

It is All About Him

Psalms

August 27, 2017
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My aim today is to turn the diamond of the glory of Jesus Christ ever so slightly so that one more facet of his glorious being can be admired. Jesus is a brilliant, infinitely faceted diamond and all of his facets are glorious. Over the years we have seen him through many, many different Scriptures each allowing revelation of his glory to shine and sparkle.

We have never done one like today before. Two reasons: first, we have never tried to do it from such a large section of Scripture. Second, we have never attempted it from poetry before. So this is the All About Him: Psalms edition. All summer we have been studying the Psalms. Our series title is *Songs for Sinners*. We conclude our series today with the grand finale of the glory of Jesus from the Psalms. All summer we have repeated that the Psalms are not like any other book of the Bible. No chapters. Just songs and lyrics. It's like the back of an album cover (if you remember what an album was). Song after song listed. Then CDs came out and they would print the lyrics of the songs in the fold-out cover. Now people hardly know what a CD is.

But we all know what lyrics are because we all love music. Lyrics are art. They are not prose. They are not necessarily linear, rational, logical development. Art has its own way of communicating truth. What is art? We tend to think we know what art is without having thought about it. That's part of the nature of art; its power flows primarily from the heart. Perhaps that's why they rhyme. Art. Heart.

"Art: The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power."¹

This *All About Him* I want to draw from the most artistic section in the Bible (the Psalms) the beauty of Jesus, not as human imagination, but the glorious expression of divine beauty and love. He loved the Psalms, quoted the Psalms, and is the main point of the Psalms. Indeed, Jesus is the Song for Sinners.

Jesus and the Psalms

I want to start not in the Psalms but in what Jesus said about the Psalms. Let me take you to the famous Upper Room. It is the Sunday after Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples are there bewildered that Jesus' body is no longer in the tomb. Reports have come from Mary Magdalene and others saying they have seen Jesus alive. Suddenly, with the doors locked, Jesus is standing in their midst. Has there ever been a more shocked group of humans?

Jesus says, touch me. I'm no ghost. To prove it he ate something. Simple, but effective. And then Jesus says,

"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

¹ Definition taken from *The Oxford American College Dictionary* accessed online via Google search.

and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.' (Luke 24:44–48 ESV)

Just prior to this, he had met some of the disciples on the Emmaus road and rebuked their confusion by appealing to Scripture. *"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."* (Luke 24:27)

What a sermon that would have been! Jesus exegeted himself out of the Old Testament Scriptures. On the Emmaus Road it says *"Moses and all the prophets."* In the Upper Room Jesus says, *"that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* (Luke 24:44)

Please note that the only singular book mentioned is Psalms. Why would he only mention Psalms? Certainly Judges, Ruth, Daniel, and all the rest are about him. He said as much on the Emmaus Road. Yet in this powerful and precious moment of disclosure after his resurrection, he wants them to know that the Psalms are all about him. That everything written about him in the Psalms must be fulfilled. He is saying, *you cannot understand who I am and why I am here and what I have done if you don't understand what that Psalms said about me.*

This summer we have tried to get our minds around this massive collection of songs. I hope you have been blessed and helped with lament and praise in the course of life. But if we leave Psalms and think, *what a great collection of songs for sinners to help sinners on the journeys of life*, we have missed the big point entirely. Through all the songs about joy and sorrow, pain and praise is a thread. A melody. You have to read the Psalms listening for the Messianic Melody.

It's like some of our great musical scores for movies. To me the best is *Star Wars*. It runs through all these episodes, 1, 2, and 3 which turn out to be 4, 5, and 6 and the new 1, 2, 3 were done only to be added to with 7, and this December number 8. There was even a prequel of *Rogue One* last year and who knows what is to come. If you watch *Star Wars* you almost don't have to know what is happening on screen; the music tells it all. Certain characters have their own theme music. Most clearly Darth Vader [Steve hums the tune here] and Luke Skywalker [Steve also hums this tune]. Those characters may not actually be on the screen, but if their song is playing, they are nearby.

Jesus may not be on the screen but he is always nearby. His melody in the Psalms hits unexpected notes. Lament notes. Pain notes. But also notes of victory and hope. The Psalms are for sinners but are not primarily about sinners. The Psalms are about our Savior.

Jesus in the Psalms

The reign of Christ

*"The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
Fire goes before him
and burns up his adversaries all around.
His lightnings light up the world;*

*the earth sees and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.” (Psalm 97:1-5)*

Many of the psalms speak to the reign of the Lord. These include Psalm 24, 29, 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 145, and 146.² So much so that one commentary on the Psalms is entitled *Singing in the Reign* (Michael Barber). Clever.

We spent some of this past year talking about the kingdom of God. The reign of God through Christ. Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God. His miracles and resurrection declared that the kingdom and the king had arrived. So different from the kingdom of man that we live in. The kingdom of man is death and darkness, despair and futility. But God’s kingdom is light and life, truth and purity, hope and beauty. And Jesus is the King of the kingdom. He is reigning now.

The Psalms’ imagery is poetically powerful. *“The Lord sits enthroned as King forever.”* (Psalm 29:10) *“God reigns over the nations. God sits on his holy throne.”* (Psalm 47:8) *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures throughout all generations.”* (Psalm 145:13) Is this all hype? According to Jesus it isn’t. I am confident we will see Jesus’ glorious reign and kingdom and realize how understated even these psalms are to reality. In an old song I still really like, *“He’s more wonderful than my mind can conceive/He’s more than wonderful than my heart can believe.”*³ Psalm 99 summarizes it well, *“The Lord reigns; let the people tremble!”* (Psalm 99:1). In Psalms, Jesus is king! Bow before him!

The glory of Christ in the Psalms seems in contradiction to the next notes in the messianic melody—suffering. This is why Judaism struggles to see Jesus as Messiah. Yes king, but also a suffering servant. Psalms say so much about the sufferings of Christ.

The sufferings of Christ

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
they have pierced my hands and feet...
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.” (Psalm 22:1, 7, 14-15, 17-18)*

Within these words we have reference to Christ and exact fulfillment in the life of Christ.

² Christopher J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, p. 243.

³ “More Than Wonderful” ©1982 Lanny Wolfe Music

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Does that sound familiar? Of course. Jesus cries this out as he hangs on the cross.

"All who see me, mock me." Matthew cites this as directly fulfilled in the mocking Jesus faced.

"They have pierced my hands and feet." Obvious prophecy of the cross.

"They divide my garments." You could accuse Jesus of play-acting prophecies to appear to be the Messiah, but did the Romans soldiers have any idea they were part of the messianic melody?

Could Judas have known that he was fulfilling Psalm 41:9? "*Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*"

Jesus' last words flow from the Psalms: "*Into your hand I commit my spirit.*" (Psalm 31:5)

Let's take a moment and consider why psalms would flow from Jesus' mouth in his most painful and overwhelming moments.

I remember I was playing golf some years ago and out of nowhere this ball came and hit me right above the shoulder blade. It felt like I had been shot. Afterward, one of the guys said, "I can't believe you didn't cuss." I don't remember, but I likely said Christian acceptable words and screamed, but there was no profanity.

Moments of pain are when what is on the inside comes to the outside. If you doubt this, go home and slam your thumb with a hammer. There was never a pain like Jesus had on the cross. Others have died gruesomely as he did. No one has ever borne the sin guilt for humanity but Christ. The real Jesus was on display while he hung on the cross. What came out? Grace – "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" (Luke 23:34) And love – to the thief, "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" (Luke 23:43)

Of the seven things we know that Jesus said while dying on the cross, two of them were from the Psalms. "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Psalm 22:1) and "*Into your hand I commit my spirit.*" (Psalm 31:5)

Psalms came out because the pain forced out what was inside. Jesus knew the Psalms. Loved the Psalms. Each response in his temptation by Satan was a Psalm quote. He rebuffed the Pharisees by pointing out in Psalm 110 that David calls his son his Lord. Psalm after psalm. Why? **Jesus was in the Psalms and the Psalms were in Jesus.**

What comes out in your times of suffering? Anger? Violence? Profanity or blaspheming against God? What should it say to us that Jesus turned to the Psalms for truth and comfort and out of him flowed in his sufferings the songs of God?

The saving work of Christ

I am going to tell the redemptive story of Jesus from the Psalms. Might his Emmaus Road sermon have sounded something like this?

While Jesus was born a human around 6 BC, that was not his beginning. In fact, he had no beginning for he was in eternity past the Son of God. "*The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'*" (Psalm 2:7) Eternally begotten. Not born. No beginning.

Has always been. Eternally the Son of God. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1)

Not just eternal Sonship but eternal reign. As Hebrews 1 quotes Psalm 45:6, *"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness."*

Not just a king but also a priest. Not a Levitical Priest but a priest forever by another order, *"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'"* (Psalm 110:4) Melchizedek was a priest-king to whom Abraham himself tithed. He was a foreshadowing of an eternal priest, king, and mediator who would come. Jesus is like Melchizedek, only greater.

Jesus was born of a virgin and lived quietly for 30 years. He began a public ministry of teaching and miracles. He taught in parables. *"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old."* (Psalm 78:2)

He presented himself to Israel as King in his triumphal entry riding down the Mount of Olives on a donkey. Psalms were sung over him as he came to them on a donkey. *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!"* (Psalm 118:26)

In spite of his incredible popularity, enemies plotted against him including a member of his own inner circle. *"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed."* (Psalm 2:2)

And one of his disciples, Judas, conspired against him, *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."* (Psalm 41:9) The conspiracy was executed at night. Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was framed and with political maneuvers even more treacherous than we see today, sentenced to death on a cross. By 9:00am on a day we call Good Friday, Jesus was crucified with nails attaching him to a Roman cross. *"For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet."* (Psalm 22:16)

The Roman soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothes as he hung over them. *"They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."* (Psalm 22:18)

There on the cross Jesus faced terrible pain and anguish. Psalm 22 describes it as, *"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast."* (Psalm 22:14)

As God the Father placed upon Jesus' humanity the sins of humanity, the Father rejected Jesus as sin and accepted Jesus' sacrifice for sin. This rejection of Jesus felt to Jesus like abandonment. He cries out straight from the Psalms, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Psalm 22:1). And then in the moment before he died he cried out, *"Into your hand I commit my spirit."* (Psalm 31:5) His last words were a psalm.

His enemies, including Satan, gloated over his death. His followers buried him. Most if not all thought that was the end.

But the Psalms and God the Father knew a deeper secret—a prophecy given in the Psalms centuries before regarding the messiah.

*"I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken."*

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.” (Psalm 16:8–10)*

This psalm was a promise to Jesus that his body would not decay like all humanity. How? Resurrection! On the third day, God the Father raised Jesus back to life and granted to him a kingdom and a rule and a reign as King of the Kingdom of God. *“The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” (Psalm 110:1)*

In the very first sermon of the church, the Apostle Peter quoted Psalm 110 and said, *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36)*

3,000 people on Pentecost responded in trust in Jesus. They heard the messianic melody. Peter preached a messianic psalm and the Holy Spirit launched the church. We live today in that era of gospel proclamation of Christ as King, Savior, Priest, Son, Lord, King, Mediator and Messiah.

What should we do? What do the Psalms call us to? The same as that first Pentecost day. *Believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Bend the knee to Jesus’ Kingship in your life. His reign in our hearts creates powerful countercultural character and desires and directions. Essentially, incredible loyalty and obedience and love to Jesus.

*“Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.” (Psalm 100)*

Our response is worship and love and praise and thanksgiving. By God’s grace, we have heard and responded in faith to the messianic melody.

Jesus: The Song for Sinners

The Psalms are songs for sinners but the melody is pure Christ. He is the song of our hearts. He is the song of the church. All the Scriptures are about him. All of history is about him. All the church is to be about him. All our lives are to be about him. The messianic melody makes us dance; sometimes a mournful dance, sometimes a happy dance but always a Jesus dance. We never get over him. We never get past him. We never make too much of him.

As Psalm 27:4 says, *“One thing...will I seek after, “that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.”* Dear friend, do you see his beauty? Have you heard his melody? Is your heart dancing with happiness that in Psalms and everywhere else, *It is all about him?*

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