

## PSALMS ABOUT A SAVIOUR

→ Television schedules continue to be full of repeats; some stations allow you to watch programmes an hour after they were originally put on air and of course iPlayer enables you to watch what you have missed or indeed what you want to see again for several days after it was originally scheduled. So, there are lots of opportunities for us to hear things again or see things again if we want to.

.....But there are other occasions perhaps, when, even though we may not know we are watching or reading something that we have seen or read before, we suddenly get that feeling of *deja vu*. We've heard this before or we've seen this before; things feel very familiar and sometimes we know exactly why, whereas on other occasions we're not so sure!

.....As you heard those words from Psalm 22 this morning, there may have been parts of it that sounded or felt very familiar to you. Like the words right at the beginning of the psalm for example, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Where have you heard that before? Well, of course, they're the words that Jesus speaks on the cross as he cries out to his heavenly Father before he dies. And as we read them here, we may be tempted to think that this must be an eye-witness account of the crucifixion!

.....As you read a little further on into the psalm and arrive at verses 7 and 8 you read, "All who see me jeer at me; they stick out their tongues and shake their heads. "You relied on the Lord," they say, "Why doesn't he save you? If the Lord likes you, why doesn't he help you?" Isn't that just what the chief priests and the scribes and the religious leaders of the day shouted at Jesus as he hung on the cross? Isn't that a vivid description of their behaviour?

.....And so it continues in verses 15-18, describing the thirst that we hear of Jesus experiencing in the gospel accounts and the gambling of the soldiers who divided up Jesus' clothes amongst them. The description of the events at the crucifixion of Jesus is even more detailed here than it is when we read about it in the four gospels. How can that be? Is this a first hand testimony that has somehow got mixed up with the psalms when the Bible was compiled? How can it be so accurate in what it has to say?

→ The title of this psalm tells us that the author is David. So this is no eye-witness account of the crucifixion. These are words that were written hundreds of years before Jesus came to the earth; hundreds of years before crucifixion had become a common way of putting people to death. These are words that formed part of the scripture that Jesus himself would have read, studied, known and loved, yet it describes perfectly that scene at the cross when Jesus died!

.....So, are you puzzled? Are you amazed? Are you thinking "so what!?" Why does it matter that this was written so long before? Isn't it just another of the prophecies that we can find in the Old Testament; words that point ahead to what is to come? Well yes, and no! David is talking about himself here. He has experienced some kind of trouble or difficulty in his life, where he felt as if God had abandoned him and he writes about his feelings in this psalm. But wonderfully, the

Holy Spirit, who inspired what David wrote, manages to make his words talk about something that is going to happen many years later. David's words become applicable to the one who, many years later would be known as the Son of David!

.....When Jesus hung, dying on the cross, he quotes these words of David and we see, not just those particular words being fulfilled, but the whole psalm is suddenly brought into context.

→ But the verses that you've heard from Psalm 22 this morning are only part of the story. When you read the whole of it later in the week as part of your Essential Jesus reading programme, you'll see that isn't the end of the story. And Jesus' death wasn't the end of the story either. As the apostle Paul once said in a letter he wrote to the church in Corinth, if that really was the end of the story, then we are people to be pitied, because we are without hope.

.....But there is hope. As you read on through this psalm and arrive at verse 21, suddenly things begin to change. The rest of the psalm becomes much more positive. David begins to praise God for all that he has done and for all the ways in which he has blessed his people. It's the same person speaking. It's still written in the first person. "I will tell my people what you have done. I will praise you in their assembly." David is somehow seeing beyond the agony of his present situation to a new way of living. And it's not just for himself but for all those who trust in God – he refers to the descendants of Jacob and the people of Israel.

→ But still that's not the end of the story. The scope of what God has done and will do is even wider than David's own people. "All nations will remember the Lord" he says. "From every part of the world they will turn to him; all races will worship him." The death of Christ on the cross, which is reflected in the words which David writes about his own experience, is for everyone. All of us can know and experience the saving and forgiving love of God for us.

.....So, here in these words written so long before Jesus came to the earth is good news for us today; here in these words written by someone about his own experience is much for us to learn about God himself and about his love for us displayed in Jesus Christ. So, what particularly can we learn from this psalm and the others that you will be encouraged to read this week about Jesus? How could life be different for us because of what we find in these words?

→ Well, perhaps the first thing for us to see is that God's word is to be relied upon. Even though these words were written such a long time before Jesus died, we can see how accurate it all was. Just imagine trying to write down a prediction now for something that might happen in 3012! How difficult that would be! Remember all those "Tomorrow's World" programmes that some of us watched when we were young which predicted that we would all live on tablets in the future rather than normal food as well as lots of other weird and wonderful ideas. Things haven't all worked out just as they thought.

.....Yet this psalm was written by David with the help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to point ahead to Jesus and the way in which God would work out his plan of salvation for all of us. So, it doesn't matter whether you're reading the Old

Testament or the New Testament, you can always ask yourselves, what is there to be learned about Jesus from these words?

→ Then secondly, this psalm speaks to us about the great love of Jesus for us all. These words are quite specific about some of the anguish and agony and pain that he suffered for you and me. Sometimes in the gospel stories, the detail is limited and we simply hear that “he was crucified.” Here in this psalm we get a more graphic picture of what it really cost for Jesus to die on the cross for you and for me. Will that move you to praise God and thank him and marvel at his love as David did in the second half of his psalm?

.....And finally, perhaps, through the words of this psalm we are reminded that the cross was no mistake, no accident! It wasn't a case of things going horribly wrong for Jesus. All those years before David was writing of what would happen – the death of Jesus on the cross was all part of God's plan to restore the broken relationship between himself and the human race. It was all part of his plan to help us realise just how much he loved us. And of course, the death of Jesus wasn't the end of the story.

.....Resurrection and rejoicing was to follow. Jesus conquered death and was raised to life again and still today, he longs for all of us to recognise the love of God for us. It doesn't matter what age we are, or what nationality we are, or what job we do, or what has happened in our life so far. Remember those words from the baptism service “all this for you, before you could know anything of it!” All this for you!

.....So, for those of you following the Essential Jesus reading programme this week, invite God to show you more about Jesus as you read from the psalms because there's a good deal for all of us to discover here whether we're following that programme or not. So often we say that the whole of life is to be found in the psalms, joy and sadness, anger and contentment, bewilderment and rejoicing. But this psalm perhaps reminds us that not only is the whole of life to be found in the psalms, but the fullness of life that Jesus offers to all is here too. Life may be good for us at the moment, or we may be in utter anguish as David was when he wrote these words. Whatever experience is yours right now, there is good news for you here, so read, marvel and respond to the love of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.