

A Love Song

Biblical scholars remind us that, throughout the Bible, salvation is often presented as a love relationship between God and His people. For example, in Hosea 2:19-20, God says to Israel: “And I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”

I could also reference Jeremiah 3, as well as Ezekiel 16 and 23. When we come to the New Testament, the apostle Paul sees this marriage promise fulfilled in the saving work of Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 — speaking of the church — Paul writes: “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” Retired Reformed Theological Seminary Professor Dr. Douglas Kelly writes: “The almighty Father planned to give his Son the finest gift a Father could give a son: a beautiful bride.”

The series that we begin today from Psalm 45 is very unique. It uses wedding language that’s not found anywhere else in the psalms. The closest thing to this is only found in the Song of Solomon. This psalm is called “A Love Song,” and it gives us a look at events surrounding an ancient near-Eastern royal wedding of a king and his princess.

Although we don’t know exactly who this was written for, some scholars, including John Calvin, suggest that it was written for Solomon and a wife whom he had taken out of Egypt. There are, at least, a couple of things that we can know for certain about this psalm. First, this is clearly a wedding psalm which was written for one of the Old Testament Davidic kings. Along with that, we also know that this is a Messianic psalm.

As we seek to discover what we can know of this psalm, it’s important to remember that there are many psalms that are written in such a way that they have what C.S. Lewis called “second meanings.” Lewis describes “second meanings” as, “(Those meanings) which things said or written sometimes take on in the light of fuller knowledge than their author possessed.” In other words, the writer of a Messianic psalm could not have fully known at the time it was first written how this would have a “second meaning” that would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ at a future time in redemptive history.

Again, this psalm is clearly Messianic. Not only is it quoted, in part, in the New Testament, this psalm — as we’ll see — clearly points to Jesus as “The Royal Bridegroom to His Bride, the Church.” Now it’s important that, as we go, I want my readers to primarily be thinking of this psalm as how it relates to Jesus and Christians — i.e., his bride the church. With that in mind, let’s begin our brief look at this psalm under my first heading: ***The Royal Bridegroom’s Beauty.***

Verse 1 is given as an introduction. The psalmist is sharing with us his “pleasing theme.” He’s been given the amazing blessing to “address my verses to the king.” Scholars note that the language of “my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe (a skilled writer)” likely speaks of this

as initially having been an oral communication, which was then written down at a later date. Clearly, this psalm would have been sung in the gathered worship of God's people as well.

I want to begin to look at verses 2-5 under my first subheading: ***Words of Grace.***

Notice Verse 2: "You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever." If we think of this in terms of one of the Old Testament kings in the line of David, it may be that there was a measure of physical beauty that's being spoken of. But because this psalm would have been sung for various kings, the idea here is, almost certainly, one of being "handsome" or "beautiful" from the inside-out.

There's nothing in this psalm that would have us place any significant focus only on outward appearance, and this is certainly true when we know that this points forward to Jesus. We remember the prophetic words of Isaiah, who writes in one of his Servant Songs: "He had no beauty that we should desire him." (Is. 53:2c).

The second phrase in Verse 2 — "grace is poured from your lips" — clearly indicates someone who speaks God-honoring and gracious words that others need to hear. It's been suggested that, although the word "shepherd" is not in the text, this is picture of a king in the line of David who leads with a shepherd's heart of caring for others (Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24). This can certainly be said to point to the Lord Jesus, who calls himself the "good shepherd" in John 10:11. Along with words of grace let's look now at my second subheading: ***Warrior's Garments.***

The Old Testament kings of Israel and Judah were looked upon as warrior kings who would lead their armies in fighting for the people of God and protecting them from their enemies. The scribe who communicates this oral psalm calls on the Royal King to "Gird your sword on your thigh ... (and) ride out victoriously for the cause of truth, meekness, and righteousness." He also is said to have, in effect, "arrows that will pierce the heart of the king's enemies."

The prophet Isaiah, looking forward to the coming Messiah, writes: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies." (Is. 59:17- 18a)

Ultimately, every Old Testament king in Israel and Judah was sinful. Therefore, God's people looked forward to a future time when a perfect king would come who would rule and reign in righteousness.

Projecting forward across redemptive history, this psalm, ultimately, points to the perfect warrior King and the only completely faithful Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the only King who will always rule his people perfectly.

He is also the only Bridegroom who will ever love his faithless bride — the church — perfectly.

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