out from other texts).

Psalm 22 does indeed begin with the heartrending cry of abandonment, but in quoting it, Jesus did what so many teachers and rabbis have done, before Him and since. He quoted the psalm not just for these words alone, but because the whole psalm said what He wanted to say at that moment. It does not take much to realise that Psalm 22 gives a stunning description of injustice in death (22:8-18), but goes on to offer a powerful confirmation of the saving power of God (22:19f.) beyond death. Indeed, its conclusion that 'to Him ... shall all who sleep in death bow down; before Him shall bow down all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for Him!' (22:29) is one of the most powerful prophecies of the resurrection in the Old Testament!

The contrast between earthly experience and heavenly reality

The first few verses of Psalm 22 capture, in a most profound way, the difference between earthly experience and heavenly reality. Jesus truly felt the distance between Himself and His Father whilst he remained alive; anything less would mean that He was not human like you and me. Whilst serving the disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus felt the anguish of giving bread, a token of His own life, to Judas, the man who would hand Him over to His death (see Matt 26:23). Whilst praying in the Garden at Gethsemane, Jesus struggled with

yielding to God's will, but ultimately accepted His Father's authority (see Matt 26:36f.). From an earthly point of view what was happening appeared impossible! Surely such terrible things could not reflect the ultimate authority of God? The people of Israel had been crying out for a Messiah for centuries and the answer seemed as far away as ever, and there appeared to be no answer (22:2) to the deepest of human needs!

But Jesus was not about to die on the Cross for a failed mission. On the one hand, He understood the pain and distress of human failure, for He had seen in His disciples' eyes a longing for God's presence in the world to 'make a difference', and to bring a victory over sin and death. On the other hand, Jesus knew in His soul that the burden of doing this was His, and even if no other person alive could express such confidence, He knew that His Father was 'the Holy One, enthroned on the praises of Israel ...' (22:3). In the past, God's people had 'cried ... and were saved, they trusted ... and were not disappointed' (22:5). Jesus quoted Psalm 22 because he knew that what He was doing opened up the pathway for salvation to become a reality again for those who had faith.

The cost of salvation

Remarkably, Psalm 22 perceived the cost of earth meeting heaven, of the impossible becoming possible, and of salvation coming to all who awaited God's final act of redemption. We do not know whether Psalm 22 in its final form was written later than the prophecies of Isaiah, or whether Isaiah was influenced by David's writing in Psalm 22. However, Psalm 22:6-8 speaks of one who is insulted and abused, mocked and scorned, and treated as one whose faith was a mockery (22:8). This section of the Psalm reminds us of the extraordinary turn of events in Isaiah when the 'servant of God' is suddenly revealed as a 'suffering servant'; 'they were astonished at Him, so marred was His appearance, beyond human semblance ... he shall startle many nations!' (Isaiah 52:14).

Our passage today from Psalm 22 concludes with words that were thrown at Jesus in the form of taunts as he was being prepared for crucifixion; they said 'He trusts in God, let God deliver Him now ...' (Matt 27:43, Psalm 22:8). It is doubtful that the cursing crowds were bothered about what psalm they were shouting at Jesus; for as He is reported elsewhere as saying 'they don't know what they do' (Luke 23:34). It is far more likely that as Jesus was crucified, He knew that He was fulfilling all Scripture, and He wanted all who witnessed the event to know this, so that it would be passed down to us.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what circumstances are people tempted to say 'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'
2. Is it possible to hold on to faith when feeling abandoned by God?
3. In the light of verses 6 to 8, what kind of persecutions have you faced, and what have they taught you about trusting God?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is part of the doctrinal standards of many Christians to believe that Jesus was abandoned by God when on the Cross, because He became 'sin' at that very moment, and deserved death. Such a view of things is a construction of a number of verses of Scripture that each say something rather different, but its proponents will say quite adamantly that this is the scriptural truth. It is wisest to see what each text says for itself, and Psalm 22 speaks clearly about the injustice that leads to disbelief; yet it sets the foundations for a belief in