

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Christ in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27): Christ as seen in the Psalms

I looked in the mirror when I got up this morning. I could see I needed a wash and a shave and my hair needed combing. It was also clear that I urgently need a haircut and that I am growing steadily greyer. Mirrors can be cruelly accurate, especially in the morning! What mirrors cannot do is **change** your appearance, not even in the slightest, no matter how long you may stare at them. Like a mirror the Bible can show us exactly what we are like. Unlike a mirror, the Bible shows us clearly our imperfections beneath the skin, in our hearts and our minds. If that was all the Bible was capable of doing, it would make very depressing reading indeed. Let us thank God that His word not only shows us what we are like, it can also transform us into what we should be. What would we pay for a mirror that could do that for our external appearance? If I could make such a device, I am sure the world would beat a very wide path to my door and I could charge whatever price I pleased. God's word is freely available to us and can work this internal makeover, if we will let it. Small wonder that it is the most widely read book in the world. What a pity, though, that Bibles so often sit on our shelves unread. The reason that the Bible can transform us in this way is because, from cover to cover, it speaks about Jesus Christ, God's Son. The transformation that God wants to perform is to make us like His precious Son. Jesus died and rose again so that He could offer us a new life, His life, through faith in Him. If we have confessed our sins and our sinfulness and accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, then the greatest way we can serve Him is to become like Him. To become like Him we need to discover, more and more, what He is like. We do this by reading about Him in the Bible in books like the Psalms.

Perhaps you thought that the New Testament was the only place you could read about Jesus. After all the Gospels, that begin the New Testament, record His birth. How then could the much earlier books of the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Christ's birth, speak about Him? The answer to this riddle is that Jesus is God. Being God He was alive long before He came as a man into this world. In fact He always was alive. It should come as no surprise then that the Old Testament is full of references to Jesus Christ. What Jesus has done in His life, death and rising again is so incredibly important that God gave to the world signposts and previews of it long before Jesus was born. Very many prophecies recorded in the Old Testament told men and women what would happen when Jesus was born, what He would do in His life and how He would die and rise again. We can see these prophecies fulfilled when we read the Gospel records and discover that the events occurred just as God had said they would. This should strengthen our confidence in God and His word as we find that both God and His book are entirely reliable. God speaks only the truth and we can rely absolutely on what He says. But that, you say, is the prophets and today we are speaking about the Psalms. What can these Hebrew songs and poems tell us about Jesus Christ? Are they all about Him? Are any of them about Him? The answer is somewhere between the two. Some of the Psalms contain very clear references to God's Messiah, the one we know as Jesus Christ. Sometimes the whole Psalm is about Him, for instance Psalm 22. At other times just part of a Psalm is about Christ, for instance Psalm 41. Verse 9 of Psalm 41 says, "Even My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate My bread, has lifted up his heel against Me." The Lord Jesus quotes this part of the Psalm in John 13 verse 18, and applies it to Judas and Himself. However when we read, in verse 4 of the same Psalm, "Heal My soul for I have sinned against You", we know it cannot refer to the sinless Christ. Altogether, most people agree that at least sixteen Psalms refer to Christ. They are often called Messianic Psalms, because they refer to the Messiah or Christ. Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 23, 24, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 89, 102, 110 and 118 are generally considered Messianic. What justification do we have for saying these Psalms are about Christ? Often they are quoted by the Lord Jesus Himself, perhaps most notably Psalm 22 as we shall see later. Others are referred to elsewhere in the New Testament. Psalm 2 for example is quoted by the apostles in Acts chapter 4 and clearly applied to Christ. The special thing about the Psalms is that we read in them details about Jesus' thoughts and feelings that are **not** given in the Gospels.

In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we can read brief, moving accounts of Jesus' physical sufferings on the cross at Calvary. What they do not do is give us an insight into His thoughts and feelings as He suffered rejection, humiliation and pain at the hands of men. The Gospels are also silent on what happened during the three hours of darkness when God hid Christ's sufferings from human eyes. They tell us almost nothing of what happened when Jesus Christ carried my sins into the presence of a holy God and was punished for them. Even John, who was present at the cross, can not tell us what happened in those three hours. All we have recorded is the Lord's cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?". Remarkably this is a quotation from a Psalm, Psalm 22. The rest of that Psalm gives us an insight into what was in the heart and mind of the Lord Jesus on the cross. We read there, "All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am

poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death." The end of the Psalm also speaks about His wonderful resurrection and triumph. Psalm 69 allows us to see the terrible waves of rejection and sorrow that swept over Him. "Save Me, O God; for the waters are come in unto My Soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow Me. They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of My head; they that would destroy Me, being my enemies wrongfully, are mighty." In verse 4 of the Psalm we read, "Then I restored that which I took not away". That is, He paid the price for sins that were not His own - because He had none. If we are tempted to think that people are being fanciful when they speak of Jesus' heart breaking on the cross, we can read in verse 20 of Psalm 69, "Reproach has broken My heart and I am full of heaviness". Have you ever wondered where the often quoted expression "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" comes from? It is the second half of verse 20 that I have just quoted from. Many of the expressions we use when thinking and speaking about the Lord's death come from the Psalms.

The Psalms are not all sadness and suffering of course. Psalm 24, verse 7 to the end, tells us about the gates of heaven opening to admit the "King of Glory". That "King of Glory" is the One who was crucified at Calvary when the accusation pinned above Him on the cross read "This is the king of the Jews". What a change of circumstances and how fitting that the Psalms should show us the Lord Jesus in both these positions, suffering and glorified.

Those of us above a certain age can be whisked back in our minds to our Sunday School days just by hearing the words "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want". They are, of course, from the beginning of Psalm 23 which continues, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." It is clear from reading this Psalm that the writer, King David, is speaking of his trust in the God of Israel who took great care of him. It is a lovely Psalm. In it David pictures himself as a helpless, defenceless lamb, relying on the shepherd for protection, food, water and rest. Sometimes the shepherd leads him through dangerous, difficult places but only to lead him on to better pastures. There is no doubt that David meant the caring, protecting gently leading shepherd to be a picture of his God.

We can read in John's Gospel, chapter 10 of an occasion when Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep". It was obvious to the Jewish leaders of the time that with this statement Jesus was claiming to be the God revealed in the Old Testament. They were outraged that a man in this world could make such a statement and claimed Jesus was mad and demon possessed. They were also confused as to how He could "give His life for the sheep". If He was a man, what good would the laying down of His life do? If He was God, how could the creator of all life, lay down His life? This is one of the great contrasts we find running through the Psalms that speak about Christ. In them we read about One who has the feelings and trials of a human being but the position and power of God. We read about terrible suffering, and yet magnificent glory - often in the same Psalm. We see Christ rejected and despised but also praised by men, angels and God. Of course, when we follow the life of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospels we are confronted with exactly the same contrasts and apparent contradictions. Sometimes we can see how one element leads on to the other; Christ suffers for our sins to save us and then rises in the triumph and glory of resurrection and redemption.

At other times, the different elements seem impossible for us to reconcile; how can Jesus be both God and man and yet just one person? How can One who is God submit to death? The Psalms do **not** give us simple answers to these questions. I do not believe there are any simple answers. We are happy to admit that there are areas of human science which are beyond the comprehension of most of us. According to experts in quantum physics, I may be able to buy a computer, in a few years time, that uses some of the strange properties of this field of science. That may be true but I am sure I will never understand how it all works! If I can accept that some parts of science are true but beyond my powers of understanding, is it not far easier to recognise that some of the things that God declares to be true in His word are far beyond my intellect? If they do not give us simple answers the Psalms **do** give us insights to wonder over. In them we can see both the total humanity and complete deity of Christ and we can look in wonder and awe at both without understanding the whole.

In some ways reading the Psalms is rather like looking at a series of close ups of a great work of art. We gasp at the amazing detail in a little area here, and are then swept away by the drama shown in a part of the sky up there. We are captivated and deeply impressed by the glimpses we have and long to be allowed to step back and view the whole masterpiece in its entirety. In the New Testament we start to see the wider view. You might ask, "Why do I need the close ups any more when I have the whole picture?", but even when we can see the whole it is wonderful to be able to zoom in again on a detail in the Psalms and now see how it fits into the great scheme. We appreciate the beauty of the detail even more when we see how it fits into the total design. Only in heaven will we begin to fully appreciate the

fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there, I am sure, our eyes will move constantly from the majesty of the whole to the wonder of the details; back and forward for eternity.

I believe that the opportunity to learn more about the wonderful person of Jesus Christ would be more than enough reason to immerse ourselves in the Psalms. However, I began by speaking about more than being informed and enlightened, I spoke about being changed, transformed even. How can reading the Psalms change my life?

Have you ever looked at a child whose parents you know and seen a look or a smile that has made you think “she is *just* like her mother”? Perhaps we think Christ could never be seen in us like that. In the Psalms, people hundreds of years before Christ was born had experiences in life that demonstrated His thoughts and feelings. If they did we can. David was a great man and had talents and position far beyond you and me, but he had no New Testament, no knowledge of forgiveness of sins through a risen Saviour, no access to God as a Father and no assurance of the Spirit’s permanent indwelling. I do not need the talents or greatness of David to become like Jesus; I need to spend time listening to Him in the Bible and speaking to Him in prayer. Maybe that sounds a little abstract. What simple practical things can I gain from the Psalms?

Do you feel tempted to do something you know to be wrong? Read Psalm 22, remember the price Jesus paid for your sins and think again.

Are you feeling uncared for and without direction in your life? Read Psalm 23 and consider the Good Shepherd who longs to take care of you and lead you along His way.

Are you convinced that nobody has to put up with as much as you do and that no one is around to help? Read Psalm 69 and put your problems back into perspective.

Some of the Psalms are very special insights into the mind and heart of Christ Jesus but they were all written by ordinary human beings. David presumably wrote Psalm 23 while he sat quietly in the open air doing the very ordinary job of watching sheep: the chore of the youngest son. God turned this everyday experience into a picture of His tender care for us. When David wrote Psalm 22, he was clearly experiencing great problems; he felt abandoned by men and forsaken by God. I expect he wondered why a loving God would allow this to happen to him. God used this experience of human suffering to lead David into recording an insight into sufferings that were completely beyond his comprehension. Through David, as directed by God the Spirit, we have glimpses of things that, as we have seen, are to be found nowhere else in our Bibles. What an outcome from one man’s trials and problems! God has not changed in the slightest in the three thousand years or so since the Psalms were written. He still wants us to see Christ written there and, as we look at Him, God can and will change us to develop a family resemblance. A much better use of our time, I’m sure you will agree, than staring in the mirror!

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