

## **Psalm 22**

- 1 *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,  
and are so far from my salvation, from the words of my distress?*
- 2 *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;  
and by night also I find no rest.*
- 3 *Yet you are the Holy One, enthroned upon the praises of Israel.*
4. *Our forebears trusted in you; they trusted, and you delivered them.*
5. *They cried out to you and were delivered;  
they put their trust in you and were not confounded.*
6. *But as for me, I am a worm and no man,  
scorned by all and despised by the people.*
7. *All who see me laugh me to scorn;  
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,*
- 8 *'He trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him;  
let him deliver him, if he delights in him.'*
9. *But it is you that took me out of the womb  
and laid me safe upon my mother's breast.*
10. *On you was I cast ever since I was born;  
you are my God even from my mother's womb.*
11. *Be not far from me, for trouble is near at hand  
and there is none to help.*
12. *Mighty oxen come around me;  
fat bulls of Bashan close me in on every side.*
13. *They gape upon me with their mouths  
as it were a ramping and a roaring lion.*
14. *I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart has become like wax melting in the depths of my body.*
15. *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd; my tongue cleaves to my gums;  
you have laid me in the dust of death.*
16. *For the hounds are all about me, the pack of evildoers close in on me;  
they pierce my hands and my feet.*
17. *I can count all my bones; they stand staring and looking upon me.*
18. *They divide my garments among them; they cast lots for my clothing.*
19. *Be not far from me, O Lord; you are my strength; hasten to help me.*
20. *Deliver my soul from the sword, my poor life from the power of the dog.*
21. *Save me from the lion's mouth, from the horns of wild oxen.*  
  
*You have answered me!*

22. *I will tell of your name to my people;  
in the midst of the congregation will I praise you.*
23. *Praise the Lord, you that fear him; O seed of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, O seed of Israel.*
24. *For he has not despised nor abhorred the suffering of the poor;  
neither has he hidden his face from them;  
but when they cried to him he heard them.*
25. *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
I will perform my vows in the presence of those that fear you.*
26. *The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord shall praise him; their hearts shall live for ever.*
27. *All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.*
28. *For the kingdom is the Lord's and he rules over the nations.*
29. *How can those who sleep in the earth bow down in worship,  
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?*
30. *He has saved my life for himself; my descendants shall serve him;  
this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.*
31. *They shall come and make known his salvation  
to a people yet unborn,  
declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.*

### **Refrain**

I will proclaim your name among the people;  
**and praise you in the midst of the congregation.**

Psalm 22 begins with despair, but ends in thanksgiving and praise.

The psalm is in two parts, vv.1-21, in which the psalmist struggles through sorrow towards confidence, becoming overwhelmed by despair, and vv. 22-31, where he looks back on his torment from peace following his deliverance.

At the beginning, the psalmist feels that his suffering proves that the Lord had forsaken him. He thinks that his prayer is not being answered. So, he feels separated from God. This sentiment is echoed by Jesus on the cross, as in Mark 15,34, At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani? which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

The psalmist finds comfort in the history of his people; God, who is holy, but who is always present with his people, and who has never disappointed those, who trust in him.

The psalmist's enemies mock his confidence. Jesus also was mocked by the crowds as he went to the cross. The taunts confirm his feeling that God has abandoned him, but he remembers his own history, how God has protected him from the time when he was in his mother's womb (v.9. 'But it is you that took me out of the womb and laid me safe upon my mother's breast.')

His enemies tear at him like wild dogs and bulls and wear him down until he is as useless as a broken pot. His garments are confiscated and divided out by casting lots. All this happens to Jesus also, as in John 19,22,24: 'When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another. "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfil what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."'"

In the second part (vv.22-31), the psalmist offers a testimony before the congregation in the temple about the deliverance, which God has given him, and encourages the worshippers to praise God for his saving power, acknowledging that his ability to praise is the result of his deliverance.

In the end, the whole earth, those yet to be born and the dead in the underworld will accept the rule of God and will proclaim his saving deeds. This idea that God's power extends beyond death and reaches even the underworld is the first step towards a doctrine of resurrection, moving on a little in thought from Psalm 6,5: 'For in death no one remembers you; and who can give you thanks in the grave?'

So, although Psalm 22 begins with lamentation and a feeling of hopelessness, it goes on to remember all that God has done in the past and looks forward to what he will do in the future.

We sometimes face serious problems or situations, which plunge us into despair. We may feel cut off from family and friends, and also from God. When I was training for teaching and we were introduced to talking onto tapes in a language laboratory, the lecturer said: 'It's a bit like prayer; you aren't sure whether anyone is listening!' We hear many stories of conditions in wartime, loss of life, and for some people, severe trauma caused by what they experienced. If we lose someone we love, our world feels empty and it takes a long time to overcome it. Those, who lost people close to them in the Manchester Arena bombing, are going through all this.

When war ends, we rejoice, organise services of thanksgiving and celebrations in the streets. We feel that we have been delivered, even if we never forget what had taken place. If we find a solution to our problems, we rejoice also, learn from the experience and rebuild our lives. If someone close to us dies, we do not forget, but we eventually learn how to cope and how to move on.

Psalm 22 reminds us that, in spite of disasters and difficulties, God never stops loving us and will continue to do so, whatever happens. God is there with us, alongside us, even when we are in the depths of despair and cannot see a way forward. When we come through and realise that he is present with us, we, like the psalmist, can rejoice.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Post Communion Collect, Lent 4)