

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Messianic Psalms

Psalm 45

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Today's talk is part of our series on what are called the Messianic Psalms. A Psalm is one of the 150 songs in the Bible's "hymn book", the Book of Psalms. This is in the part of the Bible written before the coming of Christ, known as the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the part written after His coming, some of the Psalms are quoted and applied specifically to Him by the New Testament writers. This means that, whatever the original context may have been in which the Psalm was written, it is shown to be, or at least some verses from it are shown to be, prophetic writings looking forward to Christ. These Psalms are called the Messianic Psalms, because "Messiah" (a Hebrew word) means the same as "Christ" in Greek. And both of these words mean "the Anointed One."

I would say, and many Christians would agree with me, that the whole Bible is essentially about the Christ, or the Messiah. He is the central theme and focus of all the Scriptures.¹ And therefore there are many other Psalms which can be seen to be speaking about Him in one way or another, but the so-called Messianic Psalms are those where, if we accept the authority of the Bible as a whole, there can be no argument that they refer to Christ.

Today we will be looking at Psalm 45, so let's begin by reading it in full.

"To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah;
a love song.

My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;
I address my verses to the king;
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

You are the most handsome of the sons of men;
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you for ever.

Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one,
in your splendour and majesty!

In your majesty ride out victoriously
for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness;
let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!

Your arrows are sharp
in the heart of the king's enemies;
the peoples fall under you.

Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever.
The sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness;
you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;
your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;
daughters of kings are among your ladies of honour;
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear:
forget your people and your father's house,
and the king will desire your beauty.

Since he is your lord, bow to him.
The people of Tyre will seek your favour with gifts,
the richest of the people.

All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with
gold.
In many-coloured robes she is led to the king,
with her virgin companions following behind her.

With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.

In place of your fathers shall be your sons;
you will make them princes in all the earth.

I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations;
therefore nations will praise you for ever and ever.”

We've said that, if a Psalm is called a Messianic Psalm, then it is a Psalm which is applied to the Messiah in the New Testament. In the case of Psalm 45, the New Testament Scripture which applies it to Christ is Hebrews chapter 1, verses 8 and 9, which read:

“But of the Son he says,

‘Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.’”

Clearly this Psalm was originally written in honour of a king, and seems very likely to have been written for a royal wedding. If we try to take an overview of it and the way it is referenced in Hebrews chapter 1, I believe we can see that the whole of it can be applied to Christ.

It is, of course, a song. Like many of the Psalms, it starts with an opening line which is a kind of introduction providing some details about the Psalm. The phrase “according to lilies”, in that opening line, may be a reference to a tune. ‘Maskil’ is probably also a musical term, but its meaning is uncertain. We have no idea of what the Psalm sounded like when it was sung, but it nevertheless retains its poetic style.

I’m not going to comment on every verse, but there are, it seems to me, three outstanding things which the Psalm teaches us about the Lord Jesus, and I intend to build the talk around these. They are, firstly, that He is the Son, that is to say, He is God the Son, secondly, that He is the true King, and thirdly, that He is a husband. Let’s consider these three things in turn.

Jesus is “the Son”

In Hebrews 1 verse 8, we are told that verses 6 and 7 of the Psalm apply to Jesus as “the Son.” Chapter 1 of the letter to the Hebrews is one of the three outstanding chapters in the New Testament which teach the Deity of Christ, the others being chapter 1 of John’s Gospel and chapter 1 of the letter to the Colossians. That is to say, they teach us that the baby born in the stable at Bethlehem, the young man who walked the streets of Galilee and Judea for three and a half years, preaching, teaching and healing, and the young man who, in His mid-thirties, was nailed to a cross, was far more than the greatest of all of Israel’s prophets. He was God, who had stepped down into His own creation, and taken on humanity.

The opening verses of Hebrews chapter 1 relate how God had spoken in past ages in many and various ways. “But in these last days”, says verse 2, “he has spoken to us by his Son.” A more accurate translation of this statement is that God has spoken **in** Son or that He has spoken **Son-wise**, but these expressions, of course, don’t make good English.

The point is that, in all the previous history, God had spoken through various **intermediaries**. Now He has spoken **directly**. When the Son (Jesus) came, there was, for the first time, Someone here upon earth, Someone who could be seen and heard, Someone who was fully human, and yet who was also the exact representation of God. Verse 3 of Hebrews chapter 1 goes on to spell this out:

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

Jesus Himself said on one occasion “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”² We should never cease to be filled with wonder at this amazing truth, that God became a Man.

Jesus is “the King”

So, then, we learn from Psalm 45, and its application in Hebrews 1, that it speaks of the Deity of the Lord Jesus. The immediate impression that we get from reading it, however, is that it is about a king. The composer starts off by speaking of his delight at being able to speak to and about the king. His heart is overflowing, he says. He is bursting with enthusiasm to pour out a stream of praise to the king.

Now at this point I’m going to digress quite a bit, in order to trace, in the Bible, the development of the idea of a king. From early days in the world’s history, recorded in the Book of Genesis, the other nations had kings who ruled over them, but as regards God’s people, the descendants of Jacob, otherwise known as Israel, it was not so. In God’s instructions to them in the Book of Deuteronomy,³ He anticipated the time when they would appoint a king, but when that time eventually came, they did it very much in a spirit of rebellion against God.

The man who was appointed at that time (Saul) was a man of imposing stature who certainly looked the part. Yet King Saul was never truly God's choice, and much of his 40 year reign was wasted in mindlessly persecuting the man who **was** God's choice, that is, David, who succeeded him.

If Israel had then been faithful to God and stuck to His law as given to them through Moses, the history of this world would have taken a very different course from that which it did. But the historical parts of the Old Testament are a monotonous chronicle of Israel's disobedience. The people systematically broke every one of God's 10 commandments. They gave up worshipping Him and bowed down to the sun, the moon, the stars, and the various vile deities of the nations round about them. They forgot about caring for the widows, the orphans, and the poor, and instead they oppressed the most needy, and, in general, practised violence and corruption in their dealings with one another. And in all of this sad history, it was often their kings who were the worst offenders.

Finally, after pardoning their rebellions against Him time and time again, God drew a line under it all, and the children of Israel, by this time split into two separate kingdoms, were carried away into captivity by the powerful nations around them.

At that time the prophet Ezekiel was shown a vision of the glory of God departing from the city of Jerusalem.⁴ This was the cloud, a great sign in the sky which always symbolised God's presence with His people. It had always been over their camp as they journeyed from Egypt to the promised land, appearing as a cloud by day and a fire by night, and it had come down to fill the temple, built by King Solomon, on the day when he dedicated it.⁵

Now it was departing, signifying that God could no longer recognise, as it were, Jerusalem as the "world capital" in His eyes. Israel had forfeited her right to be the head of all the nations, and God was about to usher in a period in the history of the world which the Lord Jesus called "the times of the Gentiles."⁶ From that time forward, right up to the present day, God has entrusted the government of this world to a succession of Gentile, that is non-Jewish, rulers, beginning with the great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, whom He calls "my servant."⁷

In chapter 2 of Daniel's prophecy, God set out, in a vision given to king Nebuchadnezzar, a kind of road map of the future political structure of the world.⁸ Nebuchadnezzar's vision, explained to him by the prophet Daniel, depicted a succession of great world empires, beginning with his own, the Babylonian, which then gave way to the Persian, which in turn gave way to the Macedonian, under Alexander the Great, which finally gave way to the power of Rome.

This timeline, the rise and fall of these empires, was shown in the vision as a great statue, a statue of a man, made out of different materials, each material signifying one of the empires. The value of the materials markedly deteriorated from top to bottom. The head, which was Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire, was made of gold, whilst the legs and feet, speaking of Rome, were made partly of iron and partly of clay.

But what Nebuchadnezzar saw in this God-given vision was not simply a static picture representing the future. It was a vision in which something happened! Out of nowhere, as it were, a stone appears, described as being "cut out by no human hand." The stone lands on the feet of the statue and destroys the entire thing, so that nothing is left, but the stone itself then grows into a mountain and fills the whole earth.

When Daniel explains the meaning of the vision to the king, this, in Daniel 2 verses 44 to 45, is his explanation of the meaning of the stone:

“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.”

Because of this famous prophecy, the Jews looked forward to the coming of this promised kingdom, the kingdom of “the God of heaven”, and when Jesus preached, He spoke of both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. These two expressions seem both to be derived from the expression “the God of heaven” in Daniel.

Not only did the Lord Jesus speak about the kingdom, but He also said, quite explicitly, that by His coming into the world, the kingdom had come.⁹ To me, there is no doubt as to who is represented by the stone “cut out by no human hand.” It is the Lord Jesus who is the true King who will ultimately topple all of the world’s great empires and rule in their place.

An essential part of what it means to be a king according to God, that is, according to the principles of royal government as portrayed in the Scriptures, is that a king must govern righteously. He must care deeply about justice, and must be ready to act, by strength of arms, to execute it, punishing the guilty and vindicating the innocent.

Now consider how clearly the king spoken of in this Psalm conforms to this standard! In the verses which undisputedly speak of the Lord Jesus, it is said that the sceptre of His kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness. He is said to have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Elsewhere his sword and his arrows are mentioned, so clearly this is a king who is ready to stand for what is right.

It is part of what we might call the duty of a king, then, to uphold righteousness. This means not just in theory, by teaching and by example, but also by the carrying out, as God’s representative, of judgement against those who act unrighteously.

There is, however, a postscript to the story of Christ’s coming reign over the earth. For there will come a time when all evil will be done away, and judgement will no longer be necessary. First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 24 and 25 speak of that day:

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

Jesus, then, is the King the Psalm is really talking about.

Jesus has a Bride

We’ve thought firstly, then, of how the Psalm directs our gaze to Jesus as the Son, and secondly of how He perfectly matches the profile of the righteous king which is portrayed in it. Finally, let us consider the fact that the Psalm seems very clearly to have been written for the occasion of a royal wedding.

We come to this conclusion because of several things which are said in the Psalm about the queen. She is exhorted in verse 10 to forget her people and her father’s house. Verses 14 and 15 picture her entering the king’s palace and being led to the king, with her virgin companions (in other words, her bridesmaids) following her. All of these things are entirely consistent with this being her wedding day, and would be hard to make sense of otherwise. We need of course to

understand that we are not thinking of marriage as it is commonly entered into in our society today, between a couple who are already living together, but marriage as God intended it, and entered into according to His rules.

Given, then, that the Psalm is the celebration of a royal wedding, in what way does this apply to Christ? My answer to this question is that the Bible does indeed speak of the Bride, or wife,¹¹ of Christ. She is mentioned in several places in the Book of Revelation, for example in chapter 19 verses 7 & 9 as making herself ready for the Marriage Supper, which is about to take place. She is mentioned at the very end of that Book, in chapter 22 verse 17, as calling out for the Lord Jesus to come back. But to learn who she actually **is**, we need to go to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 25 to 32, which read:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

According to these verses, the Bride of Christ is the church. The word translated ‘church’ in the Bible does not mean either a church building or a church in the sense of a religious organisation, such as a Christian denomination. It simply means an assembly or collection of people who have been ‘called out.’

The church, as it is spoken of in the Bible, consists of every person, regardless of race, age, sex or religious affiliation, who has taken the vital step of personally entrusting themselves, and their salvation, into the hands of the Lord Jesus.

The Christian believer, then, has been brought into a far closer and deeper relationship with Christ than that of the subjects of a king, albeit a completely just and all-knowing one. We form part of His Bride, His Beloved, she for whom He gave Himself!

A final promise

In conclusion I would like to draw attention to the final verse of the Psalm. This verse, I think, can only be understood as a promise by God, that the name of the king will be remembered through all generations. If we run with the idea that the entire Psalm is indeed speaking about the Lord Jesus, then I very much see this verse as the divine answer to the sentiment expressed in another Psalm, just a few Psalms earlier, Psalm 41.

In verse 5 of Psalm 41 are the words:

“When will he die, and his name perish?”

When the Lord Jesus was here, His healing ministry touched many thousands. He comforted the sorrowing, liberated those who were oppressed by Satan, and broke the shackles of sin for so many. Yet the world returned evil for good, and He was met, increasingly, with precisely the attitude which David ascribed to his enemies in the verse just quoted.

But God has given His answer to this, by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at the right hand of the Majesty on high.¹⁰ And God has guaranteed, in the words of the Psalm we have been considering, that His name will be remembered throughout all generations.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Psalm 45, in our series on the Messianic Psalms - talk number 1257.

¹ John 5:39 ² John 14:9 ³ Deut. 17:14-20 ⁴ Ezek. 11:23 ⁵ 2 Chron. 7:1-3 ⁶ Luke 21:24 ⁷ Jer. 25:9 ⁸ Dan 2:31-45 ⁹ Matt 12:28 ¹⁰ Heb. 1:3 ¹¹ Rev. 21:9

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