



# **SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY**

## **Discipleship Plan**

**Year Seven**  
**Wisdom Literature II**  
**Songs of Ascent**

Deacon Jerome Yorkshire, Sr., Sunday School Superintendent  
Deacon Eric Dolce, Director of Discipleship  
Reverend Patrick J. Walker, Senior Pastor

## The Divided Kingdom

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## Lesson 5: Songs of Ascent--Fruitfulness & Freedom's Fight (Psalm 128-129)

**Primary Verse:** "... let Israel now say-- Greatly they have afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me. The powers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows. The LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked." Psalm 129:2-4

**Teaching Text:** Psalm 128-129

**Supporting Text:** Isaiah 53

*"He is not the best student who reads the most books, but he who meditates the most upon them. He shall not learn most of [the things of God] who hears the greatest number of sermons, but he who meditates the most devoutly upon what he does hear. Nor shall he be so profound a scholar who takes down ponderous volumes one after the other, as he who, reading little by little, precept upon precept, and line upon line, digests what he reads and assimilates each sentiment to his heart by meditation..." --Charles H. Spurgeon*

The noted preacher and author named above once said, "meditation is the couch of the soul." In this sense, Spurgeon suggests just as one's bed/couch is useful for the refreshment of the body, meditation is needful for the renovation of the inner-man. Though words like "couch" and "meditation" conjure up ideas of sleep and stillness, it is important that we never forget both are required for *renewed* action. Therefore, we do not despise or demean meditation, though the frenetic pace of the modern day invites us to devalue it.

Spurgeon's better-known metaphor for meditation compared the practice to a machine. Specifically, he said meditation was the winepress that made juice and wine out of grapes. How many of us have settled for the grapes of familiar scriptures but have not squeezed, pressed, and worked the work of meditation to extract "the sweet juice of wisdom" that comes from lingering long over the Word? Could it be that many who complain, "I've tried to read the Bible, but it just didn't speak to me" were simply devoid of meditation?

**Questions to Consider:** Why would Psalm 128:2 be of interest to people who are or have a history of oppression? What would make vineyards and olives so attractive that the psalmist would use them as imagery for a spouse (wife) and children? How does the agricultural imagery impact our understanding of the word "prosperity" in verse 5? Does the talk of spouse and children exclude single persons who are childless? Does Isaiah 53 help us understand how the single and childless might be included in Psalm 128? How might the first two verses of Psalm 129 function in that particular "Song of Ascent"? How does the imagery of the two songs compare? How are they similar? How are they different? Is there a connection between Psalm 129:6 and Psalm 128:3? What cords are being cut in Psalm 129:4?

**Challenging the Class:** Beyond being for rest and for work, remember meditation is both a command from God and an invitation from Him, to Him. Starting at Psalm 1 and at Psalm 119's crescendo (the word appears six times), over and over, God us invites to meditate on Him, His works, and His law, so we may truly receive the blessing of both understanding and experiencing Him.

## Lesson 6: Songs of Ascent--The Waiting Christian, A Weaned Child (Psalm 130-131)

**Primary Verse:** “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.” Psalm 129:2-4

**Teaching Text:** Psalm 130-131

**Supporting Texts:** Psalm 3

When was the last time you sang a song, that expressed grief over sin, to God? In worship, have you ever sung a song that expressed desperation for divine deliverance? Have you ever even heard of a song sung in corporate worship—or even for private devotions—where the theme was frustration with enemies and a desire for God’s justice? If you haven’t sung one or more of these songs in worship, are you trying to be more holy than the Bible?

In real terms, many of us are attempting to sanitize our prayers and songs in ways many psalms simply do not shy away from. The tail end of Psalm 129 and the beginning of Psalm 130 do not present pleasant images. But requests for God to repay sinners for their evil and exasperated expressions of estrangement permeate the psalms. Laments over sin and circumstance along with cries for justice are normal for the believer and are modeled in scripture. Emotionally troubling and intense language is occasionally used in both the Old and New Testaments. For these reasons, it is important that both our private and corporate worship are biblically-informed with the full-range of prayer-songs to God. The Bible is already holy—we have no business trying to sanitize it. But rather, God uses *it* to sanitize *us*!

The Psalms are so beneficial for Christian living because they supply us with sanctified means of communicating our grief, lament, shame, frustration, and anger. Believers are not immune to these feelings and the circumstances that give rise to them. But the blessing of the Psalms is they demonstrate language which is sanctified and tailored to support and supply us with wording for prayer.

We can be thankful for the insights of Christopher J. H. Wright, who tells us in his book entitled, “The God I Don’t Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith,”

*“It is precisely those who have the closest relationship with God who feel most at liberty to pour out their pain in protest to God—without fear of reproach. Lament is not only allowed in the Bible; it is modeled in abundance. God seems to want to give us as many words with which to fill out our complaint forms as to write our thank-you notes.”*

**Questions to Consider:** How does earlier usage of “out of the depths” language influence your reading of Psalm 130:1-2 (see Psalm 69:1-2, 14; Isaiah 51:10, Jonah 2:2 and 5)? What is the emotion expressed in these verses? How do verses 3-4 impact your interpretation of the nature of these “depths” that are the cause of concern for the psalmist? How many ways can we discern/interpret the imagery of verse 6? Psalm 131:1 contains the word “too” (either “too lofty,” or “too profound,” depending on your translation). How might the verse mean something totally different without the word “too” in it? Why does this matter? In either psalm, is there any obvious resolution or change in a circumstance to bring relief to the author? In both psalms, what is the common resolve of the psalmist?

**Challenging the Class:** While the psalms give us an outlet for expressing the less-pleasant portions of our experiences, Psalm 131:2 also paints a portrait pointing to maturity. God’s faithfulness and readiness to hear our “despairing cry” is not in doubt. The real question is, have we progressed in our faith past the point of the spiritual babe with colic, or have we progressed into the weaned child who trusts in God’s tenderness to provide and protect?

## Lesson 7: Songs of Ascent—Like Father, Like Son (Psalm 132)

**Primary Verse:** “For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one. The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” Psalm 132:10-12

**Teaching Text:** Psalm 132

**Supporting Texts:** 1 Chronicles 17

**Remembering...** In our day, the word “remember” calls to mind a person at rest physically but searching through “mental files,” so to speak, for particular bits of information from the past. But biblically, remembering is a key indicator God is about to take major action that is visible, not invisible. During, what appears to be, a long period of silence or lack of labor, at the very moment we are cued that God “remembers,” the covenant-keeping God’s loyal love launches into labor (Genesis 8:1 and 30:22, Exodus 2:23-25, Luke 1:52-55 and 68-74, Acts 10:30-32, Revelation 16:18-20). In the opening verse, the psalm’s plea is for God to remember David and his steadfast devotion to worship.

**Rewarding...** Though it came almost in the form of rebuke, it was most likely the most welcome repudiation ever received in history! David’s desire to build God a house was met with a most intriguing counter-proposal (if it can be called a “proposal” of any sort!). God would, instead, build *him* a house. It was the greatest example of “making an offer he can’t refuse!” But we must remember, not only did God promise a physical descendant would sit on David’s throne, He also promised one who would build the temple, the place of God’s dwelling.

**Resolution...** The ending of this psalm is one of the most satisfying imaginable. In the context of worship and in the background of covenant, there are many who revel in the ecstasy of bold declarations of faith they make to the Lord. But what could be better than rehearsing the gracious promises of a God who is so faithful He cannot lie and so strong He cannot fail? Wave after wave of “I will” statements (see Psalm 132:14-18) leave worshippers awash with awe at the steadfast love of the Lord which never ceases (Lamentations 3:22).

**Questions to Consider:** True or False: without prior knowledge of King David and the covenant God makes with him, this psalm is virtually worthless to the reader. How does the psalmist connect David with the presence of God? Clearly, the psalmist/author intended the reader to be familiar with stories of the Ark of the Covenant, Temple, and King David. How does a psalm like this, written multiple generations after most (if not all these events/people), confirm the centrality of the Scriptures to ancient Jews/Israelites?

**Challenging the Class:** Remember Jesus declared the Old Testament, including the Psalms, were speaking of and pointing to Him (Luke 24:44). Can you identify five ways in which Psalm 132 resembles or foreshadows the life and ministry of Jesus, David’s greater Son?

## Lesson 8: Songs of Ascent—Blessing Upon Blessing (Psalm 133-134)

**Primary Verse:** “It is like the precious oil on the head running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes? It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion!” Psalm 133:2-3a

**Teaching Text:** Psalms 133-134

**Supporting Texts:** Exodus 30:30-33, Leviticus 8:30

Psalm 133:1 is often quoted, but not studied as often in context. The desire for unity runs deeply within the unbeliever and the believer alike. While many are seeking “unity at all costs,” the mature Christian is neither able nor willing to enter into any unity at the cost of the truth and in particular at the expense of the gospel. If indeed we are all partakers of the same Holy Spirit, whatever form of unity we desire or consider, let us first be unified in loyalty to God and His Son, our Lord Jesus.

Nothing unites people as much as a common king or a common enemy. When the local expression of God’s household gathers for worship, we should expect to find singleness of mind and purpose. If the focus is singular, as it should be, the people will experience the “good and pleasant” blessing of unity. After all, we are blessed by one Father, redeemed by one Son, sealed by one Holy Spirit, saved by the same grace, justified by the same faith, living for the same purpose (God’s glory), and desiring the same destiny (a home in heaven with God). If these things are true, then we *must* find unity increasing more and more in our lives.

Psalm 134:1 bears witness to 1 Chronicles 9:33 and 23:23-30 of the same book. Standing (the normal posture for worship in those days) to thank and praise the Lord in the temple was done every morning and evening. Worship was the shared activity of believers under the Old Covenant and is equally so under the New Covenant. Whether day or night, God is faithful and most deserving of our thanks! Equally, God’s kindness is such He is not willing to let us praise Him without Him blessing us.

**Questions to Consider:** The imagery in Psalm 133 is derived from what two primary sources? How do these two sources encompass all of life? Psalm 133:2 refers to oil. What is the possible significance of where the oil begins? In other words, why does it flow from the head downward rather than the other way around? Considering the known geography of Israel/Palestine, what is the importance of dew? If saints, under the Old Covenant, enjoyed “good and pleasant” unity under that arrangement, what should we expect under the New Covenant? What scriptures justify/support your answer?

**Challenging the Class:** According to Exodus 30:30-33, the composition of the oil which consecrates the priests was not to be duplicated. Yet, the oil spoken of in Psalm 133 is most likely a reference to this special anointing oil. By comparing the unity of worshippers to the oil which anoints Aaron and his sons as priests, Psalm 133 points to a blessing in corporate worship not found elsewhere. How often do you appreciate and anticipate that blessing found in God’s house with God’s people? When was the last time you invited someone to join you where “the feast of the Lord” is going on?

# Christ in the Psalms

J. Ligon Duncan, III

Many evangelical churches today have lost the distinctive doctrines of the Reformation. But why now? What accounts for this loss in churches where Reformation faith was heralded for generations? Why is the faith once delivered now being abandoned? It is because we have lost the reformer's God. Behind the church's current theological crisis is a spiritual crisis. Just as false doctrine leads away from the living God, so also true doctrine is buttressed by fellowship with him. If true godliness does not anchor us in the truth, then we will probably pursue the vain theological imaginings of our sinful hearts. This spiritual principle's dread consequences are now upon us.

What is the proper remedy? Part of it, I believe, involves re-appropriating the theology of the Psalms. Today's church has lost the Psalms. We rarely sing them-our choruses and praise songs feature only snippets dislocated from their rich contexts, and many churches where Psalms once were sung sing them no more. The Psalms confound us with their robust and realistic spirituality. They discomfort us with their sharp denunciations and imprecations. Our theology is [sheepishly soft] by comparison. But we must recover them. The early church-indeed, the church in almost all ages-saw them not only as the church's main hymnbook but also as the definitive, inspired guide to Christian experience. As Thomas Scott said, "There is nothing in true religion-doctrinal, experimental, and practical-but will present itself to our attention whilst we meditate upon the psalms. The Christian's use of them in the closet, and the minister's in the pulpit, will generally increase with the growing experience of the power of true religion in their own hearts."

In spite of their centrality in Christian worship and meditation throughout the church era, we face several barriers in attempting to recover the Psalms today. Probably the greatest barrier is the claim that to read the Psalms in the light of Christ is inevitably to distort them. Yet the New Testament's writers, as well as earlier Christians, saw the Psalms as essentially about Christ. They took them to reveal his person and work, his divinity and ministry, his incarnation and resurrection, and his humiliation and glorification. Establishing this may open the way to our re-appropriating their theology and spirituality.

## **The Psalms Are About Christ and We Meet Christ Everywhere in the Psalms**

The Psalms are quoted throughout the New Testament with most of those quotations applied to Jesus. Earlier Christians saw the Old Testament as an essentially Christian book, and they believed the Psalms, above all of the rest of the Old Testament, were uniquely Christological (that is, oriented toward and orbiting Christ). They also found Christ in more than what we title the "messianic Psalms." Jonathan Edwards catches this perspective perfectly when he says, "The main subjects of these songs were the glorious things of the Gospel, as is evident by the interpretation that is often put upon them, and the use that is made of them, in the New Testament. For, there is no one book of the Old Testament that is so often quoted in the New as the Book of Psalms. Here Christ is spoken of in multitudes of songs."

Liberal Old Testament scholars love to parody assertions like this as involving gross, interpretive abuse. They argue that authorial intent as well as contextual relevance are savaged by such a "Christianized" reading of the Psalms. Jesus can be read into the Psalms, they say, but he wasn't there in the first place. Christians may "apply" portions of the Psalms to Christ, but their original meaning and referents are found elsewhere.

In contrast, earlier Christians viewed the New Testament Scriptures as the definitive and divinely inspired interpretive manual for the Old Testament; and so, since the New Testament takes the Psalms to be about Christ, they also took them as fundamentally Christological. That we should still do so is easily established by reviewing the New Testament's Christological interpretation of many psalms.

### **Christ's Exaltation and Resurrection: Acts 13:33; Psalm 2:7**

When Paul preached the gospel to the Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, he not only asserted that the death of Christ was according to Scripture (see Acts 13:29) but also that Jesus' resurrection fulfilled Psalm 2:7: "And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'" (Acts 13:32-33). Here Paul applied this statement from the Psalm directly to Jesus' resurrection. So, the Psalms reveal Christ's exaltation, especially by referring to his resurrection.

### **The Father's Appointment of Christ as Our High Priest: Hebrews 5:5; Psalm 2:7**

Hebrews 5:1-5 also appeals to Psalm 2:7:

*For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."*

The writer of Hebrews thus takes this Psalm as revealing Jesus' appointment as high priest on our behalf. Today, the unfaithful evangelical New Testament scholars speak of Christ's resurrection as a testimony to his Lordship but downplay the role and meaning of his death. Yet this passage inextricably ties Christ's resurrection to his priestly work, which links it to his sacrificial death. It also draws attention to the eternal Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son by emphasizing that God appointed Christ to be our high priest in contrast to Christ appointing himself.

## **Christ as Appointed Mediator Will Dispense His Own Prerogatives to His People on the Last Day: Revelation 2:26-27; Psalm 2:9**

The Psalms teach that Christ, after his resurrection, is seated at the right hand of the Father, from where he will administer retributive and remunerative justice. Thus, when our Lord speaks to the church in Thyatira, he encourages them to persevere and endure with these words: "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, *to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces*, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:26-27; my emphasis). The emphasized words are from Psalm 2:9. They remind us that the Father has given Christ every spiritual blessing so that he may dispense them to his people on the last day, even as God has given his Son rule over and judgment of all his enemies.

## **Psalms Are Fulfilled in the Events of Jesus' Ministry: Matthew 21:16; Psalm 8:2**

More than one New Testament writer emphasizes the Psalms' references to significant events in Jesus' life and ministry. For instance, Matthew's account of the triumphal entry includes this incident: "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant, and they said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise"?' (Matt. 21:15-16). The final quotation is from Psalm 8:2 and, given Matthew's fulfillment motif, it is meant to be more than illustrative. It tells us that Jesus is worthy of praise-which is another of his claims to deity-as well as that he is fulfilling the Psalms.

## **Psalms Testify that Everything Is Subjugated to Christ: 1 Corinthians 15:27; Psalm 8:6**

Paul's appeal to Psalm 8 in 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 establishes that the Psalms teach that Christ rules the world for the sake of his people and for the glory of his Father. Paul says: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.'" Then Paul adds, "But when it says, 'all things are put in subjection,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him" in order to emphasize that Jesus' heavenly providential rule neither competes with nor contradicts the rule of his Father.

## **God's Promise to David Is Fulfilled in Christ: Acts 13:35; Psalm 16:10**

Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch confirms that the Psalms speak of Christ's everlasting resurrection life. Appealing to Psalm 16:10, Paul quotes this passage as the clincher in his argument for God's having resurrected Jesus to everlasting life.

And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David," Therefore he says also in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption." For David, after he had served the

purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. (Acts 13:34-37)

### **Jesus' resurrection thus fulfilled the Psalm, and the Psalm establishes his incorruptibility. David's Words Are on Jesus' Lips Even as He Dies: Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5**

The Psalms supply Christ's dying words. As Luke records, "It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this, he breathed his last" (Luke 23:44-46). Here the Son's trust of his Father even in death far outdistances David's faith in the midst of danger. Jesus' quotation of this Psalm at this critical moment is a tribute both to his own faith and to God's faithfulness.

### **Jesus Takes Up the Words of David, which Makes Sense Only in Light of His Doing His Father's Will: Hebrews 10:5-7; Psalm 40:6-8**

The author of Hebrews, in the midst of his arguments for the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, says "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book"' (Heb. 10:4-7). Here this Psalm is applied to Christ in a way that indicates that Christ came to "do the will of God" in the sense of fulfilling all the requirements for our fellowship with him. Specifically, this Psalm points to Jesus' perfect active and passive obedience. In addition, its reference to Christ having come into the world to do his Father's will testifies to the covenant of redemption that the Father and the Son struck before the foundation of the world.

### **Jesus' Dispensation of Gifts to the Church Is an Act of the Lord, Spoken of by David: Ephesians 4:8; Psalm 68:18**

When Paul speaks of Christ's gracious gifts to his New Covenant people, he sees it as fulfilling Psalm 68:18. "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'" He then specifies some of these gifts. "And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness Christ" (Eph. 4:7-8, 11-13). So, the Psalms foretell of Jesus' giving gifts to his church.

### **The Psalms Express Christ's Experience: Romans 15:3; Psalm 69:9b**

In exhorting Christians to follow Christ's example in bearing with the weak, Paul goes to the Psalms to express Christ's experience of dishonor, blame, disapproval, and rejection by his own people. "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to

please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me" (Rom. 15:1-3). Paul's point is that if Christ could bear reproach, then we at least should be prepared to bear weaker brethren. The fact that Paul makes this point by going to the Psalms rather than by citing some incident from Jesus' earthly life implies that the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Psalms are one and the same.

### **The Deity and Priesthood of Christ: Matthew 22:44; Psalm 110:1**

Psalms 110 and 118 are the Psalms most frequently applied to Christ in the New Testament. Psalm 110 is one of the New Testament's major Old Testament witnesses to the deity of Christ. (It is also used to distinguish Christ's priesthood from the Levitical line.) In Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus stumps the Pharisees on this Psalm's proper interpretation. All of the synoptics record this incident (see Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

### **In his humanity, Jesus is David's son and, in his deity, David's Lord. Christ's Position Is Superior to the Angels: Hebrews 1:13; Psalm 110:1**

The author of Hebrews uses this same verse to contrast the Son's position with that of the angels and thus to demonstrate Christ's superiority over them: "And to which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?" So it is the Psalms that provide the theological ground for Christ's preeminence over the angelic host.

### **Jesus Is the Rejected Stone Who Becomes the Cornerstone: Matthew 21:42; Psalm 118:22-23**

The words of Psalm 118 appear often in the New Testament. They predict Jesus' rejection by his people and yet his establishment as Savior of the world, in whom alone salvation is found (see Acts 4:10-12). They are used to welcome Christ during his triumphal entry (see Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; John 12:13). At Matthew 21:42-46 (cf. Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17), Jesus quotes verses 22 and 23 to apply the Psalm's rejected stone/chief cornerstone image to himself as a rebuke to the chief priests and Pharisees:

*Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people*

*producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.*

## **A Plea for Recovering the Psalms in the Church Today**

I have noted fewer than half of the New Testament's references to Christ in the Psalms. But this should be enough to give preachers confidence in finding Christ in them and proclaiming Christ from them. More generally, it should encourage Christians to read and to memorize and to pray and to sing the Psalms as distinctively Christian praise and devotion.

This would give us a natural way to introduce Scripture's God to our postmodern contemporaries. Postmodern thinkers value spiritual experience over religious authority. They disdain the didactic and prefer the poetic. They distrust propositions but warm to story. So how do we reach them? Where can we take them to hear what God says about himself through his divinely authorized messengers? There is no better place to start than with the Psalms as both God's authoritative revelation of himself and an inspired expression of sanctified human experience. The Psalms approach objective truth from the angle of subjective experience. They convey this truth, found in the joys of deliverance and the heat of trials, through the language of song and of tears. They affirm God's sovereignty amid life's vicissitudes.

The Psalms can help us break the habit of circumscribing God according to our age's standards and expectations by allowing him to present himself to us through the inspired songs of his people. This God is his people's greatest desire, with plans and purposes that transcend their largest problems. He is their priority, not as a means to their ends but as the one whose favor and fellowship are dearer to them than life itself and whom they value more than the sum total of everything else. He is pronouncedly politically incorrect, but he is also a God worth living and dying for. In his incomparable greatness, he is worth knowing, glorifying, and enjoying forever. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore (see Ps. 16:11).

Embracing these great truths about God was central to Reformation spirituality. This made it far superior to the rootlessness and imbalance that characterizes much modern evangelical spirituality. It is not true that Christians can go through life without any struggles, any pain, any weakness, or without any sense of absolute tragedy. God does not promise his people health and wealth. He does not exist for our personal benefit. Above all, he is not, as some Christians now openly claim, a scaled-down deity who empathizes with human life's intractabilities but who cannot do anything about them.

Reading and singing the Psalms can help us to transcend these ungodly caricatures. In the psalmist's joys and sorrows we can find the resources for true spirituality—a spirituality that is more than surface deep and a piety equal to the exigencies of our experience. As the psalmist deals with life's realities, he pours out his heart to the living God. In his complaints, his heartaches, and his feelings of emptiness—as well as through his joys and comforts—he makes

contact with a God who is incomparably great and yet who loves his struggling children with an everlasting, covenantal love.

God and his Word dominate the psalmist's experience without diminishing at all the wounds and quandaries and questions that life in a fallen world brings. So it is no wonder that, in addition to the New Testament's writers finding our Lord Jesus Christ's person and work, his divinity and ministry, his incarnation and resurrection, and his humiliation and glorification in the Psalms, we also find unique intimations of our Savior's heart in them. We know that Jesus read and memorized and prayed and sang the Psalms-that is why they came so naturally to his lips. They reveal his spirituality and his experience. And in doing so they reveal the poetry and the music-and not just the propositions and the prose-in our Savior's heart.

A friend of mine once argued before an ecclesiastical assembly that the church should be singing the Psalms as well as biblically based hymns. He noted that they are Scripture's song book, that they have been the core of sung praise for Christians down through the centuries, and that they are more biblically robust than the diet of texts usually sung today. A respondent charged that this would "cover the bride of Christ with the veil of Moses," presumably because he thought the Psalms witnessed insufficiently of the glories of Christian redemption.

With that opinion, my friend's respondent separated himself from the New Testament's inspired writers as well as from the best of the whole Christian tradition.

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