**Messiah’s victory** 2/4/23

Read: Psalm 22, Hebrews 2

Text: Psalm 22:21-31

Psalms: 122old, 40:5-10, 45:6-9&12-14, 72old

‘The second half of Psalm 22 is thus a throbbing, soaring anticipation of the expanding proclamation of the gospel and of the ongoing and triumphant Christian church’; so writes James Montgomery Boice. He, like others, saw the second half of this psalm as a continuation of the prophecy of the cross. The prophecy extends to the resurrection, which Jesus himself foretold, but even as Jesus cried out on the cross, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?’ (22:1), he said, ‘It is finished’, words which echo the final words of this psalm: ‘He has done this’ (22:31, cf. John 19:30). We will come back to these important words. For now, note these closing words coming from the mouth of Jesus, and the words of verse 22 being put into the mouth of Jesus in Hebrews 2:12, as bookends to this passage. Besides, words about ‘living forever’ in verse 26 go beyond anything David or any other earthly king could promise.

The desperate cry for deliverance from mocking and devouring enemies is answered at the end of verse 21. The plea, ‘Save me from the lion’s mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen’ is answered by the Lord; in Hebrew it is a single word, ‘answered’ meaning, ‘you have answered’. We saw the writer remembering how the Lord delivered ‘our fathers’, and how precious he was to the Lord who gave him birth. His affliction was great- terrible thirst, clothes stripped from his body, bones sticking out, hand and feet pierced- but then the Lord answered him. For Jesus on the cross that answer was ultimately in his resurrection, but even while on the cross he knew that he had completed the work he was sent to do; he had accomplished our salvation, our atonement and reconciliation with the Lord God who gave us life.

Some translations, namely NIV and ESV, do not have a clear translation of the last word in verse 21-‘answered’ or ‘you have answered’. In fact, the NIV gives no indication of a turning point in the psalm, except in a marginal reading, ‘You have heard’. The ESV translates, ‘You have rescued me’ with a marginal note, “Hebrew ‘answered’”. So if you follow the marginal readings you have the correct translation. Do check other translations you might be reading.

Our subheadings for this second half of Psalm 22 are: ‘Praise in the assembly of Israel’, ‘Praise with the poor and the rich’, ‘Praise with the Gentiles’, and ‘Praise with future generations’.

**1. Praise in the assembly of Israel**

There is a sudden turning from prayer to praise as we come to verse 22, which, knowing that the Lord has answered his prayer, is understandable. What do you do when the Lord answers your prayer? When you experience healing, pass an exam, deliver a healthy baby, get a pay rise, or a new job, do you stay silent? I am not talking about boasting but about giving thanks to the Lord for answering your prayer.

When we were in Fiji recently, my wife got quite sick. Being in a foreign country, and that without hospitals like ours, I prayed for Elizabeth to get well. She went off to sleep and in the morning was well. On our trip to Europe we were in Prague on the Lord’s Day and wanted to go to church. I looked on the internet and discovered a Baptist church nearby, but could we find it? We had arrived in the city the day before. We eventually found the upstairs room where some people were gathered. We heard a fine sermon, and then the pastor asked visitors to introduce themselves. We told him how thankful we were to the Lord for guiding us to this place where we could praise the Lord with fellow believers across the world.

You might like to sing in the shower but the Lord calls us to sing praise in the assembly or congregation. Under the old covenant public worship was an essential, and it the same under the new covenant. The early believers gave themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). The believers wanted to be together in the Lord’s house. Whenever believers are together, Jesus is present with them (Mat 18:20). If you don’t want to be with Jesus then don’t come to church.

Not only was the assembly the place for teaching, for prayer, and for praise, it was the place to meet with the Lord and his people. If the words of verse 22 are put into the mouth of Jesus, as they are in Hebrews 2:12, then Jesus is in the assembly of the brethren. Jesus, our Saviour and Lord, is not ashamed to call those he sanctifies his brethren. The fellowship that we enjoy here in church includes Jesus himself. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is sometimes called ‘holy communion’. It is holy because the Lord is present, not in the bread or the wine but in spirit and in truth.

The assembly or church is for those who fear the Lord (22:23). It is the place where God is to be glorified, not man- remember what we said about verse 3. It is the place to confess sin, to offer up prayers of thanksgiving and petition, and to praise the Lord. Reference to ‘the afflicted’ in verse 24 is probably to Jesus himself, but also applies to any who are afflicted because of the name of Jesus. As the Lord heard the cry of Jesus from the cross, so he will hear your cry and deliver you. He will deliver you because of the cross, because through the death and resurrection of Jesus we become the children of God, and brethren as far as Jesus is concerned (22:22, Heb 2:12).

The verse from Hebrews 2 reminds us that Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh and blood that he might be our High Priest to make propitiation for our sins. In Jesus we have one who represents us, one who is our mediator, the only mediator between God and man (1Tim 2:5). How tragic it is to see people praying to Mary or some other ‘saint’; there seems to be as many saints in the Church of Rome as there are Hindu gods! Before the Reformation, the church was steeped in superstition. Fear of the Lord, not fear of the devil, is the mark of a true Christian.

**2. Praise with the poor and the rich**

The brethren for whom Christ died include poor and rich alike. All sections of society are included in the assembly. Those who seek him will find him and will praise the Lord (22:26). Special mention is made of the poor. Under the Law of Moses the poor were not to be neglected. They were to be included in the assembly and given a share of the sacrifices and offerings brought to the Lord. They shared this with the Levites also (Deut 14:29). Jesus helped the poor in their needs, both physical and spiritual, as did the early church. The Lord promises to bless the poor, and those who remember the poor (Deut 14:29). ‘Let your heart live forever’ is the blessing received by all who seek the Lord.

The rich are referred to in verse 29- they are literally those who are ‘fat upon the earth’. The picture seems to be that of the self-sufficient putting aside their arrogance to join with the poor in worship and the associated feast. There is no other way of course! There is only one church and only one heaven. The rich must understand that they will die just like the poor. Maybe we should understand verse 29 in the light of Philippians 2:10- both the living and the dead will one day bow the knee before Jesus.

**3. Praise with the Gentiles**

The great assembly of the brethren will include Gentiles as well as Jews. Praise for God’s answer to the prayer of Jesus, and his answer to our prayer in Jesus Christ, will go up from Jew and Gentile, to ‘the ends of the earth’; the word ‘nations’ means Gentiles’ (22:27). The promise is fulfilled in Jesus of course. Jesus focussed on the Jews in his ministry, but often spoke of others being gathered into the kingdom of heaven. In John 17 Jesus prayed, ‘that the world may know that you have sent me’; He sent his apostles into the world with this message. The risen Jesus told his disciples that they would be witnesses to him in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8), which is just what is prophesied here in verse 27.

On this side of the cross, and at this time in history, we stand with awe and thanksgiving at the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth, including to us and our people group. It remains for us to continue witnessing this glorious gospel to the ends of the earth, and especially to the next generation.

**4. Praise from future generations**

Praise from Jew and Gentile, and from rich and poor, is prophesied here in this psalm. We are reminded of what Paul writes: ‘There is neither Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Yet the gospel is not only for every race and every social status of men and women, it is also for every generation and for future generations. Hindus boast that their religion is very ancient, but the gospel we preach, when we preach the whole Bible, extends back to the beginning of time. We have the truth of the gospel being proclaimed here in this very psalm, written a thousand years before Christ.

In verse 30 it is prophesied that, ‘a posterity shall serve Him’, and that future generations will be told about the Lord. People yet to be born will declare the praises of the Lord, praise that centres around the great salvation we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are many generations from the time of Christ but you were in the thoughts of Christ as he hung on the cross dying for you. Is this not a wonderful and precious thought? Indeed, ‘He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love’ (Eph 1:4).

We do not know how many more generations will be born before Jesus returns, but we know two things for certain. Firstly, that for each of those generations to be saved, they need to hear the same gospel, the same truth that we are hearing today, the truth of Jesus Christ. Secondly, we are to be witnesses of this truth to the next generation, and the generation after that, if you are blessed to see your grandchildren, or even great grandchildren.

The closing words of this psalm are, ‘He has done this’, which, as we have said, echo the words, ‘It is finished’ that Jesus spoke as he died (John 19:30). What did Jesus mean? He did not say, ‘I am finished’, as so many understand. Jesus was not just dying as a good man tragically executed by wicked men. When he prayed, ‘It is finished’ he was referring to the work the Father had sent him to do (John 17:4). He was sent to die as the sacrifice for our sins, sent to pay the penalty that was upon us for our sin. In dying on the cross he paid that penalty in full. There is nothing left for you to pay, so do not think your good works contribute to, or are necessary in any way for your salvation. What you must do is believe in Jesus Christ, believe him when he said, ‘It is finished’.

If this is what you believe, you will be among the few Christians that do. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that good works are necessary, and that taking the Mass somehow cleanses you of sin. Back in the Middle Ages they even taught that you could pay for your sins with cash given to the church! But it is not only Catholics who teach the necessity of good works in order to be saved. If good works are part of salvation, you can never be sure that you are saved. The Reformers taught salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They taught this because the Bible declares, ‘There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1), and because on the cross Jesus cried out, ‘It is finished’.