

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Easter Messages from the Psalms: The Crucifixion - Psalm 22:1-31

A few days after Christmas, I was in my local supermarket. The shelves had been cleared of Christmas merchandise. What had replaced it? Easter eggs! Had Christmas and Easter, then, simply become marketing ploys? A few of our Christmas cards carried the slogan, "Jesus is the reason for the season". Those words are certainly true of Christmas. That's the time when we remember that God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into our world, born as that Baby in Bethlehem's manger. But if the slogan is true of Christmas, it is equally true of Easter.

On this Easter morning, then, it's good for us to stop and take time to consider what Easter is all about. It's certainly about more than Easter eggs, Easter bunnies and Easter bonnets, however much we enjoy those things. This is the third in our series of talks on some of the psalms which particularly remind us of the Lord Jesus. We began by looking at Psalm 2 and considering the question, "Who is Jesus?" Then we looked at Psalms 40 and 41 and considered the incarnation, obedience and betrayal of the Lord Jesus. Today, we are looking at Psalm 22 with its vivid prophetic portrayal of His crucifixion.

Psalm 22 is interesting, in that it is quoted no fewer than six times by the writers of the New Testament:

- Psalm 22:1 (twice) by Matthew in his Gospel, Matthew 27:46 and Mark in his Gospel, Mark 15:34;
- Psalm 22:7 by Matthew in Matthew 27:39;
- Psalm 22:8 by Matthew in Matthew 27:43;
- Psalm 22:17 (twice) by Matthew in Matthew 27:35 and by the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 2:12.

In each case, the writers plainly attribute the quotation to the Lord Jesus. We are not, then, reading into this psalm things that God has not meant for us to see there. This portrayal of the Lord Jesus is all the more remarkable when we consider that David, the author of the psalm as we are told in the heading to the psalm, lived 1,000 years before Jesus was born!

The psalm is somewhat long so that it will only be possible for us to read parts of it today but I would urge you after this broadcast to take time to read it all through carefully. We should just say, too, that the psalm is the first in a trilogy:

- Psalm 22: The Cross of Christ;
- Psalm 23: Christ the Shepherd and His Crook;
- Psalm 24: Christ the Crowned King.

It will be convenient to consider the psalm under three headings:

1. The cry of abandonment (Psalm 22:1-8);
2. The cry of suffering (Psalm 22:12-18);
3. The cry of triumph (Psalm 22:21-24).

### 1. The cry of abandonment (Psalm 22:1-8)

We'll read Psalm 22:1-8: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, who inhabit the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed. But I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All those who see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the LORD, let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'"*

The four Gospels together tell us of seven separate sayings of the Lord Jesus when He was upon the cross. In chronological order they are:

1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34);
2. "He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to [John], 'Behold, your mother'" (John 19:26-27);
3. "Jesus said to [the thief], 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:43);
4. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34);
5. "I thirst!" (John 19:28);
6. "It is finished!" (John 19:30);
7. "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

The supreme importance of this cry of abandonment is indicated by the fact that not only is it the only one of the seven sayings to be recorded by two of the Gospel writers but it stands as the central one of the seven. God clearly wants us to take special notice of it!

The Lord Jesus answers His own question in Psalm 22:3: "*But You are holy...*" Herein lies the wonder of what took place at Calvary at that first Easter time. The Lord Jesus as a Man took our place as guilty sinners before a holy God. The prophet Habakkuk describes God in this way, "*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil*" (Habakkuk 1:13). In those three hours of darkness at Calvary, the Lord Jesus took the punishment for sin that we deserved - sin which a holy God could not look upon except to judge it.

The Apostle Peter writes of it in this way, "*...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness*" (1 Peter 2:24). In similar vein, the Apostle Paul writes, "*For [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Apostle John writes, "*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:10). Finally, the hymn writer, JD Smith, reminds us:

*All thy sins were laid upon Him,  
Jesus bore them on the tree;  
God, who knew them, laid them on Him,  
And, believing, thou art free.*

Let us never forget that great price which was paid by the Lord Jesus at Calvary so that our sins might be forgiven and that we might be brought back to God as His beloved children! Before we leave this cry of abandonment, we should note Jesus' words, "My God." John writes of the Lord Jesus, "*No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him*" (John 1:18). Dr. Colin Curry has commented helpfully on this verse, "It is of the utmost moment to see that John, under the Holy Spirit, and in a context where these distinctions are being made again and again, has no use for the verb 'to become', but carefully selects the word 'is' when he asserts that 'the only begotten Son is in the bosom of the Father'". He uses the present participle of the timeless verb. There was no commencement to that! Nor any discontinuity either. These are holy mysteries which our human minds find difficult to reconcile but, in speaking of the place of the Lord Jesus before His Father and before His God, we do well to stick to the words of Scripture.

## 2. The cry of suffering (Psalm 22:12-18)

We'll read Psalm 22:12-18: "*Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, as a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the assembly of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones; they look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.*"

In the cry of abandonment, we have seen something of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus for sin, not His own, but ours. In the verses we have just read, we see something of His sufferings at the hands of men for righteousness' sake. On a previous visit to Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus had asked in the full hearing of a large crowd, "*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*" (John 8:46). But no one would, or could, take up that challenge! When the Jews arrested Him and put Him on trial, the only way they felt they could obtain a conviction was to pay false witnesses. But even then, those witnesses could not agree amongst themselves! No, the Lord Jesus had lived as a righteous Man amongst them and they hated Him for it!

The precise details given of His suffering are all the more remarkable when we remember that, at the time when David wrote this psalm, stoning was the Jewish method of execution. Crucifixion was only introduced by the Romans centuries later. The disjointed bones, the broken heart, the deep thirst are all accurate portrayals of the awful suffering of crucifixion. Significantly, the Gospels record the fact that the soldiers gambled for His clothes.

### 3. The cry of triumph (Psalm 22:21-24, 30-31)

We'll read Psalm 22:21-24 and Psalm 22:30-31: *"Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard ... A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this."*

We should notice the very abrupt transition that takes place in the middle of Psalm 22:21. First, we hear the anguished cry of the sufferer: *"Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen."* We should remember that the psalms are Hebrew poetry. As in all poetry, truth is often expressed in other than literal terms. Peter describes the devil as walking *"about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). The lion's mouth, then, may well be a depiction of the awful power of Satan unleashed against the Lord Jesus at Calvary. That power of Satan energised wicked men to crucify Him. *"The horns of the wild oxen"* is a very vivid picture of impalement. The Lord Jesus would be nailed to His cross by heavy Roman nails. Thomas knew that when he refused to believe in Jesus' resurrection until he saw in Jesus' hands *"the print of the nails"* (John 20:25). The hymn writer quite properly asks:

*Was it the nails, O Saviour,  
That bound Thee to the tree?  
Nay, 'twas Thine everlasting love,  
Thy love for me, for me.*

*Katherine AM Kelly (1869-1942)*

But after that intense cry of suffering, the mood immediately changes: *"You have answered Me"*! (Psalm 22:21) The Lord Jesus knew that all the judgment of God that we as sinners deserved, He had fully borne. The work that His Father had given Him to do He had finished (see John 17:4).

We saw earlier that in those seven sayings from the cross, after that awful cry of abandonment, the Lord Jesus said, *"I thirst"* (John 19:28). Those words reflect far more than the physical thirst which the Lord Jesus would experience during His crucifixion. P Gerhardt (1607-1676) expresses it so beautifully:

*Love caused Thine incarnation  
This brought Thee from on high;  
Thy thirst for our salvation,  
This made Thee come to die.*

But then we hear that mighty cry of triumph from the cross: *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30). This was no last gasp of a dying Man. This was the Victor's cry of triumph! It was the practice in those days that when a conquering Roman general returned to Rome in triumph, leading all his foes captive, he would cry, *"It is finished"* and the crowds would answer in triumph, *"It is finished."* So let us on this Easter morning rejoice in that mighty victory of our Saviour, and declare, *"It is finished"*!

The completeness of the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary is a theme taken up by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Describing that work, he writes: *"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God ... For by one offering, He has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified"* (Hebrews 10:11-14). Firstly in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple, no seat was provided for the priest - his work was never done. But the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary is a completed work. It will never be repeated nor is there any need for it to be repeated. The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ rests by faith on that all important assurance!

There are two important consequences of that completed work and they are both foretold in Psalm 22:22. Here is the first: *"I will declare Your name to My brethren."* On that first Easter day, that resurrection morning, the Lord Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene who had come to the garden expecting His lifeless body still to be in the tomb (John 20:1-18). John tells us, *"Jesus said to her ... 'Go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'"* (John 20:17). He had first called the twelve as His disciples; later He called them, *"My friends"* (John 15:14). But now He brings them, and us, into this totally new relationship, *"My brethren"*! Moreover, He brings them, and us, into this totally new relationship with His God and Father: *"My Father and your Father, My God and your God"* (John 20:17). We might well exclaim with John, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* (1 John 3:1).

The other important consequence follows: *"In the midst of the congregation I will praise You"* (Psalm 22:22). Again in the Tabernacle and Temple, only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of holies, the dwelling place of God, and that only once a year with the blood of sacrifice (see Hebrews 9:7). When the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary was complete, we read, *"Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"* (Matthew 27:50-51). The fact is of such fundamental importance that both Mark and Luke record it too (Mark 15:38, Luke 22:45). That veil had shut off the Holy of holies and so had separated man from God. But now God was coming out to man! It was His work; the veil was rent from top to bottom. Man would have had to tear it from bottom to top!

The writer to the Hebrews invites us, *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart..."* (Hebrews 10:19-22). Today, the Lord Jesus is true to His word: *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). In the midst of His redeemed people, the Lord Jesus delights to receive their grateful praises and to present them to His Father.

I would ask each of you listening today, When the people of God are met together week by week, are you there with them, joining your praise with theirs to the Lord Jesus? He's worthy of it! Some may have disabilities which prevent that. The Lord knows all about that and welcomes the quiet worship of your heart. But please, let none of us this Easter time, or any other time, miss out on the opportunity of being together with fellow believers to worship the Lord simply because we can't be bothered or we would rather do something else.

As we close, let's remind ourselves again of that great triumph cry, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30). Christ is risen! Hallelujah!

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