

JESUS THE VICTORIOUS WARRIOR AND HUSBAND
(SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2009)

SCRIPTURE READING: PSALM 45

INTRODUCTION

The Psalm that I have chosen to preach from tonight is a very important Psalm as it is quoted by the author of Hebrews in proving the superiority of Christ over the angels. However it is a somewhat difficult Psalm in understanding the imagery of the Psalm, its structure, and how exactly it applies to Jesus Christ.

I recently heard a very pathetic explanation of the Psalm by one of the leaders in the Emergent Church movement named Nadia Bolz-Weber, the female and heavily tattooed pastor of a gay-affirming, ELCA church in Colorado. Her exposition I think typifies how the Emergent Church often approaches Scripture. There is little reverence or attempt to truly understand Scripture. Rather one simply seeks to comment based on one's own feelings and thoughts. In an interview Ms. Bolz-Weber was commenting on the Psalm and stated, "... *It makes me think that person he is writing about is kind of a Shmuck and doesn't really like him... He is totally scraping about for comments... It is weird. It is a weird Psalm. It reminds me of the minstrel in Monthly Python who sang sycophantic songs not very well.*"¹

I hope you will come away with a much more reverent understanding of this Psalm as we study it this evening. We won't be able to resolve all the

¹ <http://www.isaaceverett.com/2009/08/26/psalm-45-nadia-bolz-weber/>

interpretive difficulties but I hope we are able to see how this Psalm does clearly point to Jesus Christ. It is given to us then so that we might love our Lord and Savior even more and fall before Him in worship and praise.

Charles Spurgeon wrote of this Psalm in his commentary, *The Treasury of David*,

Some here see Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter only—they are short sighted; others see both Solomon and Christ—they are cross eyed; well focused spiritual eyes see here Jesus only, or if Solomon be present at all, it must be like those hazy shadows of by passers which cross the face of the camera, and therefore are dimly traceable upon a photographic landscape. "The King, "the God whose throne is for ever and ever, is no mere mortal and his everlasting dominion is not bounded by Lebanon and Egypt's river. **This is no wedding song of earthly nuptials, but an Epithalamium for the Heavenly Bridegroom and his elect spouse.**²

I learned at least one new word in my studies of this Psalm, the word Epithalamium. The word means a song or poem celebrating a marriage, coming from two Greek words, *epe* – upon and *thalamus* – bridal chamber.

Yes, we must see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ if we are going to truly appreciate this Psalm. But this Psalm was written originally to celebrate the marriage of one of the Kings in Israel. James Boice writes, "We are to assume, then, that the poet is writing of a specific Jewish king, whose identity is unknown, but that he is also looking ahead and upward to that ideal promised King whose perfect and eternal reign was foreshadowed by the Jewish monarchy."³

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, s.v. Psalm 45. Electronic Version by Accordance Software.

³ James Boice, *Psalms*, Vol. 2, p. 381.

In my studies I came across a very good summary of this Psalm which also is a good summary of the work of Christ. This Psalm gives praise to a mighty and beautiful king who goes out to battle, conquers, and then returns to marry a beautiful bride.⁴ The first part of the Psalm focuses on the king's beauty, his going out to battle, the glory of His throne. The second part then focuses on the beauty of his bride, the new queen. There is a description of her procession from her old home to her new home the palace. Finally at the end, the psalm gives a final blessing and looks forward to the continued reign of the king and his children.

I think you can see how well this Psalm then is a picture of Christ and His work. Christ is the Victor. He has redeemed His people, His bride. And all of history awaits His final return and the ultimate celebration, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. You don't really have to read into the psalm to see this pictured either because the NT does look to the images given in the OT.

After we look then at this Psalm we will conclude by considering more how it does point to Christ and what that means for us as God's people.

The author of this Psalm is not specifically listed other than being one of the sons of Korah. There are a total of 11 Psalms that are authored by the sons of Korah. The tune is listed as "The Lilies" but we don't know exactly what this means. Finally it is described as a Song of Love. This description makes the Psalm unique.⁵

⁴ From a sermon preached by Pastor Kevin Swanson, Reformation Church in Colorado.

⁵ Boice, 380.

Verse 1 gives further introduction to the Psalm. The psalmist has been given a most wonderful assignment in writing a poem celebrating a handsome and powerful king who is now ready to marry an equally beautiful bride. And especially as we consider that truly this Psalm is not just about an earthly king but about the King of Kings we well agree that the author has been given the greatest of assignments. The author states also that he is ready for the task. His tongue is the pen of a ready or quick writer. The words flow from his tongue even just as words flow from the pen of a scribe.

The psalmist then begins in verse 2 by praising the greatness of the king. You are fairer or most handsome of the sons of men. The ability of this great king to speak is also noted. Grace is poured upon Your lips. These two blessings come from the great blessing of God. The *therefore* in verse 2 perhaps should be translated as since. God has truly blessed the king with beauty and grace. He stands apart from all others.

This mighty King is next called to go out into battle. In the Hebrew you can see the beautiful alliteration that is present in the verse that can really be translated into English. The king is called to go out into battle wearing his complete and most impressive kingly armor. If you have had opportunity to visit museums and see the armor and other garments worn by kings in preparation for battle you can appreciate how these things are described as **glory** and **majesty**.

But what should cause us to pause is found in verse 4. This king does not go out like other kings simply for the gain and glory of battle. This king is not going out simply to steal from neighboring kingdoms. No, this king rides in

victory for the sake of truth, meekness, and righteousness. His right hand, a picture of strength, will accomplish awesome (in the correct use of the word) deeds. Though this king is not like other kings he is far from being a wimp or impotent king.

Verse 5 celebrates the military prowess of the king. The verse more literally reads, “**Your arrows are sharp — peoples beneath you fall — in the heart of the enemies of the king.**”⁶ The choppy style of the verse reflects the excitement of the psalmist. The words flow quickly but are still overwhelming.

With verse 6 we come to what is a most important part of the Psalm. Verses 6-7 are quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9. And so we have God’s inspired interpretation that these verses are ultimately speaking of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the one who far excels angels and all others. However there are at least four different interpretations of how exactly we understand the connection. Some find it strange that in the midst of the Psalm there is praise of God and His eternal throne. The interpretation that I think makes good sense comes from the ESV Study Bible.

Many have supposed that these words must address the Davidic king, either as foretelling Christ or as a type that Christ would eventually fulfill. Although the OT does foretell a divine Messiah (e.g., **Isa. 9:6**), this kind of interpretation does not easily fit this context. It seems better to think that the song speaks to God about his throne (“your throne, O God”), namely, the one that the heir of David occupies, and then goes on to describe the divine ideals for a king’s reign.⁷

⁶ NET Bible note.

⁷ ESV Study Bible, s.v. Psalm 45:6-7.

When we look at this Psalm from the perspective of the NT we see of course that verse 6 does most appropriately apply to Christ. The NT without any hesitation speaks of Jesus as being God and yet as verse 7 indicates there is Triune nature of God shown in the distinct persons of the Son and the Father.⁸ **Therefore, God, Your God has anointed you.**

Kings were anointed before they were placed on the throne. Kings also were anointed as part of the wedding preparation and celebration. Likely this is the anointing that verse 7 speaks of. The king has been set apart and given the oil of gladness.⁹ He has been set apart because of God's calling and also because of his love of righteousness and his hatred of wickedness.

Verse 8 reflects also the traditions of a wedding ceremony during the time of the kings of Israel. Here the king, the groom, is decked in royal robes that have been scented with myrrh, aloe, and cassia. Aloe in this case is likely referring to the aromatic aloe wood. Cassia also is a bark that comes from an eastern Asia tree, having a smell similar to cinnamon.¹⁰

There are sights, smells, and also sounds. The second half of verse 8 refers to the great wealth and splendor of this great king. We probably should not try to imagine an entire palace made from ivory. Rather the picture is of a beautiful palace that is decorated with ivory. The last phrase of the verse is somewhat difficult to translate. It probably is best that it be translated as

⁸ *Commentary on the OT in the NT*, 939.

⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC, Vol. 19), 339. See also NET Bible note, s.v. Psalm 45:7.

¹⁰ S.v. *HALOT* and also *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

found in the ESV, “From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad.”¹¹

The final verse of this section in praise of this great King speaks of those who make up His royal court. John Calvin believed the description here was not necessarily favorable in that it is describing all the concubines or wives the king had. But I don’t think that is how we have to understand this verse. Rather in exalted language we see that the king’s court is filled with the daughters of kings. And what makes His court even better is that at his right hand stands His queen or perhaps better translated here as His bride. His bride is adorned in gold from Ophir, an unknown location that is mentioned several times in the OT as being an excellent place to find gold.¹²

Now in verse 9 the focus of the Psalm switches to the bride, the new queen. Kings most often married the daughters of other kings, though certainly we can see exceptions to this.

The bride is first given encouragement that she forget her people and her father’s house. She is joining a new house and a new people. There must be a new allegiance. The language here does capture the loneliness and homesickness that a bride feels in leaving her family and being a part of a new family.¹³ But she must do this and instead look forward to the love and loyalty of her new husband. And as she does this the king will be drawn to her beauty.¹⁴

¹¹ *HALOT* and *NIDOTTE* say that the word מִנְיָ means string – that is a musical instrument.

¹² NET note: *Gold from Ophir* is also mentioned in Isa 13:12 and Job 28:16. The precise location of Ophir is uncertain; Arabia, India, East Africa, and South Africa have all been suggested as options.

¹³ Craigie, 340.

¹⁴ NET note.

The second phrase of verse 11 I believe should better read, **Because** he is your Lord, **bow** to him. This is exactly the response we see when Abigail met David and when Ruth met Boaz. Such is considered certainly outdated and just a sign of a patriarchal culture. Now I don't think that God's word commands wives to bow before their husbands. But wives are called to honor or respect their husbands.

Verse 12 continues the focus on the bride and the wedding. The new bride is also an amazing woman such that the daughter of Tyre, a nation known for its opulent wealth, the richest of people, will come and bring gifts.

You will note that the words *the palace* in verse 13 are placed in italics. They are an attempt to make sense of the translation. The translation is difficult. More likely the bride is not yet in the palace but in her chamber getting ready to make her way to the palace. She is wearing clothing fit for such an occasion, woven with gold. This is not speaking of gold thread but rather the process where thin strands of gold could be woven into the clothing as is described in Exodus 39:3.¹⁵

Then with verse 14 we have brief description of the procession of the bride. What is interesting here is the language is not too much different from some of the ceremony that takes place in modern weddings though this imagery is not identical. The focus of this verse is not on the beauty of the bride, that has already been mentioned, but on her beautiful clothing and the virgin companions who follow her. Beauty and purity are brought together here in great celebration.

¹⁵ *IVP OT Background Commentary*, s.v. Psalm 45:13.

Verse 15 briefly describes the scene as being utmost joy. The NET version reads, “they are bubbling with joy as they walk in procession and enter the royal palace.”

In verse 16 there is another transition. The pronouns in the Hebrew indicate that verses 16-17 are specifically being addressed to the King. Here the author of this psalm gives his final blessing and hope for the king and his bride. The hope of the psalmist is focused on three blessings – sons who grow up to be princes themselves, the name of the king being remembered, and eternal praise. In fact the author of the psalm says this is something that he will seek to do. **I will make your name to be remembered.** And as a result the people or what also could be translated as nations shall praise your name forever and ever.

John Calvin wrote:

The furious efforts of Satan and the whole world have not been able to extinguish the name of Christ, which, being transmitted from one generation to another, still retains its glory in every age, even as at this day we see it celebrated in every language. And although the greater part of the world tear it in pieces by their impious blasphemies, yet it is enough that God stirs up his servants every where to proclaim with fidelity and with unfeigned zeal the praises of Christ. In the meantime, it is our duty diligently to use our endeavors, that the memory of Christ, which ought to prosper and prevail throughout all ages, to the eternal salvation of men, may never at any time lose any of its renown.

As I noted earlier verses 6-7 quoted in Hebrews 1 identify that this Psalm ultimately points to Jesus Christ though it may well have also been used in celebration of the earthly kings of Israel who were to represent the Messiah who would eventually come.

I don't think we have to try to uncover in every detail exactly how it speaks of Christ. But certainly we can I believe easily see that description of this psalm is a beautiful OT picture of the work of Jesus Christ, the one who is indeed fairer than the sons of men, the one who speaks the most precious words of grace, who goes out in great battle against His enemies and does indeed accomplish a great victory. His sword, His mighty Word, and the arrows that He shoots are indeed sharp. His throne is truly forever and ever. He loves righteousness perfectly and hates wickedness.

This Psalm then also pictures the glory of Christ's bride, His true church. It is important to keep in mind that no believer individually can ever be described as the bride of Christ. It certainly would make no sense for a man to be described this way and women also should not think of themselves this way. The imagery of a bride is given not to any individual but to the church as a whole and also local churches.

Paul writing to the church in Corinth in 2 Cor. 11:2-3 wrote:

2Cor. 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to **Christ**. ³ But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in **Christ**.

The words of verse 10 are words that are well spoken to God's people today. When God calls us we are to forget as it were our own people and our father's house and swear allegiance to our new Lord. Jesus as we noted spoke that discipleship means that our greatest loyalty is given to Him, far above that which would be given to our families.

Verse 11 then becomes the appropriate response of God's people. We are to bow down before our Lord in worship.

This Psalm also speaks to the importance of being a part of God's visible church. Every follower of Christ has the duty and responsibility of seeking fellowship in a faithful local church. This is a truth that is under great attack today in part because of the failure of so many local churches and denominations to be faithful unto their calling.

This Psalm also instructs us that we are to wait with great anticipation for the return of Christ. We are rightfully not to focus on setting dates. We are right to obey the words of Christ that we occupy until He comes. We are right to hope and expect to see progress – to see the Daughter of Tyre coming with gifts. But this Psalm turns our attention to most of all desiring the final return of Christ. This is the goal of all history. It should often occupy our thoughts and attention.

Since this Psalm does speak of Christ we should also be impressed with the passion of the Psalmist. Verse 1 again describes the incredible enthusiasm of the Psalmist in carrying out His work. And we should seek also to be filled with praise for our Lord and Savior. Often our praise is weak and completely inadequate because we don't consider often enough the greatness, true beauty, glory, and grace of our Lord and Savior.

Count Zinzendorf, quoted by Charles Spurgeon stated, "I have a passion and it is He – He only." May this also be true of you.

Benediction – Numbers 6:24-26

“The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” ’