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BIBLE SURVEY - PSALMS

Forward

Ever since the book of Psalms was written, believers in every generation have found it so helpful for all sorts of reasons. Virtually every situation we may face in life and death is included somewhere in this marvellous collection. There are great heights of joy and delight in God and his mercy, and great depths of darkness and difficulty as the different Psalmists describe their circumstances and feelings. And one of the outstanding ways this book is such a help to us is the complete honesty of the individual authors as they open up their hearts to us, the result being we so often see ourselves described in their writings.

Very often believers have found the Psalms come to their aid when they approach God in prayer. On some occasions believers have been so aware of the splendour and majesty and glory of God that they have been lost for words to express the praise they felt welling up in their hearts. On other occasions believers have been in such despair and distress that they have found it almost impossible to know

how to pray at all. At such times the words of the Psalmists have exactly fitted their need and they have quite literally prayed simply using the words of a Psalm because they were so appropriate. It is undoubtedly a very precious part of Holy Scripture, and we trust this survey will encourage you to read and study and live out and minister its precious truths to others.

I am indebted again to Philip Parsons who so willingly agreed to speak on the Psalms in the Serving Today radio programme for Pastors and Church leaders, and for his notes which I have used as the basis for this book.

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Introduction

The book of Psalms is probably the best known and best loved book in the Bible. The Psalter, as it is sometimes called, is so well known and loved because it is so rich in its expression of the whole range of spiritual thought and emotions. There are Psalms for every occasion in life and every spiritual condition and therefore the Christian finds a correspondence to his condition at any time in at least one of them. Through the Psalms countless thousands of God's people have delighted to come into his presence - in repentance, even in despair, in confession of sin, in hope, in faith and in joy and rejoicing. But the Psalms must not be limited to providing a vehicle for the expression of our feelings; that would be an abuse of them. They are also rich in theology, in teaching and instruction, to enable us to grow in grace and holiness of life.

1. Authors and Dates of Writing

You do not have to be very familiar with the Psalms to realise that it is not one book or even one collection, but a collection of collections. The main contributor is David the king, to whom about half of the Psalms are attributed. There are twelve psalms assigned to Asaph, twelve to the sons of Korah, two to Solomon, one each to companions of Ezra, and 34 Psalms which have no designation at all. It is by no means certain that where a Psalm is ascribed to an individual that he was the author or compiler, but as a general rule this is probably the case.

The earliest contributor was Moses, who almost certainly wrote Psalm 90 during the desert wanderings 1446-1406 BC. Some of the Psalms were written during the Babylonian exile 606-536 BC (Ps 137), and some during the post-exilic period (Psalm 126). After many revisions and rearrangements the final version of the Psalter as we have it today was probably complete by about 400 BC, not long after Ezra's time. So the whole book was written and compiled over a period of about 1000 years.

2. Order and Arrangement

The Psalter as we have it in our Bibles consists of five books. Book one has Psalms 1 to 41; book two Psalms 42 to 72; book three is from Psalm 73 to 89; book four contains Psalm 90 to 106; and book five is Psalm 107 to 150. While this arrangement is not strictly chronological, many of the earlier Psalms written by David are towards the beginning of the whole book, with the exilic and post-exilic Psalms towards the end. There is also a progression through the Psalter as a whole, with a bias towards penitence, confession, prayer and cries for deliverance at the beginning, to praise at the end. The five books correspond with the five books of the Law and were possibly used in rotation, in conjunction with the reading of the particular passage of the Law each Sabbath. Each of the five books ends with a doxology and contains a selection of most of the different types of Psalms. Psalms 1 and 2 are clearly introductory to the whole collection, while Psalm 150 provides a fitting doxology to the whole.

3. The Poetry of the Psalms

The Psalms are poetry from first to last, yet poetry of a kind which is largely unfamiliar to us. Our hymns are often based on rhyming lines in the English speaking world, with strict adherence to metre (the number of syllables in each line). By contrast, Hebrew poetry has as its basis the development of thoughts and ideas, which are similar, contrasting or complementary. Each phrase is either similar to the one before, or in contrast to the one before, or completes the one before. This whole scheme is called 'parallelism'. Most modern translations of the Bible helpfully not only recognise this poetic form of the Psalms but actually print them accordingly which helps to show the parallelism. The following are examples of the three kinds of parallelism we find which should make the point clear: -

- (i) Psalm 23:1, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want - complementary parallelism. The implied linking word is, "therefore".
- (ii) Psalm 23:2, He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters - similar parallelism. The implied linking word is, "and".
- (iii) Psalm 1:6, The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish - contrasting parallelism with "but" as the link word.

These are simple examples of the parallelism that forms the basis of Hebrew poetry; in many instances it will be more varied and complex.

4. Musical Accompaniment for the Psalms

In general, the Psalms were written to be sung, but we have no real idea of what the tunes were like. We cannot be certain that traditional Jewish music is anything like what was used in the Old Testament. According to 1 Chronicles 25 there were 288 specially appointed Levites who were trained to be musicians for the temple worship. Which musical instruments were to be used was also laid down (v1), like all the other regulations of the Old Testament. So there was not any kind of musical free-for-all; everything was meticulously controlled. Those who led that worship *'were trained and skilled in music for the Lord'* (v7). Since the destruction of the temple in A.D.70, there is no mandate for Christian worship to follow that Old Testament pattern. The synagogue worship, not the temple worship, is a more appropriate pattern for us in New Testament times. Some form of musical accompaniment may well be prudent for things to be done decently and in order, but to proliferate musical instruments and music groups as is done in some churches, suggests a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

5. Psalm Types

Any attempt to classify the Psalms will invariably be inadequate, because of the diversity of thought in many of

them, but the following attempt at classification may be helpful: -

There are Psalms which are prayers, Psalms which are praise, cries of despair and for deliverance, confessions of faith, confessions of sin, intercession, imprecatory or cursing Psalms, Psalms of instruction and teaching, Psalms of meditation, Psalms exalting the Law and Psalms of Messianic hope. Many of the Psalms contain parts that correspond to more than one of the above categories. For instance, there may be a cry for help and confession of sin, followed by praise. Taken as a whole, one cannot but be struck by the balance of the Psalter.

The book of Psalms was the hymnbook for the Old Testament saints and the early Church, so of course it is relevant and should be used by the Church today. Some say that we should only sing Psalms, but that view does not take on board the fuller light and revelation of the New Testament. We are now under the new covenant in this question of singing, and so in addition to the Psalms, we need hymns that reflect the full and final revelation given to us through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of our great hymns which are based upon New Testament theology, and which are excellent poetry and have fitting tunes, are worthy to be used alongside the Old Covenant Psalms. If we only sing Psalms we are not giving proper expression to our New Testament position. On the other hand, any hymns that are not scripturally based should not

be given a place in our worship. Also, any Christian hymnbook worthy of the name should aim to have the same breadth of thought and expression as is found in the Psalter. Judged by that criterion there is no comparison between many modern Christian songs and the Psalms.

6. The Penitential Psalms

These are Psalms that concentrate on the question of sin, repentance from sin, and forgiveness.

Psalm 32. We begin with this Psalm because it gives us basic teaching on the whole question of sin in the life of the believer and how he should deal with it. David, in characteristic honesty, gives us a piece of autobiography relating to unconfessed sin and its consequences - even physical tiredness! But he also goes on to show the result of coming clean about his sin and the end result of such an action - heartfelt praise (v11).

Psalm 51. This is the best known of the penitential Psalms, partly because the circumstances under which it was written are clearly explained in the life of David. Prior to writing this Psalm, David had sinned greatly by committing adultery with Bathsheba, having her husband murdered and then trying to cover it up (2 Samuel 12 - 13). The words of J. C. Ryle are apt at this point: *“There is no sin so great, but a great saint may fall into it. There is no saint so great but he may fall into a great sin.”* This Psalm stands as a warning to us all, but it also shows the depths of God's mercy in

forgiving those who truly repent of even such great sins, and that after even such a fall a believer can be restored to full fellowship with his God and Saviour, and usefulness in God's service.

Psalms 6 & 38. These Psalms have a common theme, where David is praying for deliverance from sickness, which he has recognised as chastisement because of his sin. This is not to say that all sickness has this purpose, but there will be occasions when the Lord will send us sickness to correct us and discipline us. David recognizes the justice of God in so afflicting him, but prays for restoration in this life in order to serve God.

Psalm 102. Although this Psalm seems similar to 6 and 38, it is likely that the affliction of the Psalmist is shared with the rest of the nation. Because of national sin God has brought this calamity upon the whole nation. We are not exempt from such judgements, indeed, the Church in some parts of the world is under the judgement of God, and if we have any sensitivity about these things we can identify ourselves with the Psalmist and also pray his prayer for deliverance (verse 13 and following).

Psalm 130. In this Psalm, the writer cries to God out of great distress which he clearly links to his own sin. Although as in Psalm 38 the Psalm ends with no relief from his trouble, he is confident that the Lord will hear and answer.

Psalm 143. In this last of the penitential Psalms, the theme is similar: a recognition of the justice of God in bringing trouble upon him, but again an expression of hope that God will deliver him.

Surely these penitential Psalms teach us that confessing and forsaking our sins is a vital part of our Christian experience. Neglect of it will multiply our woes. True contrition will lead to joyous praise. And we all need to pray the words of Psalm 139:23 and 24.

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

7. Psalms Requesting Help in Trouble

This further group of Psalms is a response to trouble, which is not identified as the result of specific sin. Having said that, in some of these Psalms there is recognition by the Psalmist that he is a sinner and although he does not link his sin to the trouble, he makes free confession of it.

Space permits us to look only fleetingly at some of these Psalms, but there are others, which come into this category. Although some of these Psalms come from other contributors (e.g. Asaph), most of them were written by David during the two periods of his life when he was in particular trouble.

(1) First of all, there was that period of about 12 years when David was on the run from Saul. But it was not only Saul he had to consider; it was also the Philistines. In this category we have Psalms 7, 11, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142.

(2) Then there is the time when David had to flee from his son Absalom, who had seized power (Psalm 3, 63)

(3) Sometimes the enemy is not defined (Psalm 12, 13, 25, 55, 70, 71, 86).

(4) Sometimes the Psalmist's particular trouble is not defined (Psalm 88, 120).

(5) Sometimes the Psalmist is expressing his trust and hope in God in such times of trouble (Psalm 90, 91).

(6) Sometimes the Psalmist gives thanks for deliverance from his troubles (Psalm 18, 34, 46, 116).

It is significant to note how these requests are uttered. The Psalmist always puts forward arguments as to why God should hear him. Let us briefly consider some of these arguments:

- a. He reminds God that it is in his character to deliver his people. He is their shield, their fortress, their strong tower, and their protecting cover (sheltering under his wings).

- b. He reminds God of his justice which requires him to punish the wicked and deliver the righteous.
- c. He reminds God of his power to deliver.
- d. He reminds God of the covenant relationship that exists between him and his people.
- e. He appeals to the pity and mercy of God.

The personal relationship between the Psalmist and his God comes out very clearly. He speaks to God in an intimate and personal way and yet always with a sense of reverence and propriety. There is never the jovial familiarity with which some people pray these days. And he certainly never regards God as some kind of help machine that you pop in a prayer and out comes the help. It is unbelievers who pray like that, not the true Christian (see Matthew 6:5 - 15).

These Psalms are a mine of instruction in the art of prayer - an art in which we all need to improve. When the prayers of God's people begin to come up to the kind of pattern and standard we find in the Psalms, then be sure that we are on the road to seeing much greater blessing from God.

8. Reviewing God's Mighty Acts

You might almost call these Psalms 'church history' Psalms, because they review the history of God's people and how he had delivered them in the past. Psalm 105 reviews the period from Abraham to the Exodus, about 700 years. Psalm 78 is a review of their spiritual history from the Exodus to the establishment of the monarchy under David -

some 450 years. Psalm 106 considers their history from the point of view of the sins of the past, how God had judged them for those sins but how he had also delivered them. Psalm 114 deals briefly with their deliverance from Egypt and God's provision in the wilderness. Psalm 136, one of the very few Psalms with any kind of refrain or chorus, considers God's mighty acts on the wider canvas of Creation, Providence and Redemption.

9. Prayers for Reviving and Restoration

In this category are Psalms 44, 74, 77, 79, 80, 85 and 126. All these Psalms have as their main theme the desire for the restoration of God's work. The writers use many arguments in their appeals to God: -

- (i) They appeal to God's mighty acts in the past.
- (ii) They appeal to the devastation caused to God's people by the adversary.
- (iii) They appeal to the mocking and scorn of God's and their enemies.
- (iv) They appeal to God on the basis of the glory of his Name.
- (v) They appeal to God on the basis of his covenant.
- (vi) They appeal to God on the basis of their pitiable condition.
- (vii) They appeal to God on the grounds of justice against his enemies.

To us who live in times when spiritual life is at a low ebb, these Psalms should be especially precious. If we were to know them and understand them, then maybe we would begin to pray those oft-repeated cries: - *“How long O Lord? Will you be angry with us for ever?”* – *“Will you not revive us again?”*

10. Teaching Psalms

It may not have escaped your notice that in many Psalms there is a definite teaching element. They are not all praise or all confession or all prayer, either for ourselves or the Church, but many of the Psalms have a part in which we are instructed. The following group are Psalms in which the teaching element predominates.

Psalm 1. As if to underline the fact that teaching is meant to be a vital part of this whole book, the whole of the first Psalm is devoted to it. The Psalm compares the righteous and the wicked, their lifestyle and their end. Psalms 37 and 112 are an amplification of this theme of the righteous and the wicked, although Psalm 112 has only a passing reference to the wicked.

Psalms 14 and 53, which are almost identical, are expositions of the universality of sin. Paul quotes from these Psalms in Romans 3.

Psalm 15 describes the blameless life and its rewards.

Psalm 32, which we already considered in the group of penitential Psalms, contains teaching on the importance and benefits of confessed and forgiven sin.

Psalm 34 is a meditation on the fear of the Lord.

Psalm 49 teaches us the vanity of possessing riches without true understanding.

Psalm 73 is a treatise on spiritual depression, its causes and cure, and the problem of the prosperity of the wicked.

Psalm 91 describes the benefits and blessings of those who trust in the Lord and walk closely with him.

Psalm 103 enumerates the Lord's love and faithfulness to his people in all states and conditions of life.

Psalm 104 contains a study of the providence of God over all his creatures.

Psalm 139 is a meditation on the omniscience and omnipresence of God.

Surely one lesson which comes out of all these teaching Psalms, is that the quality of our praying and praising is directly linked to our understanding of spiritual truth. One definition of a Christian is that he is a teachable person, not

opinionated. The growing Christian is a learning Christian, a true disciple. God keep us from the sin of unteachableness!

11. Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving

As we have already seen, the majority of the Psalms have some part which is devoted to praise or thanksgiving. In all cases where the Psalmist bursts out in praise it is for a definite reason. He may be giving praise to God for his works in creation and providence (e.g. Psalms 65, 103, 104, 147) or his sovereignty over the nations (e.g. Psalms 47, 96, 99, 113). The Psalmist's cause of praise is sometimes for a great deliverance (e.g. 18, 34, 46, 116) or in remembrance of God's mighty acts of redemption towards his people (e.g. 48, 98, 105). Sometimes praise is the outcome of forgiven sin as in some of the penitential Psalms. In some Psalms there are two or more themes which are the basis of praise. A few Psalms are totally devoted to praise (e.g. Psalms 100, 150).

The praise of the Psalms is always thoughtful and rational, never mechanical or trivial. Whenever there is an ascription of praise there is always the underlying concept of the majesty of the Lord, who is being praised.

12. Messianic Psalms

In a sense almost all the Psalms, like much of the rest of Scripture, bear some relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ; but there are some Psalms that clearly prophesy some aspect of the work of Christ or of his kingdom. This

understanding of these Psalms is to be found in the teaching of the apostles as they bore witness to the saving work of Christ (Acts 2:25 - 36). These Messianic Psalms, written mostly by King David, do not only concern his own experiences, but have sections which can only have their fulfilment in the life, sufferings, death, resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah.

Psalm 16. This Psalm, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost, speaks of the humanity of Christ, the recognition of his human frailty, his need of protection so that he could carry out his work and his confidence that death would not be able to hold him, but that he would ascend finally to the right hand of his Father when his work on earth was completed.

Psalm 22. There can be no doubt that this Psalm clearly describes the sufferings of Christ, particularly upon the cross. It is, I understand, a very graphic description of what is experienced by someone who is being crucified. The opening words of the Psalm were actually used by our Lord when he was being crucified (see Matthew 27:46).

Psalm 40. This Psalm emphasizes the role of the Messiah as One who would suffer in obedience to the will of his Father. But like other passages of Scripture which speak of Christ's sufferings, this Psalm has also given great comfort to God's people in their sufferings, particularly when those sufferings have been for righteousness' sake.

Psalm 45 considers the kingdom of Christ under the beautiful allegory of marriage. Christ is the king and the Church is his bride. This theme is also developed more fully in the Song of Solomon and appears in the writings of Paul and John.

Psalm 118: 22 and 23 is quoted by our Lord as referring to himself (see Matthew 21:42). The emphasis in this Psalm has shifted from suffering to deliverance and triumph.

Although Psalm 24 was almost certainly written for the occasion of the bringing of the ark up to Jerusalem, it also depicts the glorious entrance of the victorious Messiah into heaven after his battle with sin and death.

The notes of the triumph and prosperity of Messiah's kingdom are echoed in Psalms 2 and 72 and 110. In Psalms 2 and 110 the imagery is more of a military nature of the Messiah subduing his enemies. In Psalm 72, written by Solomon, the extension of Christ's kingdom is put in more peaceful terms. But both aspects are true; there are times when the kingdom of Christ suffers violence and others when it advances in a more peaceful manner. The hymns, 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed' and 'Jesus shall reign', are both based on Psalm 72.

13. The Imprecatory Psalms

These are Psalms or parts of Psalms, which express the desire to see God's enemies defeated and crushed - hence

the name imprecatory, or cursing Psalms. There are about seventeen Psalms which have a section where the Psalmist is praying for vengeance upon his, and God's enemies. The following are a few examples:

52:5,6; 58:10; 59:12,13; 68:1,2,21,23; 79:12; 83:17; 94:1-3; 109; 129:5; 137:8,9.

We cannot ignore these passages, even though we might be surprised to see them in the Word of God. Indeed there are other parts of the Bible where similar passages are found so as we begin considering these cursing Psalms we will consider some of these.

(i) Other Biblical Woes and Curses

First, there are other parts of the Old Testament where the people of God rejoice over the destruction of their enemies. An example is when they were delivered from Pharaoh and his army, who were drowned in the sea. But second, it is not only the Old Testament that has this strand of thought; it is also found in the New Testament. At the end of our Lord's ministry we find him pronouncing woe after woe upon the Scribes and Pharisees and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Matthew 23). He also pronounced woes upon those cities which had largely rejected his teaching. The Apostle Paul pronounces a double curse on those who preach another gospel (Galatians 1:8 - 9). The same Apostle speaks in a similar vein about Alexander the metalworker (2 Timothy 4:14 - 15). Then there are the woes of Revelation and

perhaps most surprising of all some of the praises of the redeemed in heaven (Revelation 19:1 - 3). So if you and I are going to be among that multitude praising God for taking vengeance upon his enemies, then we need to come to terms with this strand of teaching which is unmistakably woven into the whole Bible.

(ii) An Apparent Contradiction

The main problem with these passages is that there seems to be a conflict with other aspects of the Bible's teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord tells us to love our enemies (see Matthew 5:43 - 48). How can we square that with those woes and curses, which also fell from his lips? We are going to try and answer the question by putting forward the following principles:

(a) We are never to take personal revenge for personal wrongs. The whole thrust of the cursing passages is that they are against those who oppose God, his kingdom and his work. Even when David pronounces against those who have attacked him without a cause, he is speaking as the judicial head of God's Covenant People. But he refused to take personal revenge upon Saul, even though he could have done so.

(b) The God of the Bible is a God of justice as well as love and to all those who refuse his love will be meted out his justice and vengeance. That is a Biblical fact

which sensitive souls recoil from. We may not like the doctrine, but we resist it at our peril.

(c) God's temporal judgements are meant to have a good effect upon his enemies, to bring them to their senses so that they might repent and find mercy. God may choose to send nearly 1000 people to a sudden and violent death in order to awaken others that they may repent and be saved. God's ways are inscrutable; we dare not sit in judgement upon them.

(d) These Psalms like other sections of the Psalter have a prophetic aspect in that they reveal the final attitude of great David's Greater Son, who will execute vengeance upon all his enemies. Are we longing and praying for the return of Jesus Christ? Then we are praying for him to destroy all his enemies (2 Thessalonians 1:6 - 10).

14. Psalm 119

(i) The Structure of this Psalm

A cursory glance at this Psalm shows it to be unique among all the rest. As we can see in our Bibles, each section or stanza of the Psalm is headed by one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. What we cannot see in the English translation is that each of the eight verses of a stanza also begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Various explanations have been put forward as to why this elaborate acrostic form was used. To an Israelite it may have assisted

memory, but this cannot have been the primary reason for its use. A more satisfactory explanation is that the theme which the writer is expounding is so important that it demanded the use of the full power of language and this alphabetical structure is a symbol of that fact.

Each stanza has eight verses. The likely reason for this is the use of eight different Hebrew words which describe the word of God. Six of the stanzas use all eight words and the rest never use less than six. These words appear in a different order in each stanza. In our television and 'Comic Strip' age this elaborate construction may seem artificial, but anyone who has become acquainted with the Psalm will testify to a spiritual freshness and devotion in it which is as far from artificial as it is possible to be.

(ii) The Theme of the Psalm

As we have already seen, this Psalm is a meditation on the Word of God in its many facets and aspects. One could regard the Psalm as an elaboration of the theme of Psalm 19:7 - 13. As we examine the Psalm we find two main aspects of God's Word:

- (i) God's instructions for living, which call for obedience.
- (ii) God's promises to his servants which call for faith.

Most of the verses of the Psalm are in the form of personal prayers. Just as the Psalmist is devoted to the Word of God, so too is he devoted to the God of that Word. He is honest about his waywardness and sinfulness, and is acquainted with and has submitted to God's corrective chastening. He also identifies God's spiritual enemies as his own.

(iii) Testimonies to this Psalm

Philip Henry, the father of the commentator Matthew Henry, advised his children to take a verse of this Psalm each morning and meditate upon it during the day and so to go over the Psalm twice in a year. *“That will bring you to be in love with all the rest of Scripture.”* It certainly proved to be the case for his son Matthew.

Martin Luther prized this Psalm so highly that he would not exchange the whole world for one leaf of it.

Henry Venn wrote of it to a friend: *“I know not any part of Scripture much more profitable. This is the Psalm I have often had recourse to when I could find no spirit of prayer in my own heart, and at length the fire was kindled and I could pray.”*

The pioneer missionary Henry Martyn expressed similar sentiments in his journal: *“In the evening I grew better by reading Psalm 119, which generally brings me into a spiritual frame of mind.”*

William Wilberforce speaks of an occasion when walking in Hyde Park, London in which he went over the whole of the 119th Psalm, *“with great comfort”*.

We could add to these testimonies from the writings of many others. Let us be challenged by these saints of a previous era to follow in their train and use this Psalm as well as the rest of Scripture much more than we do, and in so doing we shall know the increased blessing of God upon our lives.

15. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Psalms

We have already looked at some of the Psalms which contain definite Messianic predictions and therefore which obviously found their fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah. There is, however, more Christology to be found in the Psalms without distortion of the meaning of the text.

The Psalms had a significant part to play in Christ's spiritual development and his understanding of his role as Messiah.

Our Lord never went to the Rabbinical Schools; he was self-taught. As a child he would have learned much of the Scriptures by heart. Along with all other children from godly Jewish families he would have sung the Psalms in the Synagogue worship and on the way up to the festivals at Jerusalem. As he grew physically and in wisdom and knowledge he would have found the Psalms to be

particularly relevant to his understanding of his Messianic mission in the following ways:

(i) Many of David's expressions of innocence and righteousness - although true of David's evangelical obedience, particularly in his relationship to Saul - could only find their complete fulfilment in the sinless life of Jesus. See Psalm 18:22 - 23 and Psalm 26:1 and 6. The words of Psalm 40:8 find an echo in those in John's gospel: *"I do always those things which please the Father."*

(ii) The whole of his teaching was deeply rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures but especially in the Psalms. This comes out very noticeably in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Psalm 37:11).

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Psalm 42:1 - 2).

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Psalm 24:3 - 4).

(iii) Once he began his ministry it wasn't long before he knew what it was to suffer unjustly at the hands of sinners. See Psalm 35:19 and Psalm 59:4.

(iv) As he became conscious of being the sin-bearer, he could identify with the justice of God upon that vast number

of sins, which were being put to his account. See Psalm 38:3 - 4.

(v) The many requests for deliverance in deep distress that occur in the Psalms must have been a great comfort to him in his hour of need in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross. Even quoting Psalm 22 must have been a help to him.

(vi) The future glory of his kingdom as expressed in Psalm 2:8 finds an echo in his prayer of John 17:20, and according to the writer of Hebrews was an incentive to him to finish the awesome task which had been given to him. (Hebrews 12:2.)

These are just some of the ways in which our Lord made the Psalms especially his own. When Christ came in the flesh, he identified himself with God's people and became for them God's Righteous Servant 'par excellence'. So these prayers in the Psalms became his prayers also, and in many ways uniquely so. And the suffering and deliverance of which many of the Psalms speak also found their fulfilment in him.

But these prayers also continue to be the prayers of all those who take up their cross and follow him. As they suffer for his sake, they are filling up to full measure the sufferings which he too experienced while here on earth.

Suggested Sermon Outlines from a selection of the Psalms

The following sermon suggestions are related to a sample of the different types of Psalms.

1. Psalm 1 – The godly and the ungodly

- (a) What the godly man is not like (v1)
- (b) The godly man's spiritual roots (v2)
- (c) The outward marks of inward godliness (v3)
Stability, fruitfulness, consistent profession, spiritual prosperity
- (d) The contrasting hollowness of the ungodly life (v4)
- (e) The final end of both the godly and the wicked (v5)
- (f) The underlying reason for the godly man's salvation (v6)

2. Psalm 32 – The blessedness of forgiven sin

- (a) The happy state of those who experience God's forgiveness (v1-2)
- (b) The effects of unconfessed sin both spiritual and physical – marks of God's displeasure (v3-4)
- (c) The joy of full confession and forgiveness (v5)
- (d) An exhortation to habitual genuine confession of sin to avoid God's displeasure and feel his smile of approval (v 6-7)
- (e) A further warning against the foolishness of being in an unforgiven state (v8-10)

- (f) A final exhortation to rejoicing for God's mercy towards repentant sinners (v11)

3. Psalm 46 – God's sovereign rule over all the earth

- (a) God is with his people in all the extremities of life (v1-3)
- (b) God's sustaining presence among his people (v4-6)
- (c) God's sovereignty over all the nations and all natural disasters (8-9)
- (d) A command to all to submit to God's works and ways (v10)
- (e) The affirmation of God's people of their trust in him (v7 & 11)

4. Psalm 63 – The godly man's desire for God

- (a) Desiring God even when prevented from attending public worship (v1)
- (b) He reflects on previous meetings with God in the sanctuary (v2)
- (c) The assurance of God's love for him provokes praise (v3-4)
- (d) Spiritual food alone can satisfy the hungry soul (v5)
- (e) Meditation on God during wakeful nights (v6)
- (f) Rejoicing in God's keeping and upholding power (v7-8)
- (g) The final destruction of God's enemies (v9-10)
- (h) The godly will rejoice, the ungodly will be silenced (v11)

5. Psalm 73 – Spiritual depression, its causes and cure

- (a) An affirmation of the goodness of God to his people (v1)
- (b) Envy of the prosperity of the ungodly. Though proud, violent, aggressive and scornful of God they seem to prosper (v2-12)
- (c) Is it worth it to be godly and have more troubles than the wicked? (v13-14)
- (d) The foolishness of such thinking (v15-16)
- (e) The final destiny of the wicked (v17-20)
- (f) Envying the prosperous wicked is foolish and sinful (v21-22)
- (g) To have God as our portion outweighs all our temporal troubles (v23-26)
- (h) A final contrast of the godly and the ungodly (v27-28)

6. Psalm 90

- (a) The Lord has always been the dwelling place of the godly (v1)
- (b) This truth will never change because God is eternal (v2)
- (c) By contrast the brevity and frailty of sinful human life (v3-6)
- (d) Man's sin rightly incurs God's wrath (v7-11)
- (e) Numbering our days – the lesson to be drawn from our sinful frailty (v12)
- (f) A prayer for mercy, reviving and blessing (v13-17)

7. Psalm 122 – The great privilege of public worship

- (a) A song of ascents – sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the feasts.
- (b) The joy of going to the house of the Lord
- (c) David was denied this privilege for many years – when on the run from Saul and later from Absalom
- (d) Thrones of the house of David – a reference to the covenant (1Sam 7)
- (e) Jerusalem the centre of God's worship – where the people of God meet together
- (f) Peace is vital to the prosperity of the church

8. Psalm 139 – A study in the omniscience of God

- (a) God knows all our ways, our words and even our thoughts (v1-6)
 - (b) We cannot escape from God's all-seeing and all-knowing presence (7-12)
 - (c) God's omniscience pre-dates our birth (v13-16)
 - (d) If God has so formed each of us, what right have we to kill a child in the womb?
 - (e) Verse 16 a wonderful poetic description of the DNA
 - (f) Yet this all-seeing all-knowing God thinks of his people (v17-18)
 - (g) The head of God's covenant people pronounces against God's enemies (v19-22)
 - (h) A prayer for God to search and know us, reveal any hidden sinful way in us and lead us out of it (v23-24)
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