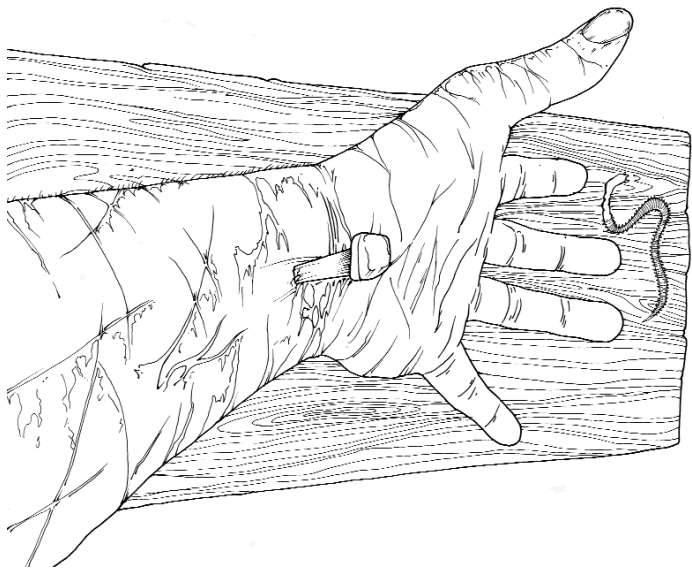


BIBLE STUDY 1: PSALM 20

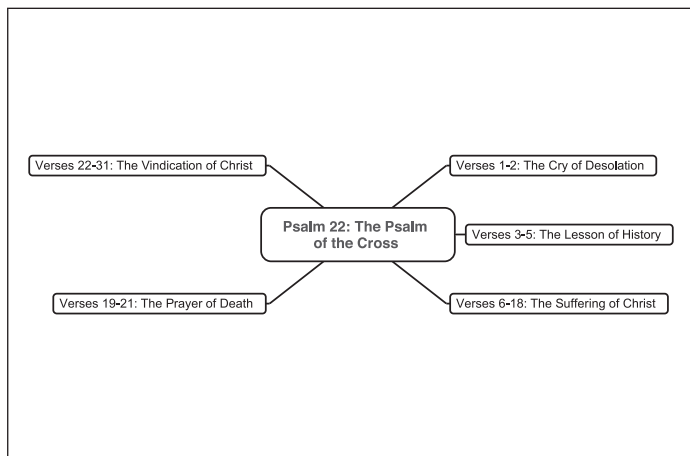
This psalm lets us see the prayer of the ancient Church to the Father. The Church prays for her Redeemer, the Messiah, to be made victorious.

1. Ancient Israel prays this psalm about the Promised Messiah. Who does she call on to help Christ's victory? How does this help us in our own prayer lives? Who can we pray directly to and how? Look at Jesus' teaching on this in Matthew 6:6-9.
2. When is the time of "distress" talked about in verse 1?
3. What is the sacrifice and burnt offering mentioned in verse 3? There were thousands of animal sacrifices that were made on behalf of the ancient Church. They are often spoken of in the Scriptures. Why then does the psalm focus on the sacrifice from this particular Person? Why is it so special?
4. Why would the Church pray verse 4? What are the desires of the Messiah's heart, and what are His plans? (See, for example, Isaiah 65:17-25; Hebrews 12:1-2, 25-29; or Romans 8:18-25.)
5. According to this psalm, as Christians, what should make us joyful (verse 5)? How does this ensure that we can be joyful whatever our circumstances?
6. What are banners for? (verse 6) How should the banners of the Church be identified? How can this be the case in the way we live our lives?
7. In verses 7 & 8, how does the gospel turn all worldly perspectives and expectations upside-down? How can knowing this help us when we are ridiculed for what we believe?
8. What does this psalm show us about how closely Christ is connected to us, His Church, through His sufferings? As Christians, should we be able to look on the Cross without feeling?

Psalm 22: The psalm of the Cross



"I am a worm and not a man..."



Key Truth: This psalm gives us an insight into the very thoughts and feelings of the Christ as He hung dying on the Cross.

In C. H. Spurgeon's "Treasury of David", he says of this psalm, "This is beyond all others THE PSALM OF THE CROSS. It may have been repeated word by word by our Lord when hanging on the tree... It is the photograph of our Lord's saddest hours, the record of His dying words... Before us we have a description both of the darkness and the glory of the Cross, the sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall follow. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm."

This psalm describes the sufferings of Jesus so accurately that it has been called '*history written in advance.*'

1. The cry of desolation – verses 1-2

In Matthew 27:46 Jesus cried out verse 1 of Psalm 22, allowing us to see that David's sombre prediction of His suffering had come true. The depth of desolation and darkness in His cry was explained and dissected by David so long before.

"This word 'My God' takes in more than all the philosophers in the world could draw out of it" – Alexander Wedderburn, 1701. We are faced here with the inner turmoil of the divine life on the Cross.

How could the Eternal Son, the LORD's Christ, utter such words? How could the Father abandon the Son? Surely, this would be the end of the Living God, the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Of course, the temptation is to explain these words away, to minimise their significance. Yet, when we meditate on the Cross of Christ we *must* face it in all its terror and darkness if we are to appreciate what was happening for our salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – "God made Him who had no sin to *be* sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

When Jesus hung on the Cross suffering the anger of God against sin, the impossible happened: the Father turned His face away from the Son, the LORD turned away from His Messiah. We can never imagine the utter desolation that Jesus experienced at that time. He had known the overwhelming love of the Father from everlasting... *until* those hours. Never before and never since has there been anything but infinite love between the Father and the Son. But at that time the uninterrupted life of the Living God was disrupted as the condemnation of our sin was answered within the life of God.

When we read these words we are ushered into the deepest and most terrible suffering that there ever has been and ever will be.

Whatever desolation we experience we can enter into this psalm and find expression for it. Our Mediator understands where we are, no matter how deep our suffering.



2. The lesson of history – verses 3-5

When He became one of us through the Virgin Mary, the Lord entered into the whole of what it means to be an earthly human. He learned His theology as we learn theology, through the Scriptures. When we are given a brief glimpse of His childhood in Luke 2:41-52 we see a boy completely enthralled by the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Scriptures He found His own identity and work described in great detail.

In these verses of Psalm 22 we see that as He hung on the Cross, the Messiah recalled to mind the lives of the saints in the Scriptures. He remembered how previous generations of believers had trusted in the Living God. He remembered that every single one had received salvation. They were not disappointed in their faith.

This was the foundation truth that He had to rest upon at that time. When He hung on the Cross in God-forsaken agony, He knew that He could trust Himself completely to His Father's will. Through the Scriptures, history had taught Him the lessons He needed to sustain Him in the darkest hour.

3. The suffering of Christ – verses 6-18

When we read this section of the psalm we are amazed at the accuracy of David's prophecy. It is as if he had seen the crucifixion with his own eyes. Here the profound nature of prophecy is revealed. The vague and ambiguous ramblings of Nostradamus are shown up for what they are by the clarity, accuracy and specificity of the great prophet David.

Yet, nothing can prepare us for the words of verse 6 – "I am a worm and not a man..." In His suffering Jesus felt so isolated, so cut off from both human and divine life that He felt as if He had lost His humanity. He felt as if He were nothing more than a helpless creature, trodden underfoot. Christ the Lord, the One through Whom and for Whom everything was created, the One infinitely above the

greatest angel, was brought so low, suffering so deeply, that His own humanity seemed lost to Him.

Notice, verses 7-8, that it is the rejection of the people that provokes such dark thoughts in Him. The crowds mocked and insulted Him, shaking their heads in scorn at the mess He was in. He wanted human sympathy and friendship at that time. He longed for the words of His Eternal Father telling Him that He was loved... and that was the very focus of the insults. Why didn't the Lord deliver Him from this cursed, God-forsaken death?

Yet, verses 9-11, His trust is unshaken. He remembers how He has trusted in His Father even when He was in His mother's womb. When He was helpless then He trusted. When there is no one to help, He will still trust His God.

He feels as if He were surrounded by wild animals (v12-13). The people hate Him and only want to destroy Him. It is this that causes Him such distress. He is dying to save the world even when the world hates Him. His whole body feels broken in His suffering – v14-15.

Verse 16 is a wonderful prophecy of the crucifixion of the Messiah – "they have pierced my hands and feet." *Nothing like that ever happened to David, yet it precisely described the way Jesus was killed.*

In v17 we are able to look through the eyes of the Messiah on the Cross. We are taken so deeply into the most terrible event there will ever be. What can He see? The bones of His own body showing through His skin... and the people staring at Him, gloating over Him.

Just as David prophesied, verse 18, Jesus' clothes were divided up among the soldiers – John 19:23-24.

4. The prayer of death – verses 19-21

In such grief, Jesus remains the Man of Faith. He still trusts His Father. He has prepared Himself throughout His life for this time. He must have read this psalm, and all the other prophecies of His death so



many times throughout His life. Now, at the end He remains faithful and entrusts His life to His Father.

As He dies He asks His Father to deliver His life from death. In Luke 23:46 we see how Jesus did this.

5. The vindication of Christ – verses 22-31

In Hebrews 12:2 we are told that Jesus “for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame”. He could get through the pain and humiliation of His crucifixion because He was so focused on the final outcome.

In the final section of this psalm we are shown how the Messiah thought about “the joy set before Him” even in His agony.

It is thoughts of Church life that He looks forward to. It is the fact of His sharing the human life of His Church that fills His mind (see Hebrews 2:10-12). He imagines how wonderful it will be to teach the Church more about His Father and how He will join them in Christian worship. Such thoughts make Him want to lead the praise right away – verse 23. Can it really be true that in the depth of His suffering His heart was lifted in praise to His Father? Yes, and He goes on to explain this.

However forsaken Jesus felt, nevertheless, He knew that His Father did not despise or ignore “the suffering of The Afflicted One.” Far from turning away from the Cross, the Father’s entire attention was fixed on that suffering. Jesus knew that it was in His suffering that the glory of God was being revealed to the world.

So He imagines Himself at the centre of a “great assembly” of Christian worship, all focused on the Father. As we study the following verses, we see that it isn’t just any time of praise... it is the great assembly of Resurrection Morning, when the saints from all over the world and from every period of history will gather around Jesus Christ to worship the Father. In verse 26, He thinks of the way

He will satisfy all poverty and grant immortality to those who seek the Lord. People from every nation will turn to the Lord (verses 27-28), including the rich as well as the poor (v.29). The dead, whose bodies have become dust, will be resurrected to kneel in worship in that great assembly.

In verses 30-31 we see how the Messiah thought ahead to the many generations of people who would come to a knowledge of the Living God because of what He was doing. They would be able to tell the gospel to other future generations (v31). But, how can this be? As Christ looked down from the Cross He could only see the scornful faces of people who hated Him. How could He be so sure that things would turn out so well in the end? The final phrase of the psalm explains – the Lord has done it. This is no human work. The whole human race is simply a spectator of the Cross of Jesus. It is the ultimate work of the Living God to turn us from Christ-hating rebels to Christ-loving members of that great assembly.

Further Questions

1. It has been said that God is most clearly revealed at the Cross. How can this be true at the very time when the Father forsakes the Son?
2. In verse 6, God the Son, the Messiah-Lord feels as though He has lost His humanity. Have we noticed how highly humanity is regarded throughout the Bible? What does this tell us about the agonies of the Cross?
3. Verse 1 is the cry of Jesus at the beginning of His death on the Cross. Look at Psalm 31:5. What might this tell us about the Scriptures between these two verses?



Daily Readings

Sunday: Psalm 22

Monday: Matthew 27:27-61

Tuesday: Philippians 2:1-18

Wednesday: Isaiah chapter 53

Thursday: Ephesians 2:11-22 and Romans 5:1-11

Friday: 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

Saturday: Revelation chapter 5