

IN RESPONSE - SINGING ABOUT CHRIST, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

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One of the most frequent contemporary criticisms raised against the exclusive use of the Psalms of the Old Testament in worship concerns Jesus the redeemer. The criticism sounds something like this, "I want to sing about Jesus." Or, as stated by a well known systematic theologian, in words to this effect, "When we sing the psalms, we don't sing about Jesus." Of course the psalms speak about Jesus Christ in abundant terms.

Examination of the statement may show critics want to use the English word "Jesus" in their singing. This may be for several reasons. First, contemporary evangelicalism wants to set a familiar, brotherly, hyper-friendly, Jesus before the world. Hence the desire to use the familiar name, Jesus. It's similar to calling our friends by their first names. And after all, Jesus is our best friend.

Second, our culture loathes the authoritarian. Evangelicals therefore give us Jesus. He is the Savior (Matthew 1:21). Bowing before the absolute Lordship of Christ is unpopular at best. This is true even though salvation depends upon it (Romans 10:9).

Third, our lack of biblical knowledge and of biblical history, our lack in understanding biblical imagery, our simple lack in knowing the various biblical names for God, and how God reveals Himself in Scripture prejudice us against singing the Psalms. The terrain is unfamiliar.

Fourth, we are in love with love. We love to sing love songs. Much contemporary Christian music involves singing love songs to Jesus. In some cases the difference between a human lover and Jesus is unknown and unseen. Debbie Boone sang, "To know Him is to love Him." Others picked up the words and the tune and sang "To know him is to love him." The Psalms are certainly not traditional love songs.

Fifth, contemporary evangelicalism celebrates celebration. Celebration and praise and the use of choruses is in. The traditional, including traditional hymnody, is out. Psalmody smacks of the old and the out of style. It is just too staid and sedate. It is too traditional.

Finally, there is a great desire to be New Testament in orientation. This has led some churches to cast off the Old Testament entirely and led others in a charismatic direction where people can participate in "the operation of the gifts."

However, one of the things to note about the church in the New Testament was its utter reliance upon the Old Testament, particularly the psalms, and its reliance on Old Testament concepts and images, such as those expressed in the Psalms, to speak about Christ.

It is therefore fitting to examine the use of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalter, in the New Testament. From this study we hope to glean New Testament principles with regard to speaking and singing about Christ. I trust we shall see there is a biblical approach to speaking and singing about Christ. I trust we shall also see the contemporary insistence on the use of the English word "Jesus" in singing is misplaced.

We begin with two psalms frequently quoted in the New Testament, Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Hebrews 5:5-6 quotes portions from both psalms. "So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'; just as He says also in another passage 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" God the Father appointed God the Son to an eternal priesthood with the words, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (Psalm 2:7). The Father pronounced the Son a member of a unique priesthood with these words: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

To sing these psalms is therefore to sing about the great act of God in establishing Christ as the eternal high priest of our confession. We should sing these psalms with this in mind and with the work of Christ in mind.

Acts 13:32-33 also quotes Psalm 2:7. "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My

Son; today I have begotten You.' God raised up His Son and anointed Him a priest above His fellows accompanied by a grand pronouncement. Matthew 3:16-17, "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'"

It was this anointing as priest which identified Jesus to John and to the world. The John 1:29-37 explains,

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

The Father identified Jesus as the lamb who takes away the sins of the world by anointing Him with the Holy Spirit. When we sing from Psalm 2 and from Psalm 110, all of this is in the background. We sing of Christ. We sing of what God has done in Christ. We do so with Holy Spirit inspired words. Next, we will conclude our short look at Psalm 2 and continue our study of Psalm 110.

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IN RESPONSE - SINGING ABOUT CHRIST, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

Hebrews 1:4-5 compares Christ with angels and quotes Psalm 2:7. "Having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'?" Psalm 2:7 speaks of Christ. The New Testament consistently uses this psalm portion to refer to the Savior. If the inspired writers of the New Testament use Psalm 2:7 in this way, we should learn to use Psalm 2:7 similarly.

After a notable miracle, the Jewish hierarchy put Peter and John in jail. Upon their release, the church in Jerusalem heard the apostle's report. Acts 2:24-28 relates the church's response utilizing Psalm 146:6 and Psalm 2:1-2.

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them," who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ." For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

The church in Jerusalem, under the leadership of the apostles and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies Psalm 2:1-2 to the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. To be truly New Testament in orientation therefore require the similar use of Psalm 2:1-2. This quote of Psalm 2:1-2 is from the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. This Greek translation uses the Name *Christ* for the familiar Hebrew *Messiah*. The psalm therefore definitely speaks of Christ our Lord. When we sing this portion of the psalm, we sing of Christ. We sing about the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of Christ with inspired words and with biblical terminology.

We now return to Psalm 110. Verses 1 and 4 are quoted in Hebrews. Psalm 110:1 is used just like Psalm 2:7. Hebrews 1:13, "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'?" There is an allusion to Psalm 110:1 in 1 Corinthians 15:25. Christ presently sits at the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high (Hebrews 8:1). "He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." No angel rules in heaven. No angel sits on the throne of the King. Jesus Christ sits enthroned as King.

As already mentioned, Hebrews 5:6 quotes Psalm 110:4 as does Hebrews 7:17 and 21. Hebrews 7:15-22 says,

And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever'"); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

So it is that Psalm 110:4 speaks of Jesus, the priest representing an indestructible priesthood and the guarantor of a better covenant. This is so plain that we should sing the psalm without qualm realizing its divine origin and giving voice to its divine message.

Jesus himself quotes Psalm 110:1 in His disputations with the Pharisees.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "The son of David." He

said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet'?" If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question (Matthew 22:41-46, see also Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44).

Jesus Christ speaks of Himself in terms of Psalm 110:1. Christ emphasizes His office as King and His title of Lord. He asks the Pharisees and He asks us a very good question. "How does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord'?" The answer is clear. Christ *is* Lord.

The apostle Paul plainly tells us, this is the basic Christian confession. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Who is this Lord? Paul tells us. "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Paul quotes Joel 2:32. The *Lord* in Joel 2:32 is *Jehovah*. Paul equates Jesus and Jehovah. They are one and the same. Jesus Christ affirms this in His use of Psalm 110:4.

The apostle Peter uses Psalm 110:4 to preach Christ. We break into Peter's sermon with Acts 2:32-36.

This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.

We continue in the next lesson by looking at Peter's point in using Psalm 110:4.

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IN RESPONSE - SINGING ABOUT CHRIST, PART 3

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How does Peter use Psalm 110? David wrote the psalm. But it was not David who ascended bodily into heaven. David speaks of Christ. Peter shows this is the case. First he quotes the psalm. “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (Psalm 110:4). Then Peter concludes his message with these words, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

The sovereign God ordained Jesus as both King over all and the Messiah of Israel. Jesus Christ is therefore both King and Priest. Psalm 110 explains this. Psalm 110, as Psalm 2, lays the center and core of redemption before us in graphic terms. These psalms set forth Jesus Christ as the crucified, risen, ascended, reigning Lord. These psalms are worthy of use in worship before God because, in short compass, they give us the gospel message in inspired form.

As Psalm 2 refers to the trial of Christ, Jesus alludes to Psalm 110 in His trial. “The high priest said to Him, ‘I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (Matthew 26:63-64). Mark 14:61-62 says, “Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One? And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’” And Luke 22:69 adds, “From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

The concept, *seated at the right hand*, comes from Psalm 110:1. William Hendriksen gives this analysis of Jesus’ words and use of the psalm.

Jesus is looking down history’s lane. He sees the miracles of Calvary, the resurrection, the ascension, the coronation at the Father’s right hand (‘the right hand of Power,’ that is, ‘of the Almighty’), Pentecost, the glorious re-

turn on the clouds of heaven, the judgment day, all rolled into one, manifesting his power and glory.”¹

In referring to Psalm 110:1, our Lord Jesus presents the gospel. The central issue is that Jesus is Lord and Christ. This is Jesus’ claim. This is the apostle’s message. The Jewish people reject Him. The Gentiles, through Pilate, reject Him. Why? It is because of His claim and His message. Jesus and the apostles make the claim and preach the message using Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. These psalms present the heart of the gospel. To sing them is to sing of Christ. We proclaim the gospel when we sing these psalms.

Psalm 22 is another psalm of which there are frequent New Testament allusions and uses. The psalm begins with the cry, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” Jesus utters these words of agony on the cross when under the crushing wrath of God. “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46). The parallel is Mark 15:34. “At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Mark 15:34). Psalm 22 is therefore a song of Christ centering on the crucifixion, Christ’s work on behalf of sinners.

John 19:24 quotes Psalm 22:18. “So they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be’; this was to fulfill the Scripture: ‘They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.’” The gospel calls the action of the soldiers at the foot of the cross a clear fulfillment of prophecy. Psalm 22:18 says, “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” The synoptic gospels all contain allusions to this prophecy. Matthew 27:35, “And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.” Mark 15:24, “And they

crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.” Luke 23:34 “But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.”

The third direct quote of the Psalm 22 is of verse 22, “I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.” Hebrews 2:10-12 speaks of Christ using the psalm.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.”

Hebrews puts the words of Psalm 22 in the mouth of Jesus just as Jesus takes these words to Himself.

Psalm 22 also describes various aspects of the scene at the cross. For example, verses 7-8, “All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.’” Matthew describes Christ’s crucifixion. “And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads (Matthew 27:39). Matthew 27:41-43 adds,

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Before looking at other psalms quoted in the New Testament, we draw some preliminary conclusions about psalmody.

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¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 932-933.

IN RESPONSE - PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

by Dennis Prutow

When we sing psalms, we sing of what God has done in history using biblical imagery rather than twentieth century sentimentalism. Psalm 2 is a prime example. To be sure, many modern uninspired hymns rehearse biblical themes and history. It seems, however, hymns often center more on sentimental feelings rather than upon history. Here is the first stanza of "The Old Rugged Cross."

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;/
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain./
So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;/
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown.¹

Compare Psalm 2, stanzas 1 and 2.

Why do heathen nations rage? Why do peoples folly mind?/
Kings of earth in plots engage, Rulers are in league combined;/
Then against Jehovah high, and against Messiah's sway/"
Let us break their bands," they cry, "Let us cast their cords away."/
But the Lord will scorn them all/He will laugh who sits on high./
Then His wrath will on them fall; Sore displease He will reply:"
Yet according to my will I have set my King to reign,/
And on Zion's holy hill My Anointed I'll maintain."²

Although the subject matter in both these hymns is similar, the crucifixion, the tone and approach to the subject are quite different. In the uninspired hymn, emphasis is on an object, the cross. We see the object. This brings good feelings. We like the hymn because of the sentiments it expresses. In the inspired hymn, there is emphasis upon human rebellion, God's judgment, God's decrees, and God's Anointed established as King. It is not too subtle a shift in emphasis that may make us uncomfortable if we are unprepared to acknowledge human depravity

and divine sovereignty. In the former hymn, the cross is an object of my emotional attachment. In the latter hymn, emphasis is upon what God has done in history based upon His eternal decree.

Psalm 2 also presents Christ as Lord and King as does Psalm 110. What is the basic Christian confession? "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). These psalms do not use the name Jesus. Why? "The man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5), is God's anointed King. Scripture stress is upon the kingship of Christ. Salvation comes in acknowledging Christ as Lord.

Popular hymns emphasize the name Jesus. "Jesus is the sweetest name I know, And He's just the same as His lovely name, And that's the reason why I love Him so; Oh, Jesus is the sweetest name I know."³ The stress is sentimental.

Philippians 2:9-11 speaks very positively of the name of Jesus. "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." You must bow before Jesus. If you do not bow willingly before Jesus in this life, you will bow unwillingly in the life to come. Christ is Lord. Compare Psalm 110:1-3.

Jehovah to my Lord has said, "Sit Thou at My right hand/Until I make Thy foes a stool Whereon Thy feet may stand."/
Jehovah shall from Zion send The scepter of Thy power./
In battle with Thine enemies Be Thou the conqueror.//
A willing people in Thy day of power shall come to Thee./
Thy youth arrayed in holiness Like morning dew shall be./
Jehovah swore, and from His oath He never will depart:"
Of the order of Melchizedek A priest Thou ever art."⁴

Again, the psalm stresses the divine decree, the present rule, and reign of Christ.

Psalm 110:3 is the proof text used by the Westminster Divines to support the work of Christ as King in the answer to question 26 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "How doth Christ execute the office of king?" He subdues us to Himself.⁵

Popular hymnody does include emphasis upon the Lordship of Christ. "Crown him with many crowns, The lamb upon the throne;/
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns All music but its own;/
Awake, my soul and sing Of him who died for thee,/
And hail him as thy matchless King Through all eternity."⁶ Surely we do not crown Christ King. The hymn does however acknowledge Christ is Lord. Yet unbelievers do not have the native ability to bow before Christ as King. Christ subdues them to Himself.⁷ Does the hymn refer to 1 Peter 3:15, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts"? The hymn sends a mixed signal.

Psalm 110 also presents Christ as priest. This great High Priest *brings us to God*. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Compare another familiar hymn. "There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins./
And sinners, plunged beneath the flood, Lose all their guilty stains...."⁸ Stress in the inspired hymn is more upon the person of Christ, particularly His offices of King and Priest. The Westminster Catechisms follow this lead and present the gospel in terms of Christ's offices of prophet, priest and king. Subtle and slight shifts in emphasis in our hymnody alter our theology and turn our sentiments away from biblical and gospel priorities. The inspired hymnody of the psalms inevitably presents biblical truth more faithfully and fully than uninspired hymns and songs.

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¹ *Armed Forces Hymnal* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, n.d.), 210.

² *The Book of Psalms for Singing* (Pittsburgh: The Board of Education and Publication, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1980), 2.

³ *Favorite Hymns of Praise* (Chicago: Tabernacle Publishing Company, 1968), 36.

⁴ *The Book of Psalms for Singing*, 110.

⁵ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q & A 26, Psalm 110:3.

⁶ *Trinity Hymnal* (Philadelphia: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1961), 216.

⁷ See note 5.

⁸ *Trinity Hymnal*, 188.