

Chapter 18 The Psalms

Praying our Praise

"I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." Psalm 145:1-3

The Psalms show us how to integrate our personal stories into God's Story of Redemption. It is all here, failure and success, sickness and health, betrayal and friendship, frustration and delight, long nights of despair and mornings of joy. We are not lectured in how to bring our lives into relationship with God, we are shown. The Psalms guide us in how to be ourselves—how to be real, before the living God. Instead of being lectured on lamentation and instructed in how to praise, we are guided along paths of pain and praise.

The main theme of the Psalms is not pain, but praise. In spite of all the prayed out rage and resentment, praise prevails. Praise rises above the anxiety and angst. In the Psalms we are never very far from a burst of praise. "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs" (100:1). For every last gasp cry for help in the Psalms there is a full voice song of praise. For every lament from the pit there is a chorus of praise from the mountain top. This is not to suggest that pain and praise are in competition, with the positive, upbeat believer winning out over the negative, overly serious believer. It's not that there are more psalms of praise than psalms of lament so the higher score goes to praise. As we pray the Psalms we learn that praise to God is not offered in spite of pain, but in the midst of pain. It is difficult to find a psalm of pain that doesn't sound a note of praise, just as it is difficult to find a psalm of praise that doesn't hint at persistent trials and troubles.

Pain and praise are not the yang and yin of spirituality, as if we vacillate between two emotional states. The psalms do not cater to this notion that sometimes we're up and sometimes we're down. God-centered spirituality is not a religious barometer reflecting our emotional self, but a disciplined, devotional attention to the Lord who is real in the midst of our life. In so many psalms, praise is the hard-fought resolution that comes at the end of a litany of difficulties. The final notes of joy may be sung with tears, but they are most certainly sung with faith. Psalm 57 is both a cry for mercy and a prayer of praise. David pleads for refuge. He is on the run from his enemies who have surrounded him like lions stalking their prey. "I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me" (57:2). Nevertheless, praise transcends his fears. "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth" (57:7-11). This movement toward praise in the midst of pain is so typical of the psalms that we might miss the extraordinary testimony to faith in God that it proclaims. To pray the psalms is to be led inevitably to praise, because for all their brutal honesty about pain and suffering, they turn our attention to the Lord who is our Savior. If we run the gauntlet of pain and suffering with the psalmist we will end up in a processional of praise and gratitude.

Salvation

The prayers of pain remind us that we cannot save ourselves; the prayers of praise remind us who can! The psalms of lament emphasize just how much saving we need. We need deliverance from evil, forgiveness for our sins, protection from our enemies, freedom from our fears, healing for our bodies, and hope in the face death. The psalms of praise emphasize that God's great salvation meets the full range of human need. The Lord forgives, heals, redeems, crowns (empowers), satisfies, and renews. Psalm 103 celebrates God's amazing grace: "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; he redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion. He satisfies my desires with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's" (103:2-5). We are to understand from the Psalms that everything from cancer to conceit, and from heartbreak to a painful back involves God's gift of salvation.

God redeems every dimension of life. Holiness and health are God's blessing. Spiritual and emotional well-being are his gifts. We are rescued from our circumstances and empowered with this love and compassion. God blesses us with strength and outward energy.

Creation and Redemption are the two overarching themes which focus our praise to Yahweh. Psalm 8 exalts in the God of Creation: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens...When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (8:1,3-5). Psalm 47 affirms the Lord of the Universe, "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth!...For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted" (47:1-2,7-9).

In Psalm 19, creation bears silent testimony to the sovereignty of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (19:1-4). Revelation declares God's will with such certainty and specificity that David was inspired to use a wealth of terms to express his gratitude. "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes" (19:7-8). Such blessing calls for our response, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (19:14).

Psalm 29 expresses full confidence in the sovereign power of God over all creation. "Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the

Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic” (29:1-4).

The psalms of praise turn our attention away from ourselves and our resources and, instead, place our focus on the Lord where it belongs. The psalmist compiles metaphors for strength and security to describe the Lord’s resourcefulness. “I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies...The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!” (18:1-3, 46). Living as we do in a culture enamored with material things and physical appearances, the Psalms help us to appreciate the invisible reality of God’s sovereignty and transcendence. Against our culture’s nearly total preoccupation with the self, the Psalms impress upon us the magnificence of God.

Vivid images are used to describe the Lord’s salvation. We are familiar with Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul” (23:1-2). But there are many more images of redemption, such as in Psalm 30, “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent” (30:11-12). Throughout the psalms, images of liberation abound. “Praise be to the Lord, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city. In my alarm I said, ‘I am cut off from your sight!’ Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help” (32:21-22). And in Psalm 40, God’s deliverance is sure. “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God” (40:1-3).

Throughout the Psalms praise is focused on Yahweh. The purpose of worship is not to flatter God, but to speak the truth about God. In many Psalms a simple indicative sentence commences true worship. "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed" (9:9). "The Lord is my fortress and my deliverer" (18:2). "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (27:1). If God is the subject of our worship, as these Psalms proclaim, the focus of our worship will always be on the holy character and acts of God rather than on us. This simple focus on who God is holds worship true. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (34:18). "For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations" (100:5). "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" (103:8). "The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens" (113:4). "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (118:14).

The psalms of praise resist vague generalities about God and shun religious abstractions. The Lord is known by name: the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob, the God of Israel, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel. The Lord is addressed by titles that express both affection and authority. David referred to the Lord as "my Glorious One" (3:3) "my King and my God" (5:2), "my Rock and my Redeemer" (19:14), "my loving God" (59:9). He called out to God passionately, "O Most High," "O righteous God" (7:8,9), "O my Strength" (59:17). He entitled God with all reverence, "the King of glory" (24:7), "the Lord Most High," "the great King over

all the earth" (47:2). These titles of endearment and reverence express love and loyalty to Yahweh. By meditating on these names for God and using these titles in our prayers, we too, acknowledge the Lord's greatness and resist responding to God in a casual or demeaning manner. They are the means by which the true worshiper affirms the greatness of Almighty God.

Community

The psalms of praise lead us in a worship experience that is both deeply personal and genuinely relational. The psalms are personal, but not private prayers. They were written to inspire God's people in worship. Every psalm is meant to focus the community on the Lord and encourage a solidarity rooted in God's redemption and revelation. In the modern era the first person singular is often used to distinguish the individual and establish independence. "I" statements and "me" statements send distinctive messages. When we say, "I", we mean "me" as opposed to "you." We emphasize the fact that we don't want to speak for one another. Each person speaks for himself or herself. When we refer to the group we readily transpose "I" into "we" or "my" into "our." But in the psalms the first personal singular is not used to distinguish oneself from the community, but to inspire community. It says in effect "Count me in!"

When the whole worshipping community prays and sings in the first person singular it builds solidarity, because it underscores personal commitment. If we're not careful, our "we" talk can become vague and noncommittal. When someone says, "We will handle it," we want to know who will handle it, because we know how individuals hide their lack of responsibility behind the group. The power of the first person singular in a communal call of worship is clearly evident in Psalm 34, "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together" (34:1-3). This emphasis is in Psalm 122 as well, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem" (122:1-2).

In many Psalms, the personal character of our praise is further emphasized by stressing that worship involves our whole being. "I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart" (86:12). "My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them..." (35:10). "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name" (103:1). True praise comes from deep within our true selves. "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul" (25:1). "My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice" (34:2). There is a passion behind this praise that is consistent with the passion behind our pain. "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (84:20).

There is nothing half-hearted about the psalms of praise. To praise the Lord is to be fully alive. "Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn" (57:8). Every type of musical instrument was to be put to use in praising God. "Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD" (150:3-6).

Expressionless praise is a contradiction; exuberant praise is a confirmation. "My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you-- I, whom you have redeemed" (71:23). Eyes and ears, lips and hands are used in praise. "I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven" (123:1). "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you" (63:3). Worship is energetic, "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy" (47:1). The body language of praise is reverent, moving and heartfelt, "I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands" (63:4). Worship has its own imperatives, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD" (134:2). There is movement and motion in worship, "Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp" (149:3). And there is quiet dignity in worship, "My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD" (26:12).

Not only are we to praise the Lord with our whole being, we are to call everyone in all creation to join in. "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness" (29:2). The Lord deserves an ever expanding circle of praise. "Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul" (103:20-22). The invitation to praise goes out to everyone, from the weakest members of society to the strongest, and from close relatives to distant nations. The psalmist is determined, "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" (78:4). Praise God everywhere, "in the assembly of the saints" (149:1) and "in the great congregation" (68:26). "Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens" (150:1). Worship is commanded. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name" (100:4).

We are to praise God among the nations. "Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples" (117:1). There is a missionary thrust to praise. "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (96:3). God is so great that his praise cannot be confined and restricted. It reaches "to the ends of the earth" (48:10). "I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples" (108:3). "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done" (105:1).

The Psalms never imply that the nations will universally respond to the invitation to worship the Lord of the nations. In fact the opposite is the case, "the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain" (2:1; see 9:5,17; 33:10), but the message of praise cannot be stopped. There is an evangelistic thrust to praise that is in keeping with the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). "I will praise you among the nations, O Lord; I will sing praises to your name" (18:49). The Psalms are confident that regardless of people's rebellion against the Sovereign Lord, the day is coming when, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations" (22:27-28). Some will be forced to bow, others will bow in adoration and praise, but all will bow before the Lord. This psalm recalls the early Christian hymn cited by the apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi. The day is coming when, "at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

The Christ

Throughout the Psalms there is a dynamic vision of Yahweh and his work that inspires and motivates praise. It is a comprehensive vision of God that centers every dimension of life from the deeply personal to the geo-political and from the ancient past to the everlasting future. The psalmist's vision of salvation is complete. Every available metaphor seems to be used to describe the fulness of God's salvation from scenes of pastoral tranquility, "he leads me beside quiet waters" (23:2), to political liberation, "he leads forth the prisoners with singing" (68:6). The psalmist helps us to visualize the promises of God with vivid word pictures of relational fulfillment. Psalm 133 recalls the unity Israel felt in the wilderness when Aaron was anointed. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes" (133:1-2). David praises the transcendent, all powerful God of the cosmos. "Extol him who rides on the clouds—his name is the Lord," and then praises this same God who is "a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows" (68:4-5). The God who sets the stars in place, "sets the lonely in families" (68:6). God's immanence is likened to parental love, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust" (103:13-14). God's transcendence is expressed in political sovereignty, "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all" (103:19).

The psalms train our praying imagination to appreciate the certainty of our destiny and the security of being at home with God. We are safe. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (91:1). Our place is secure. "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (23:6). We know where we belong. "One thing I ask the Lord this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock" (27:4-5).

However, the praise-inspiring vision of the Psalms reaches its zenith in the expectation of the Messiah. All the promises of redemption and vindication depend upon the Promised One. Therefore we cannot pray the Psalms without thinking of Jesus, the Messiah. There is a longing for God and an expectation of blessing and salvation that can only be fulfilled through Christ, the Anointed One. Guided by the Holy Spirit the psalmists wrote better than they knew. They created not only Israel's prayer book, but the Church's prayer book. In the light of Christ, the Psalms mean even more today than they did in David's day. Whatever cultural differences may hinder our appreciation of the Psalms, they pale in significance when compared to the distinct advantage Christians have in praying the Psalms. In Christ the power of the Psalms to strengthen faith and inspire the soul becomes even more apparent. This may surprise many Christians who have yet to discover the value of the Psalms in helping them stay in the story, but the Psalms are a constant reminder of the One who has already come and is coming again! Who, but Christ

Jesus, fulfills the passion psalms and the royal psalms?

Psalm 1 resonates with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount description of ' beatitude-based believers (Mt 5:1-12) "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers,". Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing" (23:1), parallels Jesus' profession, "I am the good shepherd," and reminds us of his promise, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10,11). The first line of Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear?" brings to mind Jesus' profession, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Jesus' confirmation of Peter's confession, "upon this rock I will build my church" (Mt 16:18), recalls the many Psalms that speak of God as "the Rock of our salvation" (95:1; see 18:2,31,46; 19:14). Jesus' self-designation as the Son of Man caused the New Testament writers to find in Psalm 8 a description of what God intended for humanity, now fulfilled in Christ. As the author of Hebrews wrote, "But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:6-9; see 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22).

David's testimony in Psalm 40 seems to go beyond himself and point to Christ. His words make us think of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Nazareth, when Jesus entered the synagogue, read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and afterwards said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:16-21). David writes, "Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come,-- it is written about me in the scroll. To do your will, O my God, is my desire; your law is within my heart.' I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips... (40:7-9). At the end of his public ministry, Psalm 118 provides a striking description of his final entrance into Jerusalem, "Open for me the gates of righteousness...The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (118:19,22-26). When Jesus entered the temple and drove out the money changers, children angered the teachers of the law by shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Jesus responded by quoting Psalm 8, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise..." (8:2; Mt 21:16).

Events in the life of Christ make us think of specific Psalms. When Jesus "rebuked the winds and waves" and calmed the storm (Mt 8:26), we are reminded of Psalm 29, "The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters" (29:3). The many miracles of healing that Jesus performed recall Psalm 30, "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever" (30:11-12).

The ethics of Jesus can be found in the Psalms. Compare the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) and the parable of the rich fool (Lk 12:13-21) with the message of Psalm 49: "Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. Though while he lived he counted himself blessed-- and men praise you when you prosper-- he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life. A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish" (49:16-20). Christ's call for heart righteousness can be found throughout the Psalms. David's famous lines foreshadow Jesus' message, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (51:16-17).

Certain statements made by Jesus send us to back to the Psalms to better understand their meaning, such as his final words on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). This saying comes from David in Psalm 31 when he cried out for deliverance, "Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth" (31:4-5). Some have found it significant that Jesus didn't quote the second part of David's statement. He didn't pray for his own redemption because he was without sin. Jesus used the psalms to interpret his betrayal. He quoted from Psalm 41 to explain Judas' actions. "But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me'(Jn 13:18).

In the previous chapter we noted the close relationship between the prayed out pain of Psalm 22 and Psalm 69 and Jesus' experience in Gethsemane and on the cross. Even though it was King David who prayed these psalms of pain, it never appears to have entered the consciousness of Israel, that the long awaited Messiah was also Israel's suffering servant (Is 53). Not until Jesus came do the prayers of anguish and the prayers of adoration focus on a single individual. The very one who takes on the pain of Israel is responsible for the salvation of Israel, and not only Israel's salvation but the world's. Therefore the messianic psalms are drawn from both the passion psalms and the royal psalms. This is what makes the Psalms even more relevant today for the people of God than when they were first written. Their significance has intensified and their meaning has become clearer in the light of Christ. The Cross fulfills the passion psalms in a way far more literal than David ever imagined for himself, even though he wrote these psalms to express his own pain. But the royal psalms await fulfillment on a scale and magnitude that we can hardly imagine. We stand, as it were, with David waiting for the consolation and culmination that only the coming King can bring about. If the passion psalms were fulfilled so literally, will not the fulfillment of the royal psalms be just as literal?

The Psalms take us to a level of expectation that is beyond our imagination. Our prayer book begins by underscoring the strength and scope of God's rule and reign. Yahweh is in complete control. "The kings of the earth take their stand...against the Lord and against his Anointed One." But their opposition is of no consequence to Yahweh. "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying 'I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill' (2:2-6). The implications of this Psalm go beyond Israel's earthly ruler and point to Israel's ultimate ruler. "I will proclaim the decree of the Lord:

He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery' (2:7-9). We recall Psalm 2 when Jesus was baptized and a voice from heaven pronounced, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased' (Mt 3:17). The author of Hebrews declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of Psalm 2, declaring, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:3, see 1:5).

In Psalm 110, David intentionally pointed to a future Messiah that was beyond the possibility of human design and accomplishment. Jesus used this psalm to confirm that the Anointed One was greater than King David. Jesus asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" (Mk 12:35-37). Peter at Pentecost used this same Psalm to assure the Jews that God had raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God. "For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." He concluded his message with this psalm, adding, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33-36). There was no doubt in Peter's mind that Jesus was the fulfillment of this messianic psalm. The apostles used this metaphor for authority and power from Psalm 110 to confirm the superiority of Christ Jesus over the angels (Heb 1:13), his victory over human rejection (Acts 5:30), his ongoing ministry of intercession (Rom 8:34), and the completion of his redemptive work (Heb 10:11).

If we allow this psalm to effect us the way it did the apostles, our sense of the majesty and transcendence of Christ will deepen. We will be given a perspective of the Anointed One that reminds us of the apostle John's visions of Christ in the book of Revelation. We will bow before the Lord in humility and confidence, without blame and bravado, ready and able to obey his will. We will be like the willing troops described in the psalm who are fresh and eager to serve. "Your people will freely join you, resplendent in holy armor on the great day of your conquest, join you at the fresh break of day, join you with all the vigor of youth" (110:3, The Message). This psalm encourages us "to offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices" (Rom 12:1), to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," and to "put on the full armor of God" (Eph 6:10).

The second half of Psalm 110 begins by reaching back to the very beginning of God's salvation history story, all the way back to Melchizedek, the pre-Israelite king of Jerusalem and priest of God Most High, who blessed Abraham and received an offering from him (Gen 14:18-20). In the Spirit, David used Melchizedek as an ancient type pointing forward to the ultimate King-Priest, Jesus Christ, whose rule and salvation would be complete. For this Anointed One there would be no line of succession. His priesthood was final and forever, because Christ was perfect and permanent. The author of Hebrews elaborated on this picture by emphasizing that Christ had become "a priest not on the basis of regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life" (7:16). Furthermore, the Anointed One's priesthood and kingship rested on the one thing that could never change, the Word of God. "The Lord has sworn and will not

change his mind: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." Yahweh's oath on behalf of his Anointed One became fully realized in the Incarnate One. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

Psalm 110 closes with a vision of judgment that reminds us of the book of Revelation (110:5-6). The nations rage and plot in vain (Ps 2). They reject the truth of the Lord's anointed. They refuse to acquiesce and "the rulers of the whole earth" go down to defeat. But the very final picture of this enthronement psalm offers a glimpse of the Messiah that is as reassuring as it is inspiring. Kneeling at the brook to quench his thirst, our Savior is one with us in our humanness. He is not a mythic god of human fantasy, but God Incarnate, the historical Jesus. As the apostle John wrote, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). He pauses momentarily by the brook to refresh himself, only to resume his work. "Therefore he will lift up his head" and we will follow our Lord. This is the God-centered vision that inspires our praise and focuses our eyes on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2).

The Psalms teach us that in order to stay in the story we must learn to wait. We are commanded, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (46:10). Waiting is an essential spiritual discipline and a necessary exercise in the life of faith. Perhaps we should not resent those immediate circumstances that remind us that life is incomplete on this side of eternity. Mature believers know that their longing for love and community will only be fully realized in eternity. Our yearning for significance and salvation will be fulfilled one day, but not because of what we have done or what others have done for us. We await our Savior and Lord, who alone is able to save and satisfy from everlasting to everlasting. "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (27:14).