

Psalm 22

The Psalm of the Cross

As we approach Holy week and reflect on the momentous events that took place its inevitable that the Psalm, we turn to is Psalm 22. The opening words of the Psalm are words quoted by Jesus has he suffered and died on the Cross. No Christian can read this without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion. It is not only a matter of prophecy being minutely fulfilled, but of the sufferer's humility- there is no plea for vengeance – and also towards the end of the Psalm his vision of a world wide gathering of the Gentiles – the non- Jewish world. In what way does this Psalm then speak to us our Lords death?

Jesus and the silence of God

The words of Christ from the cross

As Jesus hung dying on the cross it was to Psalm 22 his mind instinctively turned, to declare his agony and implore for help. The God with whom Jesus had enjoyed close intimacy throughout his life, now seemed in the hour of his extreme need to have deserted him. The agony of calvary was more than that of physical torture, public humiliation and painful death. It was the torment of separation from God- the God whom he knew, and whom he knew to be powerful, now seemed to be so far away. In entering his own 'dark night of the soul' Jesus was one with the many who struggle with severe suffering and affliction. The tension they face, that we face between the reality of their knowledge of an experience of a good and loving God and, on the other, the reality of the hurt, betrayal, bewilderment and suffering they are undergoing, is the tension he experienced to the full on the cross. More completely than any other person ever will, he entered into the very human experience, not only of suffering, but of the hiddenness and silence of God just when we need him most

Jesus and the deliverance of God

What is often forgotten about this Psalm which is justly famous for its opening verse is that it ends of a note of triumph. The change of tone is remarkable.

Both the Psalmist and Jesus come through their times of suffering and are restored to full life and health. But there is a difference. As one writer puts it

'The psalm concludes with praise because the sufferer escaped death; Jesus died. The Psalmist is delivered *from* death, whereas Jesus is delivered *through death*'. The deliverance experienced by Jesus was total. For the psalmist, death was merely postponed. One day it would come knocking again. For Jesus death really was defeated. When fulfilled through the resurrection of Jesus, the testimony of the psalmist in verse 22 takes on an altogether different complexion. What was merely a hint about the resurrection becomes a reality in Christ.

In his moving account in his book *Fear No Evil* of his struggle with terminal cancer David Watson writes at one point:

William Temple once put it like this: 'There cannot be a God of love,' men say, 'because if there was, and he looked upon the world, his heart would break.' The Church points to the Cross and says, 'It did break.' 'It is God who made the world,' men say. 'It is he who should bear the load.' The Church points to the Cross and says, 'He did bear it.'

A Psalm that began with a cry of dereliction and despair ends with a note of triumph. The final words in the New International Version of the Bible are 'for he has done it' words not far removed from that other great cry of our Lord on the Cross – '*It is finished*'