

The Psalms: A deeper vision of Jesus' thought life

(Eph. 6:10-18)

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Introduction: You don't come to church just to get good advice. You don't just need counsel about how to make it through another day. It's God you need – how to discern His voice in the midst of so much chaos and distraction!

- God's Word is what will take you deeper in understanding yourself, your true situation in life, and God's remedy. What you most need is a larger vision of your Savior and Lord such as only His Word can provide, because **the better you see Him, the less you will seek your fulfillment from things that do not satisfy**. The better you see Him, the more you will seek your satisfaction in Him alone. Ann Voskamp, a Christian author and housewife, expresses our problem like this: "Our fall was, has always been, and always will be, that we are *not satisfied in God* and what He gives. We hunger for something more, something other." The truth is that there's only One who satisfies our deepest longings, because only One is truly Lord over all creation, every situation and problem, every day, every year, every century. Only One stands the test of time, but **accessing the Eternal One in the midst of time** is not simply a matter of our five senses!

- Learning to be satisfied in God and what He gives requires a sixth sense that comes from Him alone: it's part of a spiritual worldview that is intrinsic to our faith in Christ. It enables us to see "behind the scenes," as in the cosmic dimensions of the spiritual battle described in Eph. 6:10-18. Knowing God's presence and accessing His vision and strength are all a matter of growing in faith in Christ, which Scripture says comes through hearing the Word.

- So we turn to that Word, believing that herein lie the seeds that have their origin in God, and they will sprout in our lives as faith in Christ and a longing for His will to be accomplished in our lives. We're continuing our series on Jesus' use of the Psalms because we want to become more like Him by listening to His inner life. We want to become more intimate with Him by following His thought patterns ("mind renewal" is the only road to life transformation – Rom. 12:2). And the Psalms, Jesus' hymnbook, are a key to His own self-understanding.

- Today again we'll see Jesus seeking to **explain His identity from the Psalms** even in the midst of His fiercest spiritual battles. But He always kept His focus on what was happening "behind the scenes" and never lost sight of the true goal, so He's the perfect example for us. He knew that the primary battle was not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and rulers of the spiritual world. So the sword of the Spirit (God's Word, Eph. 6:17) was continually in His mouth (so He's depicted in Rev. 19:15). By His Word He created the world; by His Word He will conquer every enemy, even your heart!
- Two weeks ago we looked at the first four uses that Jesus made of the Psalms, as recorded in our Gospels (he likely referred to them many more times!), especially in His exchanges with the Jews and their religious leaders, showing them from the Psalms what His true identity was. Today we look at four more, all from the last week of Jesus' life.

A. In Matt. 21, Jesus is teaching the people in the temple courts (also in Mk. 12:10 and Lk. 20:17), and the chief priests and elders come and ask Him by what authority He's doing what He does. After several exchanges between them, He tells them a parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard and rented it out to some tenant farmers. This story was one of Jesus' most direct depictions of what was going to happen in His ministry.

- The tenant farmers represent Israel, especially her leaders, who reject the servants (prophets) sent by the landowner, refusing to give God His due harvest of righteous testimony to the truth ... until finally the landowner decides to send them His son. Parallels between the parable and Jesus' ministry are hardly disguised at all – they're right on the surface for anybody to see. So when the son comes to reclaim all that belongs to his father, the tenant farmers say to themselves, "This is our chance: here's the heir; if we get rid of Him, the vineyard will be ours." It was foolish thinking, but sometimes in our lives, we too seem to think we can avoid the rule of Jesus and manage to get better control of our lives, even finding greater fulfillment. Of course, it's a lie! Jesus is the true Ruler and He will ultimately show you that His rule is in your best interest.
- So the tenant farmers take the son outside the vineyard and kill him, just as the Jewish leaders would do with God's Son. In the parable Jesus doesn't have the landowner's son resurrect, but He does issue a clear warning that in effect **predicts the resurrection**. To find such a prediction, of course, He turns to the Psalms, showing us clearly that He often meditated on them and what they spoke about Himself. He found a perfect summary of His suffering and exaltation in the lines of Ps. 118:22-23: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes." The stone that the builders found inadequate, not suitable to their purposes, so it was cast aside as worthless – that's the stone that God restored (symbol of the resurrection) to the highest position of responsibility and honor.
- Peter certainly got the point as he later bore witness before the Jewish council (Ac. 4:11), directly accusing them of rejecting God's chosen one, and again highlighting in his first letter (1 Pe. 2:7) that Jesus was the stone God rescued from the human garbage heap and placed as the most distinguished part of His edifice, upon which all things depend, because without the capstone, nothing holds together! So Paul would write in Col. 1:16-18, "all things were created **through** him and **for** him. And he is **before** all things, and **in** him all things hold together." (A lot of theology is contained in those **prepositions!**). He's the **glue of the universe**, and He wants to be the glue of your life! He alone can hold you together!

- Paul would also use the metaphor of Jesus as the cornerstone in Eph. 2:20, just as the apostles in general would draw heavily from the Psalms for their inspired testimony regarding the person and work of Christ. They were following Jesus' example, and you and I do well to follow it too!

B. Our second reference for today also comes from Ps. 118, so this must have been a key Psalm for Jesus. In Matt. 23, Jesus is pronouncing woe upon woe against the teachers of the law and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and failure to guide God's people according to God's ways.

- Their problem was they were totally absorbed with their own glory. If spiritual leaders (or other kinds too) are just focused on themselves, they won't lead well and it can mean disaster for the people. Jesus ends this message by saying that's exactly what would happen to Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you [sounds like the parable of the tenants!], how often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing [Jesus could humbly identify with a mother hen!]. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of Lord.'" With that final line He is quoting Ps.118:26.

- So we should go back and investigate a little on this Psalm. King David, its probable author, had ordained it to be sung on special occasions; so in Ezra 3, at the laying of the foundation of the second temple, the Levites and singers were ordered to sing this Psalm: "give thanks to the LORD [Yahweh], for He is good; His love endures forever" (same beginning line in Ps.106, 107, 118, 136). This psalm is still used today among orthodox Jews on feast days as part of their thanksgiving.

- This psalm is about a serious battle against the Lord's anointed (26 times the sacred name of the Lord, Yahweh, is invoked): "In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered me by setting me free. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. ... I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." The psalmist is talking here about a great struggle of cosmic dimensions that's taking place in the very life and circumstances of David!

- His thanksgiving climaxes with "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh." Jesus was indeed the one who came in the name of Yahweh, "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), "the radiance of God's glory and exact representation of His being" (Heb. 1:3). He came vindicating the honor and holiness of the Name of Yahweh, perfectly depicting what was in His Father's heart toward us. That's why if we would know the blessing of God's presence and strength in our lives, we too must learn to **bless that Name** that's above every name – the only Name given under heaven by which we may be saved (Ac. 4:12). Unless we learn what it means to bless Him, we too are headed for destruction just like Jerusalem was!

- There is no salvation in any other, because He's the **only one who can rescue us from the evil one!** That was His charge: to defeat evil by destroying the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8) and reconcile us to God (2 Cor. 5:18, Col. 1:20). But He would use an entirely different approach from humanity's typical methods (Is. 55:8-9), or as God said to Zechariah (4:6), "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says Yahweh." Instead of relying on swords, armies,

tanks and bombs, God would actually allow the **enemy to exhaust all his resources** against Him: lies, deception, betrayal, persecution, injustice, suffering, cruelty, and death. Yet Jesus would demonstrate that none of those things was capable of holding Him down. He defeated them all – on our behalf! How blessed is He! Will you bless the One who came in the name of Yahweh?!

C. In Jesus' last two references to the Psalms for today, He is talking to His disciples at the **last Supper** (John 13:18, 15:25).

- In Jn.13, after washing their feet, He's trying to help them understand that this should also be their practice with each other ("Now that you know these things, you'll be blessed if you practice them"). But then He says, "I am not referring to all of you. I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the Scripture, 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'" He was quoting Ps. 41:9, which depicted the pangs of David's soul over his betrayal. As the anointed one of his day, he suffered much persecution and grieved over his close companion whom he trusted, who had shared table fellowship with him, but then turned against him (lifting the heel meant to kick, show contempt). Jesus knew beforehand that He would be betrayed by one with whom He had shared intimate communion and friendship because He had meditated on Ps. 41. Jesus knew that as an archetype of the ultimate Anointed One, David had had experiences that were used of the Holy Spirit to foretell how it would go with Jesus. So the Psalms teach us even more about Jesus' agony of soul than the Gospels.

- Then in Jn. 15, as Jesus continued His final hours with the disciples, explaining many important things to them about their future testimony, He spoke about the opposition they'd have to face, the hatred and persecution they would receive because of His name. Jesus says that if He hadn't come and spoken to them, they'd not be guilty of sin; if He hadn't done among them what no one else had done, they wouldn't be guilty. But now they're without excuse: "The one who hates me also hates my Father." And it's all in fulfillment of Scripture: "They hated me without cause" (Ps. 35:19, 69:4). There was no cause, no good reason, for hating God, who is Love! He has done everything possible for us to be redeemed from our sin and brokenness. Both Psalm 35 and 69 reflect David's tremendous struggle against the opposition, detailing his pain and sorrow. Jesus had invested trust, hope, friendship, love and witness in all these disciples; so it was a deep wound to be abandoned by them. If you've been rejected or betrayed, don't get stuck there! Jesus already overcame the power of rejection and betrayal with His love and forgiveness, which He made available to us in the Gospel through faith in Him.

- Ps. 69 would especially be pored over by the disciples, and they would discover there numerous gems:

- v.9, "zeal for your house consumes me" – they remembered this in the Gospels when Jesus cleansed the temple;
- v.9, "the insults of those who insult you fall on me" – Paul recalled this text in Rom. 15, thinking of Christ as our "shock absorber" for whatever attacks we have to bear;
- v.21, "they gave me vinegar for my thirst" – they thought of this passage in regard to Jesus' crucifixion;
- v.25, "may his place be deserted with no one to dwell in it" – in Acts 1 Peter recalled this verse in regard to Judas.

In other words, we hear Jesus' thought life moving all through the Psalms, and as we follow His example, we'll find **the Psalms** to be **a place where our thoughts can be reformatted according to His!**