

feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

March 27, 2013

Dearest family,

Blessings for a hallowed “Holy Week”. Don’t forget the opportunities available for worship, meditation and remembrance at the services on Thursday and Friday evenings, and on Sunday morning.

When it comes to this time in the liturgical calendar, a series on the Psalms could not be more appropriate and applicable, as I sought to emphasize on Sunday. The New Testament, taken as a whole, is crammed with direct quotations from the Psalms (over 125 of them) but arguably there are hundreds of cross references, and inferences. No Old Testament book is quoted more. 103 of the 150 psalms are referred to. The psalms are quoted by every NT writer, especially by Paul (22 references, 20% of his OT quotations) and by John (22 in his gospel and apocalypse), and not surprisingly, by the writer to the Hebrews who in his one letter quotes the psalms the same number of times as Paul does in all of his. But most particularly, they are cited by all the gospel writers as a vital part of their persuasive presentation of who Jesus is.



The very opening line of the NT in **Matthew**'s gospel describes Jesus as “the son of David” and he goes on to prove Jesus’ messiahship with no less than 17 psalm quotations. **Mark** does the same with 9 strategic supportive and corroborating quotes. But we should really mention **Luke** as this is the gospel Bo is teaching from. The psalms are everywhere you read, starting in the very first chapter in the prophetic outbursts of Mary (9 allusions) and Zechariah (8 allusions). It has been noted that Satan himself has a go at quoting them in Luke 4 but needless to say, he misquotes Ps. 91:11-12! Jesus uses the psalms in Luke’s account:

- In the expression of his own self-understanding
- In his teaching of the crowds
- In his confrontation with enemies
- In his defense of his messiahship
- In his grief over Jerusalem
- In his last words on the cross
- In his post-resurrection communication: “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Lk. 24:44)

Luke also is very specific about the way certain events fulfill the psalms, whether it is the use of the psalms by the crowd at the triumphal entry, or the actions of the religious leaders; whether it is the actions of the soldiers at the foot of the cross, or the Lucan record of the apostles’ use of the psalms in their preaching in Acts. Chapter 13 is a good example of the use of the Psalms in apostolic preaching that presents Jesus’ sonship and resurrection (2:7 in 13:33 and 16:10 in 13:35) Someone has summed it up like this: “*The good news of Jesus Christ is almost unintelligible apart from the psalms.*” Before I leave this let me just briefly address the objections made by those who deny a Christian reading of the psalms, that is reading Christian theological meanings, particularly messianic ones, into a Jewish pre-Christian text. There are two good reasons for doing so.

1. **Theological:** we are called to discover Christ in the OT at his own invitation and it was foundational to his own teaching about himself. Jesus did it. He used OT references as signs of his

death and resurrection (Jonah, Solomon, Temple, brass serpent) It was actually in his commentary on the Psalms that Augustine made his famous oft-quoted statement: *“The NT is concealed in the Old and the OT is revealed in the New.”* The rightness and the necessity of this theological response is verified by the use of the OT in the gospel preaching and teaching of the early church and all the apostles.

2. **Historical:** To so read the psalms is not a Christian quirk. It is the historical continuation of Jewish exegesis, as the psalms are read with the anticipation of the messiah who would restore the Davidic kingship over a re-united Israel. At the time of the exile, when this collection was put together, there wasn't really much to shout about. It seemed that the covenant had failed. *“Your house and kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.”* Jews never ceased their longings for Messiah and for the fulfillment of God's promise to David of a king in his line, who would rule the nations and reign forever. The psalter strategically and powerfully and spiritually maintained and provoked this longing and preserved the expectation for a millennium. So the messianic reading of it was not a Christian innovation, but was the legitimate reading of the predictive texts from the vantage point of the incarnation, of the coming of Emmanuel who had indeed come to save Israel, announced to Mary as the Son of the Most High who would be given the throne of his father David and who would reign over the house of Jacob forever with a kingdom that would have no end. He was the Son of David in the town of David. Thus there was a direct continuity with the messianic expectations and Christological meanings of the psalms.

It is in the Passion narratives, however, that arguably we find the most strategic and influential use of the psalms. This is not just because the evangelists are citing them to make their points, but because Jesus himself is using them for the communication of his own self-understanding. He lived and breathed them, he prayed them, he quoted them all the time. Don't forget that Jesus would have sung the Passover psalms of praise at the Last Supper among one of his last earthly expressions of worship (Ps. 113-118). Post-resurrection he makes this very clear: *“These are my words which were written in... the Psalms concerning me.”* (Lk. 24:44-48) As we read the gospel accounts of the passion, it is his use of the psalms that conveys to us the very depths of Jesus' soul as he walks out his obedience unto death.

As an example, on Sunday I drew your attention very briefly to psalms 31 and 41, that in different ways, delineate the extent of Jesus' suffering. Of course, there are others, like Psalm 22 and Psalm 69 that anatomize the terrors and the horrors. I urge you to go back to these passages and read them through again, prayerfully and meditatively, accepting that Jesus has left us an example that we should follow in his footsteps, particularly in the experience of suffering that is the consequence, not of anything wrong on our part, but as a result of things that are inflicted upon us from other sources, whether direct enmity, or just the pressures and oppressions that come against Christian witness in the public square and in the market-place, sliming our spirits with discredit and disgrace. We can follow Jesus' example in his usage of Psalm 31. We can commit our spirits into HIS hands (v5) and rejoice that we are not in the hands of the enemy. (v8)

The praise of the welcoming children did not last long, and of course was opposed and derided by the Pharisees. The cheering at the beginning of the week became the jeering at the end of it. The adoring crowds melted away, as did the abandoning disciples. I suggested that the harrowing week was marked by two important things: warnings and weepings. As clear as the parables of grief and judgment are in that week, as clear as the prophetic warnings about the signs of the age, equally clear is the broken heart of Jesus that had been weeping long before he entered the Eastern gate. The Redeemer's tears had already been shed at Lazarus' graveside, over a rich young ruler and over the city of Jerusalem itself.

One might say, during this Holy Week, that the tears of the Redeemer continue to fall wherever there is a refusal to accept his revelation (as at Bethany); a refusal to accept his requirements (as with that young ruler); a refusal to accept his relationship (as with Jerusalem).

Man of Sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God, Who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;
"It is finished!" was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew His song we'll sing:
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Paschal blessings,
Stuart

<http://www.christour shepherd.org/pastilet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)