

THE WEDDING PSALM

Psalm 45

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I think this psalm, in setting it before us, would be best read in its entirety.

“My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer. You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad. Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir. Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord. The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift, men of wealth will seek your favor. All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold. In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions follow her and are brought to you. They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king. Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land. I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever” (Psalm 45:1–17, NIV).

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When I read a psalm like that, it doesn't immediately awaken a great spiritual hotline. I recognize it immediately as great poetry. My theology says it's inspired by the Spirit of God. There must be more there than I initially see. There's a reason why it's in the Bible, but probably if I were looking for some part of Scripture which would speak to some need in my life, I would not go to Psalm 45. Except maybe on a wedding day.

What is this kind of psalm? Is it to use once in a lifetime? Is it simply a kind historical museum piece? How does it relate?

This is one of the royal or kingly psalms in the Psalter. Out of one hundred and fifty psalms, there are thirteen of them that specifically relate to the king. The king is in the line of David. It either relates to David personally as a king or to one of David's descendants. It is understandable that just about 10 percent of the psalms would be related to the king, since the king is the embodiment of the nation, and the prosperity of the nation in Old Testament times was directly tied to the king. Under a righteous king, the country was righteous. Under a righteous king, the country prospered. The people prospered under a fair and just administration. There was protection from both internal and external dangers. It's not surprising that there would be great sections of the Scripture that would relate to the mission and meaning of the king. We see that today.

Leadership has much to do with the direction of things. Whether it is the leadership of a country or leadership in the church. When leadership fails, it just bombs the whole body of Christ and decimates things left and right. In a certain sense, the mission of God's people in this world is very intricately involved with leadership.

Therefore, there are in the psalms moments of contemplation, moments of celebration, related to the office of king. Out of the four kingly psalms we've looked at before Psalm 45, the first was

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Psalm 2, which was the psalm of kingly installation. When they were going to install the king, this is the psalm you would use. The New Testament incorporates the message of Psalm 2 relating it to the fact that God has installed Jesus as Messiah and King. The Lord will laugh at the puny effort of man to dethrone the King who God has placed on his throne. That's the first and perhaps the greatest of all the kingly psalms, because it so directly ties in with the mission of Jesus.

Psalm 18 was the second kingly psalm we looked at. It is a psalm which is to be used when you go through a time of victory in your life. It's thanksgiving for victory. Probably first sung after a major victory in battle.

The third kingly psalm is Psalm 20. This was a prayer before going into battle. It's still a good prayer to use when you're going into something stronger or bigger than you.

Then the fourth kingly psalm was Psalm 21, to be used at the anniversary of the king's reign. It is a good anniversary or birthday psalm.

We've gone from Psalm 21 all the way to Psalm 45 before we hit the fifth of the kingly psalms. This psalm has a special limited use. That is, it was a psalm to be used on the king's wedding day. It's obvious that it has two meanings.

It first of all had the meaning that it was related to the actual wedding of a king. There's no clue within the psalm as to which king it was written for. Some have suggested it was the marriage of Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh. Some have suggested Ahab and Jezebel—especially because of verse 12, the reference to the Daughter of Tyre, since Jezebel was from Phoenicia. Also, the reference to the palace of ivory. We know that Ahab had a palace that had inlaid ivory in it. Nobody knows for sure who it was. That's the first meaning—that it was used for a kingly wedding.

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But the second meaning is that it is clear by reading the New Testament, especially Hebrews 1:8–9, that the writer of Hebrews understood this to be a psalm referring to Jesus himself. There is a line, Psalm 45:6–7, which could never refer to a human king. It obviously could never refer to one Davidic king. The dynasty was to last forever and ever, but here the poet suddenly quits addressing the king as a human being and launches directly, in the midst of his talk to the king, into conversation with “Your throne, O God” not “your throne, O king.”

The writer of Hebrews picks this up and, in commenting how the Son is superior in the Old Testament to the angels, he lifts these two verses out and makes them say that of no human being or any angel did God ever say, “Your throne is forever and ever” (Hebrews 1:8). This can only be a reference to the Messiah, to Christ.

If this is the second meaning of the psalm, then it is fair to say that since verses 6–7 constitute the heart of the psalm, the whole of the psalm has therefore a reference to Christ, and the reference to Christ has to do with his union with his people, namely his church. If you go through Scripture, you’ll find many occasions where the analogy of the union between a husband and wife is used as a model for God’s relationship to his people. Hosea is an example. Ezekiel 16 is a lengthy chapter that deals with the model of husband and wife being related to the model of God being married to His people. Both human models in both passages have great failures in them but God doesn’t give up on His people.

Then there’s the Song of Solomon, which is another model that has a first meaning and a second meaning.

In the New Testament, there are passages like Ephesians 5:22–23 that liken the mystery of husband and wife to the mystery of Christ and His church. And also 2 Corinthians 11:2, where Paul says “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ,

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so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” Here Paul is clearly looking at life as the betrothal time, a time of engagement, with the marriage to be consummated when we are presented in the body to Christ in the resurrection day of triumph.

If that’s the case, we take 2 Corinthians 11:2 and tie it in with Psalm 45, and we have a clear vision of what to look forward to at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb or the marriage procession of the bride, coming into heaven to be joined by the bridegroom, Christ.

We’ll look at the first and second meanings as we walk through the psalm.

This psalm is obviously a psalm set to music. Unfortunately, we don’t know the tune. It’s written by the Sons of Korah. It’s a teaching psalm.

There are five parts to this psalm that we want to look at.

I. The first part of Psalm 45 is a poetic introduction.

It is verse 1. Here the poet very clearly is setting out his purpose in writing. Whereas, he will go on to describe the bridegroom and the bride and the procession and the conclusion of the marriage, here he is simply doing a background introduction of himself as a poet and writer. He’s confident, he is sure that he is writing something very important.

He uses the phrase “my heart is stirred,” which in Hebrew is “my heart overflows” (verse 1). “It’s boiling and seething within me.” He’s confident with what he’s going to say and he’s skilled.

Sometimes confidence in a person can put you off or put you at rest. We’re all a little bit hesitant around braggadocio people. But on the other hand, if we were getting ready to go into surgery and the surgeon said, “I’m an excellent doctor and I have superb recommendations from those I’ve operated on,” that’s the doctor we want. The guy who’s confident of his skills. We don’t let preachers get away with that. If we try, we’ll come across as non-humble. It is right and proper

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that the servant of God should live in an atmosphere of humility. But for technicians and people whose scientific accuracy is needed, we don't mind a little bit of confidence at all.

This psalmist is both anointed of the Holy Spirit and a literary poet of rank. He may be the court poet of the person of seasoned rank who is confident enough to stand up in a public setting and address the king on his wedding day.

That's kind of an introduction. He's at home, commending the quality of his writing.

II. Here is a literary photograph of a wedding.

You get the feeling he is at the wedding just as the king, dressed in his royal regalia, has come out the door of his palace to await the bridal procession. The king has taken his position to wait for the bride. The poet, first of all, wants to describe what he sees in the bridegroom. There are about six things that he notes.

A. He is focused on the personhood of the king. He commends him for the kind of person he is (verse 2). It's obviously, looking at him externally, you can describe what dress he's wearing.

And the psalmist will get around to doing this. He's not concerned with the externality of the man. He's concerned about his internality. He especially singles out the excellence in his person and the excellence of the grace with which he speaks.

He's praising the whole of the person before he looks at the person's individual parts. When you take verse 2 and apply them to Jesus, they make immediate sense. They're tremendous words of praise. What do we see when we first get around him? The excellence of his person. Every facet scintillates with glory and splendor, so that the whole is full of excellence. When the psalmist looks at the whole, then the first part he goes to, that is especially commendatory, is his speech. We look at Jesus the same way. We first of all focus on Him and who he is. Then we're caught with the splendor of His words—with the power of His teaching.

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B. The second thing the psalmist notes is the king's regal attire. It is a dress uniform. The sword represents the military majesty of his office.

How could the second meaning here apply to Christ? Christ wore just a general garment in His life here on earth. But in Revelation 19:11–16 we see fulfillment in that day, when Christ has His revelation as king over the earth.

When you look at the king's dress, it is the dress of victory. If you are a confident person, you're going to dress for success, so to speak. The fact that the king is so outfitted suggests he's in the very midst of his regal might and splendor. I think there's a comfort to this, to knowing that Christ does wear this kind of dress. We rely upon him to have the last word. It's good to know that we have one who doesn't simply play a role but who has the weight of authority that role calls for.

C. The third thing the poet notes about the bridegroom is the quality of his reign.

“Truth, humility and righteousness” (verse 4). This king does not ride forth as an agent of a cruel, bloody conquest as so many kings have done—victory for victory's sake. Conquest for conquest's sake. This king's reign is linked to moral goodness. He rides on behalf of truth, meekness—probably a better translation than humility. Meekness involves both gentleness and strength and righteousness. In the Messiah's reign, there is a moral quality. Not simply external power.

D. The fourth thing the poet notes is the success of his reign (verse 5). I think the language and theology of that verse is picked up in the New Testament in regard to Christ. Look at 1 Corinthians 15. You find that it's said of Jesus, “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1

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Corinthians 15:24–26, NIV). When you read Psalm 5 and want to have a more precise spiritual application of the verse, rather than thinking of the Lord shooting daggers into a human enemy, whom we are to forgive, I think the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians is a picture of Christ firing the mortal arrow into death itself. He spoils death and all the other enemies. He has strength to defeat His enemies. All the nations are beneath His feet. Philippians 2 picks that up as well. He admonishes us not to lose heart, because we're on the winning side. Don't lose heart. It's good to read a psalm like this. The arrows are going to pierce the enemies and the Lord will be victorious, so don't, in the midst of life's struggle, check out. It's not over. It's not over until the Lord returns.

E. The fifth thing noted about this king is that he has an eternal reign. “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. The scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom” (Psalm 45:6). There's security there. In verse 7, he returns to the inner character of the king. “You love justice and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy” (Psalm 45:7).

F. The next thing he notes is the charisma and magnetism of the king (verses 8–9). Here's a king dressed in his regal bearing who smells good. Myrrh was an aromatic resin used mainly in powder form. Aloe was a sweet smelling wood from India. Cassia was dried cinnamon blossom used for incense. The mixture formed some kind of cologne concoction that smelled great. What this is saying of the earthly king is the five senses were involved on his wedding day. Even the sense of smell communicated the picture of success and warmth and magnetism. In regard to Christ, I think it signifies the marvelous charm in His person. The king is living in palaces of ivory.

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A magnetic person who lives in splendor. Such a magnetic person will have a magnetic bride.

Sure enough, in the last description we have of the king, we find it being said that he's got a royal bride waiting for him. She's no slouch.

There's something strange and unusual about the portrayal of the wedding as compared to a modern wedding. In a modern wedding, what is the attention upon? The bridegroom or the bride? The bride! It's her day!

But in this psalm, the focus is not on the bride but on the groom. Why? Just because he's the king? That's part of it. You'd expect, if it's a kingly psalm, that the focus is on the king. But if it's also the second meaning—Christ—it's not surprising that the focus is upon Him rather than upon us. That's what we have in the psalm.

III. The third part of the psalm begins in verse 10. There is now counsel the poet is going to give to the bride.

He is going to give two commands and one promise. Verse 10, "Listen, O daughter. Consider and give ear. Forget your people and your father's house..."

A. Forget the past. You're leaving that behind. You're coming now to the king to live in his house. Isn't that picked up in the New Testament? "Forgetting the things which are behind" (Philippians 3:13). "If anybody is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old has passed away. The new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old is gone. Forget what you were. There's a new identity now.

B. The second command is to honor your lord. Psalm 45:11, "The king is enthralled by your beauty. Honor him, for he is your lord." This verse is a great model of marriage. It's obvious that the wife is being called upon to respect her husband but it's obvious, as well, that the husband is crazy about his wife. If both aren't operating at 100 percent, it's hard to fulfill both of those. In

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regard to the second meaning, this suggests that Christ thinks we're of value and of beauty.

When we come to Christ, He has redeemed us. He really does make something beautiful out of our life. The Lord, through His grace, somehow does that for us. He's able to see us, not for our own beauty, but for the beauty He clothes us with.

C. The third counsel that's given as a promise is verse 12. Why is the "Daughter of Tyre" used here? "Daughter" is probably a reference to the city of Tyre. In biblical days, it was a powerful, wealthy trading capital. If you want to get an idea of the wealth of the people, read Ezekiel 27. It gives an incredible description. It's like NYC in terms of its ability to import or export anything in the world. It is the fashion plate of the world. Here it is a poetic allusion. Where it says "Daughter of Tyre" it means—when you think of rich, you use the word "Daughter of Tyre." What this is promising the bride is, "You've got more than a relationship." That's first and front and center. But with the relationship comes a wonderful environment. You're going to have wealth and influence. All owed to the status that is conferred by the bridegroom.

IV. The fourth part of the psalm proceeds, in verses 13–15, with the glorious process.

Verses 1–12 has kind of been "still frame" and we've been poised at the action where the king has been waiting at the door of his palace. Now the film starts! Glorious procession.

I think Jesus picks up on this a little bit when He tells the story of the five foolish handmaidens and the five wise ones, who are ready for the bridegroom when He returns. Here is a bride who is obviously dressed and ready, on her wedding day, to meet the king. The bride of Christ is going to His home. We're going to enter the palace of the king.

V. The last part of the psalm—the conclusion.

Here again the bride is being told to turn her eyes away from the past and toward the future. The future is not where her father is. The future is where her sons are. The promise of marriage—that

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it will lead us into a better future than was our past. It seems that every marriage is looking for two fundamental things. They're looking for intimacy and they're looking for security. Where there is not real intimacy and openness and sharing in their relationship, both are feeling shortchanged. Where there is not genuine security in the marriage, there is not what there needs to be.

The Scriptures can so freely use the analogy of marriage to refer to Christ's people. Those two things are present in our relationship we have with the Lord: intimacy and security. The psalm closes on that kind of note—leading us in the security that we enjoy with the Lord in His palace.

Closing Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for Your Word. Thank You for the fellowship we have with You. Not the fellowship of someone at arm's distance. Or even at handshake link. But the friendship of intimacy with You. Nothing about us is hidden with You. Thank You for bringing us into Your presence. Thank You for the security that You offer us when we're weak, when we're tossed, when we're bruised and needy. You're there. You're always there. Your covenant with us is renewed. Your faithfulness is renewed every morning. You have a glorious future ahead for us. People of such a great future are people with a great present. Thank You, Lord, for the present moment of life You've called us to. Help us to follow You with joy, while strengthening our hearts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.