

Somebody to Love

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[0 : 00] But we're going to be looking at Psalm 45 today, I think one of the most surprising psalms in the Bible, a love song. So turn to Psalm 45 and we'll read it together before I pray.

Page 471 in the Visitor's Bibles. To the choir master, according to Lilies, a mascal of the sons of Korah, a love song.

My heart overflows with a pleasing theme. I address my verses to the king. My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. You are the most handsome of the sons of men.

Grace is poured upon your lips. Therefore, God has blessed you forever. Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty.

In your majesty, ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness. Let your right hand display awesome deeds.

[1 : 12] Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies. The peoples fall underneath you. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces, stringed instruments make you glad. Daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor.

And at your right hand stands the queen in gold of a fear. Hear, O daughter, and consider and incline your ear.

Forget your people and your father's house. And the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him. The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts.

[2 : 15] The richest of the people. All glorious is the princess in her chamber with robes interwoven with gold. In many colored robes, she is led to the king.

With her virgin companions following behind her. With joy and gladness, they are led along as they enter the palace of the king.

In place of your fathers shall be your sons. You will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations.

Therefore, nations shall praise you forever and ever. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray for his help before we come to look at it together.

Father God, as we come now to listen to your word and grow in your grace, we thank you for the wonderful way in which you stooped down to make us your own people.

[3 : 22] We thank you that you are not a God who is cold and distant and tyrannical, like the God worshipped by so many around this world.

But instead, you burn with a holy love for your church. So great that from heaven you sent your son to seek her out to be his own holy bride.

And with his own blood, he bought her. And for her life, he died. What a beautiful and glorious picture that is. So help us, Lord, as we open up this psalm and see our king, our bridegroom revealed.

Turn our hearts to him once again, that we might be given to Christ as a radiant bride without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.

And then send us back out into his world as greater testaments to his wonderful grace. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

[4 : 29] Amen. Well, as we open up Psalm 45, let me present you with a bit of a health warning. Perhaps, like me, you're the sort of Christian who prefers a rather English handshake to a lingering hug.

And if that's you, well, we're about to step outside of our emotional comfort zones. Because Psalm 45 is aiming for the heart.

And it answers a longing which, deep down, I think all of us have known. One of the best songs of the 1970s put it so well that I've taken it as my title.

Can anybody find me somebody to love? Some of us hide from that longing. Others sing about it from the rooftops.

But to every human being who has ever cried out for someone to love, well, here's an ancient psalmist who says, yes. I can find him for you.

[5 : 34] And let me tell you all about him. You see, Psalm 45 is an invitation to celebrate a royal wedding. And perhaps you're not normally the sort of person who puts up the bunting and joins in the fun.

But this is a wedding worth celebrating because the king involved is a king worth loving. Which is why our psalmist's title ends with those three promising words.

A love song. Now, the curious thing is that we'll never know which historical king of Israel was getting married. All that we know is that he stood in David's royal line.

And like all Davidic kings, the light which shines through him reaches its focus on the great king whose reign was still to come.

The praise poured out on this anonymous ruler of Israel spills over and finds deeper fulfillment in another king. And so like the New Testament, we can take this psalm in its very fullest sense as a love song to the Lord Jesus himself.

[6 : 49] But before we begin, there's somebody else to introduce. And that is this love song's very unlikely author. The title tells us he's a son of Korah.

And although that name may not mean a lot to us, Korah was not a name to be proud of. He might have been Israel's most famous rebel.

You can read all about him in the book of Numbers. It's so bad was this man's plotting against Moses that the ground swallowed him up. He was taken by fire.

Him and 250 of his fellow conspirators. Only Korah's sons, Moses tells us, were spared.

And so here we are, hundreds of years later, with a love song to the king written by the descendants of a treasonous rebel.

[7 : 47] Men whose very existence was owed to the Lord's extraordinary grace. So notice how their song begins. It's the praise of a heart overflowing, verse 1, with love for God's gracious king.

Well, his song falls into three parts, marked out by who the psalmist is addressing, who he's singing to. And he starts, of course, by singing to the king himself.

So firstly, in verses 1 to 9, we've got the praiseworthy king. You are the most handsome of the sons of men. Grace is poured upon your lips.

Therefore, God has blessed you forever. Now, you might wonder if our poet is getting a little carried away by the occasion. Is he laying on the poetic license a little bit thick?

Perhaps you remember the poor man whose job it was to paint a flattering portrait of fat old King Henry VIII. We're terribly suspicious, aren't we, these days, of spin. And flattery.

[8 : 52] So what is it then that so convinced our psalmist that this king is the real deal? Well, the poet praises him first for the glory of his personal character.

And then from verse 6, for the immense glory and dignity of his office as God's anointed king. Why does he so deserve our love?

Well, firstly, because his personal character, his grace and his justice and his meek might demand love of us.

Even his speech, the speech of his lips, verse 2, is uniquely gracious. Every utterance, every judgment this king makes is tinged with that attitude of God's own heart.

Remember what they said about Jesus? No one ever spoke like this man. Grace is poured upon his lips and God's blessing is eternally poured upon him, verse 2.

[9 : 55] But he's no precious prince. This is a king who rides out in majesty to fight for his kingdom. The Davidic king is a warrior king.

Yes, verse 4, he's meek. But his meekness or humility is exercised in the cause of truth and righteousness. He comes, verse 3, not to bring peace, but girded with a sword and intent on justice.

By the end of verse 4, the sword is in his right hand. And by verse 5, his hand has taken up the bow, plunging sharp arrows deep into the heart of his enemy.

Let your right hand display awesome deeds, the psalmist sings. And those are deeds which make him somebody to love if you're his friend.

But someone to fear if you're on the wrong side of his justice. So if the talk of royal weddings have conjured up a picture of somebody a bit like Prince Charles, well, it's time to think again.

[11:01] Here is a king who can truly be called both gracious and righteous, meek and all-conquering.

Doesn't he embody everything we long for in a king? So it's no surprise then, is it, that these are just the things that God's eternal king would be known for.

Jesus' character makes him so easy to admire, doesn't it? A character worthy of the throne he sits on. Well, in verse 6, the poetry turns from the glory of his character to the immense glory due to him because of that throne itself.

Think perhaps of the enormous respect with which the people of the United States treat their president, simply because of the dignity of the office he holds. So not only does this king's personal glory demand our love, but his role as God's anointed ruler is worthy of the greatest honor.

So great, in fact, that verse 6 begins by giving him the most breathtaking title ever bestowed on a mortal man. It seems shocking, but we can't smooth the language away.

[12:29] He's still talking to the historical human king of Israel. You see, this real king stood in God's place. He governed the kingdom on God's behalf.

So staggering though it is, it wasn't inappropriate to address him as God. And because he loved the things God loves and governed justly, verse 7, God has lavishly poured out his blessing.

Look at all the anointing oil, the rich fragrance robes, the ivory palaces, the beautiful queen. They're all a sign of the enormous dignity in which the Davidic king stood, a dignity worthy of a son whom God loved.

And yet the poetry does seem to spill over here, doesn't it? Into more glory than any one historical king of Israel could hold.

One writer says it's as if the Old Testament language is bursting its banks at this point. Only one king could ever fully be described like this, couldn't he?

[13:38] One fully human king who is also fully God. And so the writer to the Hebrews had no qualms in using Psalm 45 in just that way.

To what angel did God ever speak like this? But of the son, he says, your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

So there is our praiseworthy king. Not only does his grace and justice and meek might demand our love, but his righteous rule deserves the father's everlasting exaltation and our deepest respect. But before we turn our attention to his queen, let me ask you whether you could join in singing this song so far. There's no need is there to be like the embarrassed footballer, mumbling away the words to the national anthem.

Surely we can sing these words with pride and joy. Here is a king you can love. A king you can praise without restraint.

[14:49] In fact, here is a king you must. You must. But let me ask you what it is you love to praise the Lord Jesus for.

Why do you love this king? Is it for who he is and what he loves? For his grace and his justice and humility?

Or is it really for what he can do for you? It's terribly easy, isn't it, to pretend to sing a love song to the Lord Jesus when in fact we're singing it to ourselves.

And the truth is that we don't really love these qualities very often, do we? That's why so often they're not the things we look for in our own leaders. And yet these are the reasons why the father has set his son upon the throne.

And our psalmist thinks that they are the most lovable qualities in the world. Well, with the thought of the royal ladies of honor and the beautiful queen, the psalmist turns to address the bride herself.

[15:57] There she is in verse 9 at the king's right hand. And so secondly, in verses 10 to 15, all eyes are on her, the people's princess.

Hear, O daughter, and consider and incline your ear. Well, what advice would you give to a young woman about to marry a king like this?

Perhaps you can picture her. She's got the dress picked out. We don't actually see it until verse 13, but it won't disappoint. The truth is, though, it's an anxious time, isn't it?

Especially if you're about to marry into the royal family. She's got a new beginning ahead of her, but there's also an old life coming to an end. She'll need to leave her old loyalties behind and cleave to her new love.

So she has to know, doesn't she, that what she has to gain will be far more than she loses. And that is just how the psalmist encourages her.

[16:59] Hear, O daughter, and consider and incline your ear. Take my advice. Forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty.

It's an echo of the very first marriage, isn't it? A new love brings new loyalties. It means to leave the old behind and cleave to her king.

And so her life now will be to love, honor, and obey this husband. Since he is your Lord, verse 11, bow to him.

But if that is the cost to her, just look at what's to gain, verse 11. This king will be enthralled by your beauty.

Isn't that a staggering thought? And look at the dignity and status that come with belonging to him. Wedding gifts flood in from far and wide, verse 12.

[18:00] Even the rich and powerful people of Tyre. She matters now, not just to Israel, but to all the peoples of the world. So submitting to him means a new name and a new identity and a worth that this queen never had before.

Bowing to God's king is the most wonderful thing in the world. And so at last comes the wedding itself in verses 13 to 15.

The people's princess transformed into a glorious queen. Robed in gold and leading these virgin bridesmaids in a long wedding procession.

And do you see how the excitement mounts in verse 14 as she's led to the king? Perhaps you can imagine the drama, the music and the choirs and the craning necks as she walks down the aisle.

And what's the climax? The greatest reward of turning her back on the old life? Well, verse 15. It's the joy and gladness of finally being united to her king.

[19:12] And there is the difference between Psalm 45 and a fairy tale. You see, we normally watch a royal wedding, don't we? Safe in the knowledge that it will never be me.

That's what makes it a fairy tale. But we don't quite read this psalm in the same way. Because in one very important sense, this bride truly is the people's princess.

Yes, somebody just like ordinary you and I. Because like this bride, like every believer down the age, you and I are called to leave our old loyalties behind.

And to be united with Christ and to share in the wonderful glory that belongs to him alone. And just like her, the message to us is don't look back.

Bowing the knee to the new love of King Jesus means leaving the old behind, but gaining far, far more. Now, I don't know what old loyalties hold you back from doing that and submitting fully to this Lord.

[20:26] But my guess is they're not anything particularly unusual and probably not too different to mine. But the point that I'm sure you'd agree on is that a husband like this deserves the undivided hearts of his people.

He deserves our full, loving loyalty. And verse 11 is stronger than that, isn't it? The challenge to this bride is to honor him as her Lord.

Giving him not just our hearts, but our lives and obedience. And if we see that as a chore, then bowing the knee won't come easily, will it?

But if, like our psalmist, our hearts overflow with his gracious love, then everything changes.

With joy and gladness, verse 15, they're led along as they enter his palace. Well, finally, like any good royalist, the poet turns his attention from the wedding to the marriage bed and children.

[21:35] And so lastly, in the final two verses, he sings the song of God's perpetual promise. You see, like it or not, this was always going to be a very public marriage.

Because the Davidic sex life, the marriage bed of Israel's king matters to everybody. The future, not just of Israel, but of the whole kingdom of God, was bound up in this king's heirs.

So if you think Will and Kate felt the pressure with the tabloids endlessly speculating, well, just imagine this. Think of the lengths that kings have gone to down the ages to protect their line.

Six miserable marriages for Henry VIII, and still it didn't work. But not for this couple. For the third time in this psalm, we're reassured that the reign of this king will last forever and ever.

The future of Christ's kingdom is safe in God's hands. In place of your fathers shall be your sons, verse 16, and you will make them princes in all the earth.

[22 : 52] I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations. Therefore, nations shall praise you forever and ever. Well, I wonder what you make of this king.

It's an important question, you see, because if there was any doubt left, that perpetual promise makes him very relevant indeed. If this was simply a love song to a long-dead historical figure, well, we could admire it politely in the way that a scholar admires a precious manuscript, gently handling it with cotton gloves.

But these last two verses won't let us do that, will they? They tell us that this is not a king we can hide from or admire safely from a distance.

Because at this very moment, he is sitting on the throne, a prince over all the earth. Not a precious prince, but one armed with a sword who will someday soon subdue every last opponent.

And for some of us here, that may still be a day to think of with dread. But for these rebel sons, our psalmists, it was a day to sing of with great joy.

[24 : 20] A day when every former rebel and enemy who has looked on Christ in love will be robed in splendor and led to the king.

So if that is us, then what should this king's rule over our lives look like now? Let's remember as we close how love worked on our psalmist.

I think if we listen to his song, you can see it changing his heart and his mind and his will. His heart is bursting over, isn't it, with praise for this king.

To serve a king like this is a joyful duty, not a chore. Christ is a king we can serve with valor and honor and pride.

But his mind, too, is learning to love the things that he loves. Grace and justice and truth.

[25 : 23] And his will has been moved, hasn't it? Like the princess to bow to a new lord. To leave behind old loyalties.

For the surpassing worth of this king's delight. So let's listen to his song. And to the psalmist's plea to us.

Behold your king, he says. Bow to him. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our king and we are your people.

Thank you, Lord, that in your humility, you, the king of heaven, were glorified on a cross instead of a throne. And crowned with thorns instead of honor.

Thank you, Lord, that you arose victorious and that you will come again, not in weakness, but in power and majesty.

[26 : 27] And that every knee will bow before you. And thank you, Lord, that we whom you have redeemed can look forward to that day with great joy.

And by your grace can serve you now with gladness. Help us, Lord, to be good and faithful subjects to the glory of your name.