

## Young People's Forum (III 12)

Dear Young People,

You will recall that last time I mentioned that the Psalms are so very useful and relevant for singing because in them one finds a "spiritual biography" of every Christian. It was only the other day when my wife and I were reading a Psalm (I do not recall which one we were reading) when at the end she said, with something like amazement in her look, "We can always find ourselves in the Psalms!" How true that is.

But we find ourselves in the Psalms **as Christians**. The Psalms are for the people of God, not for everyone. It reminds me of an incident in the life of a minister. He was speaking on the infallible inspiration of Scripture. During the question hour, one young and cocky university student, mockingly said to him, "How can you talk about a Bible that is word for word God's word, when the Bible is full of mistakes, contradictions and obvious falsehoods?" The minister replied, "You cannot understand because you are opening someone else's mail." He meant, of course, the Bible is God's letter to his people and you are not one of God's people.

The Psalms are a "spiritual" biography. They describe a Christian in every part of his life. I want to show that to you presently, but first there is another point I want to make. When you stop to think about it, there are three different people who are singing these Psalms.

The first singer is David, or the other Psalmists: Moses (Psalm 90), Asaph (Psalm 73), Ethan (Psalm 89), and others. Some we do not even know. Psalm 137 was sung while Judah was in captivity in Babylon; but we do not know who wrote it. David wrote most of them.

When these poets and sweet singers were writing these songs, they were writing about their own experiences and describing their own spiritual life. David was sitting by his father's sheep when he wrote Psalm 23; and he was running away from Saul and tried to find a place of safety in Philistia when he sang Psalm 34. Most of the Psalms were composed for singing in the temple by choirs. The priests in the temple sang these songs. That is what is meant by "a Psalm for the sons of Asaph." Sometimes these priests would even sing antiphonally as, for example, Psalm 136, in which song one choir of priests would sing the first line of each verse, and another choir would respond with the words, "For his mercy endureth forever."

Some Psalms were written for special occasions. Psalm 72 was written to be sung at Solomon's coronation. Psalm 68 was sung at the time when the ark was taken from the house of Obededom and brought to Jerusalem. Psalm 84 was sung by the people of Israel on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover or some other feast day. As the crowd, which started in the northern tribes, moved southward, people from other tribes would join them and the song grew louder and more joyful the closer they got to Jerusalem. Psalm 137 was the sad and plaintive song of the captives in far-off Babylon. Their captors wanted them to sing the songs of Zion. But they could not, and they hung their harps on the willows. Why couldn't they sing the songs of Zion? Well, simply because all the songs of Zion spoke of Christ who was to come; and Christ couldn't come if the church was in Babylon. Micah had said that Christ had to be born in Bethlehem, and Bethlehem was in Palestine. And so:

O, Zion fair, God's holy hill,  
Wherein our God delights to dwell, Let my right hand forget her skill  
If I forget to love thee well. If I do not remember thee  
Then let my tongue from utterance cease, If any earthly joy to me  
Be dear as Zion's joy and peace (Psalter 379).

One more thing about the Psalms is important. Throughout the Psalms reference is made to the enemies of the Psalmist or of the nation. These were, of course, the enemies that surrounded Israel and destroyed the land and the people. Moab, Edom, Syria and Philistia were such nations. But they are also, in the typical Old Testament, the enemies of every child of God: physical and spiritual. David recognized this too and often spoke of these enemies as threats to his **soul**. He calls them threats to his soul because they were spiritual threats that sometimes nearly destroyed him spiritually.

If we know these things and are acquainted with the history and culture of the Israelites then every time we sing these songs, we think of Israel and the saints in the Old Testament church, and we sing with them

But there is another One who sang these Psalms. And that is our Lord Jesus Christ. There are really three reasons for this.

The first reason is that the Psalms were infallibly inspired by the Spirit of Christ. The result is that Christ himself is speaking in the Psalms There are certain Psalms, which Scripture itself refer to Christ. This does not mean that these Psalms do not refer to the Psalmists, but they refer to the Psalmists by referring to Christ – and reminding us that the Psalmists could speak Christ's words, because they belonged to Christ. (I will come back to this later.)

It is striking and important that there were two main events in Christ's life of which the Psalms especially speak: Christ's sufferings and his glorification. The Psalms do this because Christ sufferings and glorification were the two most important events in his life. Philippians 2:6-11 tell us this in a very beautiful and powerful way.

Nevertheless, other events in Christ's life are also referred to. There is even a rather oblique reference to Christ's lowly birth in Psalm 8:6: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." This refers, of course, to Adam in Paradise, but Scripture tells us that it also refers to Christ. Hebrews 2 is emphatic about this. In verses 6, 7 the Scriptures say, "But one in a certain place (That is, the Psalmist in Psalm 8) testified, saying, "What is man that thou are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels." And in verse 9 the text says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." Both in the Psalms and in Hebrews 2 these references are followed by a description of Christ's exaltation.

So, in the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem Christ was made a little lower than the angels.

We will have to wait to discuss this further until the next installment.

With love in the Lord,  
Prof