

THE GOSPEL IN THE PSALMS

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IN seeking to present the thought that the Gospel is contained in the Psalms, I do not profess to be able—nor would it be wise—to bring some new and far-fetched ideas, but rather to take a few very familiar facts that together we may stir up our minds by way of remembrance. Sometimes we take our excursions to far-off places that we may get beautiful scenery (and we get it). But all the while, lying almost at our very feet and right before our gaze, are scenes as beautiful that we fail to appreciate because they are so familiar. Let us then take a few of the best known Psalms to show that not only hidden away beneath the surface do we often find gems of Gospel Truth, but that also lying on the very surface itself is the Gospel of Christ, and that as we read or sing those beautiful Songs of Zion with the understanding and with the heart, we cannot do otherwise than proclaim the Gospel to ourselves and to others.

The youngest member of the audience scarcely needs to be reminded that the Gospel means “The Good News.” And the good news consists in this, that to this world, stained with sin and marred by the Fall, there came a Saviour “to seek and to save that which was lost.”

In applying the Gospel message, the first great essential is to convince us that we are sinners. The natural man does not seek a Saviour. No deputation ever went to heaven, or would have gone, even if it could, to ask for salvation. The first part of the Holy Spirit's work, as Christ Himself taught us, is to convince the world of sin. Only the convicted heart is ready to receive a Saviour. That fact is driven home forcibly in the N.T. For witness, take the publican's prayer. Then turn to the story of the Prodigal, that mirror in which Christ has reflected almost every aspect of Gospel truth. It was only when the prodigal had come to himself and recognised his own downright insanity that he was able to say: "I will arise and go to my father," and the only confession he was allowed to make before he re-entered under the old roof-tree—and mark that he **was** allowed to make it—was this: "Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And if we wish for a concrete example, let us go with Peter as he preaches on the day of Pentecost. All his sermon was but a bending of the bow that was to hurl this dart to the hearts of the people: "Therefore, let all the House of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus **whom ye have crucified** both Lord and Christ." It was only after they were pricked to the heart and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" that Peter was able to pour in the balm of his message, saying: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

But can even these N.T. incidents teach us more plainly than do the Psalms regarding sin? What are some of the most familiar figures of speech which we use to represent sin, and where did we get them? Has there ever been a preacher of the Gospel who proclaimed his message without speaking about "the pit of sin"? Where did he get the phrase? From the 40th Psalm.

"He took me from a fearful pit
And from the miry clay."

Christ's own illustration, taken from the Prophet and used at the very outset of His Gospel Ministry, was that of the captive. "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive, the opening of the gates to them that are bound." But the same thought had been sung for ages every time a pious Israelite made use of the 102nd Psalm.

"He from His holy place looked down,
The earth He viewed from Heaven on high,
To hear the **prisoners'** mourning groan
And **free** them that are doomed to die."

The universality of sin in the human heart, and the awful doom of the unrepentant sinner, could scarcely be more clearly set forth by Christ Himself, or by the

most evangelical preacher of the Gospel, than they have been set forth in the Psalms. Can anyone read the 51st Psalm and picture David, in the agony of conviction, crying out: "My sin I ever see"; "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," and come away denying that sin is a fact and that a convicted conscience has got a terrible sting; or can he read this Psalm or the 32nd and ever after doubt that the penitent sinner who confesses his sin can lay himself with confidence on the loving arms of a sin-pardoning God?

But this expression, "sin-pardoning God," leads us to another essential point of the Gospel message. In practically every possible way it has been made abundantly clear that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. A substitute for man must be found. God can say, "Deliver from going down into the pit" only when He can also add, "For I have found a ransom." That ransom must be more than a mere fellow-man. We have spoken of sin as a "pit." If help comes to a person in the pit, it must be brought from someone who himself is outside the pit and able to stand at the top. There is no use in a companion going down. There would be two in the pit instead of one. That would be all the difference. The rescuer must be able to stand at the top and reach down and lay hold and lift up. In other words, the man who is to be the ransom for and is to rescue fallen man must himself be more than mere man. That Christ our Redeemer was God as well as man is preached from the pages of the N.T. Angels at His birth, devils and diseases, winds and waves during His lifetime, and a Roman

centurion at His death, all join their voices in saying :
“Truly, this man was the Son of God.” But no less
clearly the Psalms proclaimed the same Gospel. When
the Apostle would prove to the Hebrews that the
Christ Whom he preached was indeed “very God of
very God,” it is to the Psalms that he goes for confirma-
tion.

Of angels many glorious things are said, but to
none of the angels did God ever say as He said of
Christ in the 45th Psalm : “Thy throne, **O God**, is for
ever and ever.”

Equally clearly do the Psalms proclaim the fact that
He Who was equal with God became man and became
obedient to His Father’s will.

“No sacrifice nor offering
Didst Thou at all desire.
Mine ears Thou bored, sin-offering Thou,
And burnt didst not require.

“Then to the Lord these were my words :
I come, behold and see
Within the volume of the Book
It written is of Me.

“To do Thy will I take delight,
O Thou, my God that art ;
Yea, that most Holy Law of Thine
I have within my heart.”

Nay, the very details of the Cross are painted with a minuteness only equalled, but not excelled, by even Matthew and Mark and Luke and John. There are few preachers of the Gospel who, in painting a picture of the sufferings of Christ, have not used the expression "the nail-pierced hands and feet." And yet in the Gospels we have only an indirect reference made to the feet of Christ, which, in itself, would hardly be conclusive proof that they were pierced. For that detail we are indebted to the 22nd Psalm :

"For dogs have compassed me about,
The wicked that did meet
In their assembly me enclosed,
They pierced my hands and feet."

Instruction to the sinner as to how to lay hold of the pardon thus obtained by the atoning death of Christ is also plainly given in the Psalms. We have already referred to David in Psalm 51, as he lies conscience stricken, penitently confessing his sins. It was the first step on the way to pardon. We must get down in humble confession. Emptied of all self-righteousness, David lays himself on the loving kindness of God and pleads :

"Do Thou with hyssop sprinkle me ;
I shall be cleansed so."

He has grasped the fact that if cleansing comes it must be through the blood of sprinkling administered by the hand of God Himself. And all this is only

driving home more forcibly what he had taught us earlier in the 32nd Psalm. He tells us how he tried to keep silence and tell his sin to neither God nor man, until, like the pent up waters of an intercepted stream breaking its banks, his soul gushed forth in a mighty confession.

“I will confess unto the Lord
My trespasses, said I,
And of my sin Thou freely didst
Forgive the iniquity.”

The Apostle puts the same Gospel fact perhaps a little more tersely, but no more clearly, when he said : “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”

And now a word or two about the proclamation of the Gospel as it has been entrusted to us. It is here, if anywhere, the Psalms might be expected to fail. There are those who will admit that the Psalms are excellent in their own day and place. But they were cast in the Jewish mould and have gone out of date, and are unsuitable for carrying the Gospel message to other nations or for expressing the pious feelings of the N.T. Church. But they are no more Jewish than was Christ Himself, and they are no narrower than His message was. He commissioned His servants, saying : “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel.” But from the heights of Zion the Jews had rolled forth their message in the Hebrew equivalent

of our metrical version of that Psalm which is used by more nations than any song in the world :

“All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.”

If the Jewish race would have limited the mercy of God to themselves, it was the fault of the Jews, not of their Psalms.

If there is one thought that Christ enshrines into His Gospel more than another it is that of a Kingdom. Pray ye “Thy Kingdom come”; “My Kingdom is not of this world”; “Go ye and make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”; “He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet.”

So many passages from the Psalms come clamouring in that it is hard to select **one** as an example of the same teaching. This one would do :

“His large and great dominion shall
From sea to sea extend.”

Or this—

“The Kings of Tarshish and the Isles
To Him shall presents bring,
And unto Him shall offer gifts,
Sheba’s and Seba’s King.”

Not with the language of hesitation, but with conviction, can we speak and say “**We know.**” We know that

the Psalms contain the Gospel message, for Christ used them and found them suitable. If it were not so He would have told us that something else was needed. And we know that the Apostles found in them the Gospel message. In fact, they proved that the crucified Christ Whom they preached was indeed God's Messiah by appealing to the Psalms and showing that what had been foretold there had been accomplished in Him.

Take down the Acts of the Apostles and read, even if you read only the first ten chapters. How do the Apostles know that there should have been a Resurrection? They had learned it as they profess from Psalm 16. How do they know about His exaltation? Psalm 110 had taught them. How have all their shattered hopes regarding the Kingship of Christ been restored, and how do they reconcile a **crucified** Christ with the thought of a **reigning** Messiah? Psalm 2 had shown them that the Princes should combine against the Lord's Anointed, and the people imagine a vain thing, yet would God set His King upon His Holy Hill in Zion. And how could they reconcile Calvary's Cross, with its fearful agonies and its seeming defeat, with God's Plan of Salvation through One Who was "**mighty to save**"? Psalm 22 had made it all plain. When the brethren would give thanksgiving to God for the success of the Gospel at the hands of Peter and John, it is in the language of Psalm 2 again that they express it. No one will deny to Stephen the honour of being a preacher of the Gospel. He has all the fervour of a N.T. evangelist, yet Stephen cannot complete his defence without a quotation from a Psalm. And when

the stones were being hurled around him, and the glory of Christ shone upon his face through the opened Heavens, he stepped across the Portal with these words upon his lips : "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The first Christian martyr had found the consolation of the Gospel for the dying hour, wrapped up in a Psalm.

If the Apostles found the Psalms so suitable for their work of evangelising the nations, it is reasonable to think that they will be a suitable medium for expressing Gospel Truth at any time and to any people. There are at least two sections of the world's inhabitants to whom they will make strong appeal. One is the Mohammedans; the other the Jews. A missionary amongst Moslems bears this testimony : "The Mohammedans love and revere the Psalms. Their Oriental setting appeals to them; the majestic swing of their language thrills them; their characterization of God fills them with awe." A zealous and successful young evangelist in Egypt, educated in a Moslem university and afterwards converted to Christianity, said concerning his efforts to reach his fellow-students : "My one aim in life is to teach Christ and Him crucified to my brethren." He always began with the Psalms, for they are, he said, full of Christ, and His character, offices, triumphs, and even the leading particulars of His life are set forth in a way which so peculiarly appeals to the Mohammedan mind that one who studies them thoroughly cannot resist their convincing power.

The Psalms will have no small share in bringing that time when

“The princes great and mighty
Shall come from Egypt lands;
To God in supplication
Shall Cush stretch forth his hands.”

We are taught in the N.T. to look for the time when the Jew shall come to the feet of Christ. What more potent influence is the Holy Spirit likely to use than just those Songs of Zion that the Jew loves? How better convince him of Gospel Truth than to show that these songs spoke of a crucified Christ? And when he does come, in what language can the Jew pour out the fullness of his heart in thanksgiving to God better than just in the old song filled with a newer, fuller meaning.

“When Zion’s bondage God turned back,
As men that dreamed were we;
Then filled with laughter was our mouth,
Our tongue with melody.
They ’mong the heathen said, the Lord
Great things for them hath wrought;
The Lord hath done great things for us,
Whence joy to us is brought.”

It may be objected that these Psalms were written by men who had never seen Christ’s day, and so could not express the Gospel message. But we remember

that these men were filled with the Spirit. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and His word was on my tongue."

The very fact that they foretold so accurately what came to pass proves that these Psalms are not the message of men, but of God. And their writers were amongst those who "searched diligently what or what manner of times the Spirit which was in them did signify when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow."

Like the mason laying course on course, and unable at the time to see the beauty of the completed building, so with these Psalmists :

"They builded better than they knew,
The conscious stones to beauty grew."

The work of the preacher of the Gospel is to present Christ in all His fulness. If you were given a number of photographs by which to make known to someone the likeness of an unseen friend, you would not have fulfilled your commission if you held back some of them. Christ's photograph is contained in the Divinely-given Song Book. "It is written"—it is Himself Who says so—"It is written . . . in the Psalms concerning Me."

And with what more melting pathos can the preacher ever describe Christ than in the language of the 22nd Psalm? New Testament Apostle and Old Testament Psalmist meet on a common platform. "We preach Christ crucified," says the Apostle. So do the Psalms.

Similar as the voice and its echo, they ring back their message. "They pierced My hands and feet."

Equally do they echo the Apostles' teaching regarding the exaltation and Lordship of Him Who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, and therefore reigns eternally.

"All ends of the earth remember shall
And turn the Lord unto
All kindreds of the nations
To Him shall homage do."

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