

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Experiencing the Psalms” Lesson 5. (Psalm 22).
For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>

Primary resources: James L. Mays, *Psalms*, 1994, John Knox Press; *Shepherd’s Notes on the Psalms*, 1999, Broadman & Holman Publishers; *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV, 1991, Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan Publishing House.

Introduction: As James Mays writes, the genre of Psalm 22 is easy to categorize. It is a psalm of “prayer for help,” i.e., a petition to God for help from life-threatening trouble. As one reads through it, you get the sense of a totally afflicted person, first appealing in helplessness to God and then praising God for help. It moves cyclically depicting afflictions leading to death and thus the prayer for help (verses 1-21); and then praise for resulting help leading to the salvation of life (verses 22-31). That is the first level of reading as one seeks to understand and interpret this Psalm’s message. What gives this Psalm even more power though is its second level of association with the Passion of Christ on the cross. Today we will look at both levels to try to truly appreciate both the message and the movement from abject despair to absolute victory.

Read Psalm 22 completely through. As you read, note three relationships that emerge: Psalmist and God; Psalmist and others; Psalmist and self. Feel the flow and rhythm of the Psalm as it moves from affliction to praise.

Now re-read 22:1-21: Note the powerful prayer for help. This time, however, add a second perspective – the perspective of the Passion of Christ on the cross. For your information, there are 13 (perhaps as many as 17) texts from the Old Testament that are drawn into the passion description of Christ. Eight of the 13 are from the Psalms: five are from Psalm 22; two from Psalm 69; one from Psalm 31. Compare:

• Psalm 22:1	• Matt 27:46
• Psalm 22:7	• Matt 27:39-40
• Psalm 22:8	• Matt 27:43
• Psalm 22:15	• John 19:28
• Psalm 22:18	• Matt 27:35

- In the Psalm’s first 21 verses and the corresponding New Testament references, what picture do you see regarding the relationship between the Psalmist and God? Do you think this also is an accurate picture for Christ? Briefly discuss.
- Interspersed between the alternative cries for assistance are assertions of trust or confidence in the Lord (vv. 3-5; 9-10). What do you make of this apparent contradiction and do you think it applies to your life? Discuss.
- What picture is starting to emerge regarding the Psalmist and others? Do you think this also is an accurate picture for Christ? Could it also describe you? Discuss.
- Some have written that the initial picture painted in Psalm 22 is the testimony of one whose whole life depends on God, but God (at this point) is portrayed as distant or far off. As a result of the apparent absence of God, the Psalmist describes the fact that “trouble is near” in metaphors of bulls and lion (verses 12, 13, 21) demonstrating great power arraigned against him and his own helplessness as “prey” (dogs and evil men – verses 16 & 20). Do you agree? What application, if any, is there for your own life? Discuss.

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Experiencing the Psalms” Lesson 5. (Psalm 22 continued).

Now re-read 22:22-31: Note the shift in mood from affliction to praise and ultimate victory. The cycle appears to picture a figure whose prayer & praise are heard and undergoes a reversal of relations:

- before (mocked & rejected for dependence on God, verses 6-8);
- after (joined by “brothers” who celebrate because of God’s faithfulness, v.22)

- before (surrounded by evil forces who threaten to supplant God’s power, 12-18)
- after (universal eternal acquiescence to & celebration of God’s sovereignty, vv. 29-30)

Look again at 22:22-26:

- In the place of a sense of forsakenness, verses 24 & 26 in particular, reverse the mood and declare two very powerful truths:
 - People may despise the lowly; the Lord does not! Does this thought give you comfort or not? Discuss
 - God answered the afflicted one, despite earlier anguish. In addition, by God’s response to the afflicted one, the company of his brothers is given cause to celebrate not only the salvation of the afflicted but the good news for them in his deliverance. What do you make of this? Discuss.

Now re-read 22:27-31: The final part of the Psalm connects the salvation of the afflicted one as grounds for faith for all the lowly/powerless people and with the future of the kingdom of the LORD. Note the following and discuss the points briefly:

- The significance of the salvation affects the entire world (27 “*All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.*”)
- It affects all people in all conditions of life, to include the dying (29 “*All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him – those who cannot keep themselves alive.*”)
- Future generations will take heart at the recital of this event (30 “*Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.*”)
- This deed will become the basis and content for future generations to proclaim the story (31 “*They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn – for he has done it.*”)

Conclusion:

If you were a Jew standing at the foot of the cross and heard Jesus’ agonizing cry, the words most probably would have triggered memories of Psalm 22. Just like one hearing the opening stanza of the hymn “Amazing Grace” could begin to sing along without prompting, so too, Israelites could hear the first line of a Psalm and start singing or chanting the words to follow. Thus, while the Psalm begins as the cry of the afflicted, it ends in victory, not only for the one afflicted but for all people of the earth.

- Do you think that someone at the foot of the cross who knows “the rest of the story” could still have hope? Would it make a difference or not? Discuss.