

Anticipating the Wedding to End All Weddings (Psalm 45)

Psalms: Pour Out Your Heart to Him

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The world is filled with songs and stories of relationships and romance and love.

- 76% of Taylor Swifts songs are about these themes.
- If we go back a generation of two, the Mic Jagger was singing “Time is on my side, yes it is... you'll come running back to me.”
- The Eagles sang about the girl on the corner of Winslow, Arizona.
- Fleetwood Mac’s songs are basically only about relational drama.
- One of my favorite Bob Seger songs describes him looking a woman he loves and thinking, “Someday lady you'll accomp'ny me.”
- Buddy Holly sings to Peggy Sue and says, “oh how my heart yearns for you.”

Then we could turn to movies, of course.

And what’s also peculiar is how important weddings are to cultures. And Royal weddings are an even bigger deal. Prince Charles’ and Princess Diana’s wedding was a global event. 750 million people watched it on TV. Two million people lined the streets of London for the procession. Most of the leaders of Europe attended. The UK made it a national holiday. Her dress even set a new standard for wedding fashion.

Why is all this so important to us?

Because history is a romance story that is moving toward a cosmic, royal wedding.

The Bible begins and ends with a wedding—Adam and Eve in the beginning, and Christ and the Church at the end.

In between these weddings is a romance story. One of the main images Bible uses to describe God’s relationship with his people is a marriage. The Bible story is God pursuing his wayward spouse, bringing her back, and making her eternally happy.

All the longings in the human heart, all the love songs, all the songs of the pain of broken relationships—all of it exists because we are part of this story.

This is the very point of history: Christ pursuing and rejoicing in his people, as a perfect husband rejoices over wife. Everything is heading toward the marriage to end all marriages.

And Psalm 45 was written to lead us to long for this eternal marriage.

Psalm 45

To the choirmaster: according to lilies. A maskil of the sons of Korah; a love song.

- 1 My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;
I address my verses to the king;
my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.
- 2 You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you forever.
- 3 Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty!
- 4 In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and
righteousness;
let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!
- 5 Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.
- 6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;
- 7 you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;
- 8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia [casha].
From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;
- 9 daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor;
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.
- 10 Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear:
forget your people and your father's house,
- 11 and the king will desire your beauty.
Since he is your lord, bow to him.
- 12 The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts,
the richest of the people.
- 13 All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with gold.
- 14 In many-colored robes she is led to the king,
with her virgin companions following behind her.
- 15 With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.
- 16 In place of your fathers shall be your sons;
you will make them princes in all the earth.
- 17 I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations;
therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.

We'll walk through this in four steps.

First, we'll see the purpose of this love song. I want to argue that this Psalm really is ultimately about the marriage of Christ and the church. Then, we'll see the praise of the royal king, the beauty of the radiant bride, and the blessing of the eternal union.

1. The Purpose of the Love Song (v. 1)

First, the purpose of the love song.

I want to persuade you that this is a love song about the marriage of Christ and the church.

The superscription, or heading, calls this “a love song.” It's a love song about a wedding, and verse 1 says it's addressed to the king.

The groom is a Davidic king. We may think at first that this is the wedding of someone like Solomon.

But the description is so over-the-top that goes far beyond any ancient king. This song could not describe any king other than Christ. It celebrates a royal wedding in a way that prophetically points ahead to the messiah.

Here are a few examples:

- Verse 2 describes him as the most handsome man in the world and blessed by God forever.
- Verse 6 calls him God, and says his throne is forever.
- And in verse 17, he will receive praise from all nations through all generations.

Here's what it seems is going on:

The Psalmist is meditating on 2 Samuel 7, and the promise of an eternal kingdom from David's line. He is meditating on the promises of the coming messiah who will rule forever. And he believes that when the Messiah comes, he will have a wedding.

He is longing for this king to come, and he is filled with joy as he thinks about him. And so he writes a love-song about the this wedding.

Now, not everyone thinks that's what's going on here.

Some scholars believe that this is just a description of an ancient royal wedding. And it's described with hyperbolic language. But it is not prophetically about the coming Messiah.

C. S. Lewis didn't see it as ultimately about Christ and the church at first. He thought that interpretation was forced and arbitrary. But then he changed his mind.

One reason was because he saw the prominence of the biblical theme of God as the husband of his people—God and Israel in the Old Testament; Christ and the Church in the New. He realized that this is actually a central theme in the Bible, and that Christ came to fulfill this. Jesus came not just as the great king, but as a lover and groom.ⁱ

Lewis is right.

- The covenant between God and Israel in the Old Testament was viewed as a marriage.
- And all through the Old Testament, God speaks of Israel as his spouse.
- And then Jesus came to marry the church as his bride.
- John the Baptist said he was the bridegroom, and he had arrived to receive his bride.ⁱⁱ
- Jesus called himself a bridegroom and he compared his kingdom to a royal wedding feast.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Then Revelation 19 says history culminates with the marriage of Christ and the church.

So, when we put this together, we realize what is most likely going on in this Psalm.

The Psalmist had this hope alive in his mind and heart. He was longing for the true messiah to come through David's line. And he spoke of this messiah's coming marriage.

We don't know all that he intended by the details of this Psalm. But this is the direction he is seeking to move our minds.

So, how is this song supposed to function? Why did he write this Psalm?

He wrote it for God's people to sing. Israel sang this to anticipate the coming royal wedding.

And notice the very last verse: He explains his purpose in writing this Psalm. He is speaking to this king, and he says: "I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever." He wrote this so that all nations would praise this king forever. This is a song of praise to the divine and Davidic king.

So, you and I are invited to use this Psalm to praise him. This is meant for us to read and sing as praise to this king for marrying the church.

So, let's do that as we consider the rest of the song. The purpose of the song is to anticipate the marriage of Christ and the church. So, let's use this Psalm to lead us to do that.

2. The Praise of the Royal King (vv. 2–9)

That's the purpose of the love song. Second, verses 2–9 praise this royal king.

He is praised with idealistic language that goes beyond any merely human king. It could only apply to the Messiah. So, how should we praise Christ as the true, royal king?

- First, we praise him for his compelling beauty in verse 2.

It says, “You are the most handsome of the sons of men.” The word for handsome is “beautiful.” It’s usually used to refer to women, but it can refer to the attractiveness of a man. King David was described with this word when we first meet him in 1 Samuel.^{iv}

The word itself in Hebrew is actually doubled, which is very unusual. The point is that this is an exceptional beauty, beyond any other man who ever lived.^v

The Psalms often used David as a model, or type, or pattern of the coming Messiah. They knew the true Messiah would be like David, but better. So I think he thinking here, “How much more beautiful will the true David be?”

Certainly in Jesus’s first coming, he was overlooked, rejected, and he suffered. Isaiah said he would not have a majesty or beauty that people would be drawn to.^{vi} But, in another sense—it was in his suffering that we see the true beauty of his character. And in his second coming, he *will* be radiant and majestic and he will shine in glory.

- We also praise him for his gracious speech in verse 2.
- And we praise him for his victory in verses 3–5.

He is ready for battle, with the sword on his side. And he will ride out for truth, meekness, and righteousness.

This is a just war if there ever was one. So many wars are fought with lies, pride, and injustice; Jesus conquers with the opposite.

He conquers with truth, not lies.

He conquers with meekness and humility, rather than pride.

And he conquers with righteousness rather than injustice.

- Then we praise him for his throne.

Jesus conquers his enemies, and then he takes his eternal throne. In verse 6 we read the most striking line of the Psalm. This is still addressed to the king, and it says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”

Some argue that this doesn’t mean the king actually *is* God. In the ancient world, the kings were closely identified with the gods. The kings were viewed as the image and likeness of the gods. But as one commentator said, “*Elohim* (which is the Hebrew word for God) does seem to press the limits of adoration of a human king in a religion ruled by the principle of ‘no other god.’”^{vii}

When Jesus came, we see how this could be true. The human king from David's line was also truly God.^{viii} The book of Hebrews, in the first chapter, actually quotes this line and applies it to Jesus.

This divine-human king's throne is eternal, and it is just. He loved righteousness and hated wickedness. That couldn't be said of any king ever, except Jesus. He is the only one who was righteous and good and just, through and through.

- And finally, we praise this king's joy in verses 7–9. This is his joy on his wedding day.

He calls this king "God," and then he says, "God, your God, has anointed you." This is God the Father anointing God the Son.

And what does he anoint him with? "the oil of gladness beyond your companions." Joy is poured out on him. And on this wedding day, there is joyful music—and it says, that, too makes him glad. Jesus likes music. It was his idea in the first place.

So this whole section is in praise of the Messiah, which we now see is Jesus.

He embodies true beauty. His speech is gracious. He conquered sin, and death, and Satan—with truth, and humility and justice. And he will finish his holy war when he returns to conquer and remove all sin and injustice.

His throne is forever, and he is the happiest man in the world. And he has a particular joy on his wedding day. And this Psalm invites us to join in honoring Christ for all these qualities.

And why is he so happy? What is his joy on this day?

You've been to weddings. You've seen the groom standing up front, waiting. And then she enters, and he gets a glimpse of her, and his eyes water. He is taken by her beauty, and he's overwhelmed with joy.

That's Jesus, as he sees his bride. And here she comes.

3. The Procession of the Radiant Bride (vv. 10–15)

Third, we see the procession of the radiant bride. This is verses 10–15. We see her loyalty, honor, beauty, and joy.

- Look at her *loyalty*. He calls the bride, in this moment, to join herself fully to Christ. This is verses 10–11, "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." She is to leave her family and join to her husband as her new family.

- Then we see her *honor* in verse 12, “The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people.” Other nations bless her with wedding gifts.

Revelation 21–22 draws on this theme. It says that when we are married to Christ on the new earth, all the riches of the nations will flood in to us. All that is good and noble from the cultures of the world will pour into the new creation. And they will be gifts to us as God’s people.

- We also see her *beauty*. Verse 11 says, “the king will desire your beauty.” And then verses 13–14 describe her beauty on her wedding day: “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.”

White is a fine and symbol-laden color for a wedding dress. But it’s not the only option. In this Psalm, her dress is multi-colored, with gold woven into it. The point is that she is adorned with beauty. She presents herself to the king, and the king will desire her beauty.

The apostle Paul refers to presenting the church to Christ as her husband. When Jesus returns, and we stand before him, this will be a wedding presentation. We will be morally and spiritually clean, clothed in white.

Revelation speaks of our white clothing in two ways, and both are true. First, it says we wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb. So, we are ultimately clean because of his death for our sins; he died to cleanse us and wash us clean. But second, it also says that at this future wedding feast, we will be clothed with pure linen, which is the righteous deeds of the saints.^{ix} Both are true.

We are morally dirty on our own. But Christ died to make us clean; we are completely forgiven and counted as pure before him. But then he gives us his Spirit to change us—and our good works contribute now to our moral beauty before him.^x

- And finally, we see her joy. He paints a picture of the joy of the bride as she is led out to meet her husband at the wedding. This is the processional. Verse 15, “With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king.”

This is the wedding day: He praises the groom for his beauty, speech, victory, throne, and gladness. And then we see bride’s loyalty, honor, beauty, and joy. It’s a perfect royal wedding.

4. The Blessing of the Eternal Union (vv. 16–17)

Finally, the blessing of the eternal union. There are two blessings: princes in all the earth, and praise forever from all the nations.

Verse 16 notes the blessing of offspring who will rule the world: “In place of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them princes in all the earth.”

Again, this is describing the coming Messiah’s reign from an Old Testament, prophetic perspective. The prophecies often gestured in the direction of the fulfillment without stating exactly how it would be. So here, it seems that he is reflecting on the promises of a global rule. The Davidic messiah will come, and he will have offspring that will fill the earth as princes. They will share his rule through all generations.

This is fulfilled in Christ and his people. Hebrews 2 says that Jesus came to restore the lost rule of humanity. God created Adam and Eve as a king and queen, and he commissioned them to rule creation. They and we all failed. So Jesus came as the true human, the true king, and he regained the kingdom. But he came not to take it for himself, but to share it with us. So Hebrews 2 refers to Jesus as regaining our rule over creation, but then sharing it with “his children.” Revelation says Jesus will come to marry the church, and then we will reign with him over the new earth forever.

And the second blessing is praise forever from all the nations.

This is the last verse, “I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.”

This Psalmist tells us why he wrote this song. He wrote it so that people would remember and praise this king forever. This is no random Davidic king who lived, who failed, and who passed away. This is the one true and eternal king, the God-man, Jesus Christ. And this Psalm was written for his people to honor and praise him forever—and from all nations.

So this little psalm was given to ancient Israel to sing.

They sang with anticipation.

They sang at a time when the nations walked in darkness.

They sang at a time when the Davidic kings were not righteous, and they lost the throne.

But they sang with hope.

They sang about the coming true, divine king—and they praised his beauty, his speech, his coming victory over evil, and his coming marriage to the church.

Implications

So, how, then, do we respond to a psalm like this?

We respond by fulfilling its purpose. Its purpose is for us to honor and praise Christ. Its purpose is to eagerly anticipate the wedding of Christ and the church, and his eternal rule over the new creation.

So, let me draw this together with four reflections to help this get worked into our lives.

First, this is God's ultimate purpose in all of creation and history.

You've heard of meta glasses by now, right? Meta has released special glasses. We should have a different pair of meta-glasses on when we look at the world. The Bible says that history is a metanarrative—and it is a romance story. So we should put on the metanarrative glasses and look through them to see this big story in the Bible and all of history. And then see our lives as part of this.

And the most important part of this is to see God's ultimate purpose and goal for all things. Jonathan Edwards reflected on this, and I want him to help us grasp this. I've not read anyone who put this more compellingly than him. I want to read two quotes from him—one is short, and one is very long.

The short one was written in a personal notebook. It's a brief reflection on "the end [or goal] of creation." He wrote, "God created the world for his Son, that he might prepare a spouse or bride for him to bestow his love upon; so that the mutual joys between this bride and bridegroom are the end of creation."^{xi}

Then about twenty years later, in his mid-forties, he preached a sermon on this. And he reflected on this for a long time in that sermon.

"The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse, towards whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense fountain of condescension, love and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified...

"Christ had done greater things than to create the world, to obtain his bride and the joy of his [marriage] with her: for he was incarnate, and become man for this end; which was a greater thing than his creating the world... And he did a much greater thing still to obtain this joy; in that for this he laid down his life, and suffered even the death of the cross...

"Christ obtains his elect spouse by conquest: for she was a captive in the hands of dreadful enemies; and her Redeemer came into the world to conquer these enemies, and rescue her out of their hands, that she might be his bride...

"When he offered up himself to God in those extreme labors and sufferings, this was the joy that was set before him, that made him cheerfully to endure the cross, and despise the pain and shame, in comparison of this joy; even that rejoicing over his church, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, that the Father had promised him, and that he expected when he should present her to himself in perfect beauty and blessedness."^{xii}

Second, if this is the goal of all things, then this shows us Christ's heart for us.

The most striking text in all of scripture on this divine marriage theme is Hosea 2. God describes how he married Israel, but she committed spiritual adultery with her idols. But God said one day he would bring her back and marry her again. And he is speaking of the new covenant, when Christ would come. So this is Hosea's description of how Jesus would come to draw us to himself.

Hosea 2:14, "Therefore, look!.... I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." He should be divorcing her for adultery, but he will allure her. And he will speak tenderly to her.

I love how the Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs describes what Christ will say to her—what he says to us. He came to this word "allure" in his commentary, and he wrote that God would say: "I will unfold the beauty and excellency of the infiniteness of my goodness and lovingkindness, and set in array before their souls the exceeding glory of the riches of my grace."^{xiii}

Then his people will respond, and they will come to Christ and trust him. And listen to what God says will happen in that day. Hosea 2:19–20, "I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD." This is the heart of Christ.

Third, we should respond to this with love and loyalty.

The psalmist calls the bride to leave her family and bow to her husband. We are to forsake our sins, and reorder our loves so he is put first. And we are to bow to him as our king and leader.

But how do we do this? This psalm actually gives us the key. The primary way that our hearts will let go of sin is by desiring Jesus as a greater attraction. It is by being compelled by his love.

Our hearts are wired to pursue beauty. We never do anything unless we truly want to. Even addictions, especially addictions, work this way. And we can be addicted not just to alcohol, but to sex and success, and power and prestige, and so forth.

But what will reorient us to love and obey Christ? We have to see his beauty and desire him as this Psalm does.

There's no song that captures this better than one called, *Hast Thou Heard Him, Seen Him, Known Him?*

Captivated by His beauty,
Worthy tribute haste to bring.
Let His peerless worth constrain thee,
Crown Him now unrivaled King.

What can strip the seeming beauty,
From the idols of the earth?
Not a sense of right or duty,
But the sight of peerless worth.

Fourth, if you are married, your marriage is a temporary pointer to this greater marriage.

Marriage is only for this age. When the new earth comes, every Christian spouse will still, no doubt, be friends. But we will no longer be married. Because every earthly marriage was meant to give a trailer to the movie of the true marriage. Every wedding reception is actually an appetizer to the true wedding feast to come. This is why weddings and marriages exist—to picture Christ and the church.

So, let your marriage point you to the greater one to come.

This is why Christians should fight to stay faithful to their vows.

It's why every Christian marriage is supposed to be a place of truth, and justice, and joy.

It's why every Christian is only to marry another Christian—to reflect the greater marriage.

It's why every husband should never abuse his wife, but cherish and treasure her.

...every wife should know and feel that he desires her beauty.

It's why every wife should gladly follow her husband's Christlike leadership.

And it's also why when a husband or wife fails to love well—or is in sin—the other spouse should not go along with it; because our loyalty is not ultimate to our spouse, but to Christ as the true husband.

We often fail. This means that we can repent in the direction of the true marriage to come.

Finally, the local church is to be the beautiful bride of Christ.

Christ is the king who desires her beauty. And so we are to be cultivating a community that is becoming more and more ethically beautiful. That's what holiness ultimately is—it is moral beauty. It is an ethical aesthetic that Christ cultivates in us, and then desires.

And so this should shape our view of one another, and the local church. There is no other bride of Christ. The church is the only institution that has Christ's heart. Don't leave it, don't divide it, don't give up on it, don't slander it—but cultivate a gospel culture of love and ethical beauty.

ⁱ He wrote, “The birth of Christ is the arrival of the great warrior and the great king. Also of the Lover, the Bridegroom, whose beauty surpasses that of man” (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 130).

ⁱⁱ John 3:25–30.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. 22:1–14.

^{iv} David is described like this: he “had beautiful eyes and was handsome” (1 Sam 16:12). This is literally, “beautiful of eyes,” or “beautiful of looking,” and it probably means he was beautiful to look at (So Tsumura, but who then says it doesn’t refer to attractive, but to a king with a bright face; Tsumura, 423). I think it’s beautiful. That would fit with how Leah is called weak of eyes, meaning she was not good to look at

^v Motyer thinks this is probably “a specially devised form to express the exceptional beauty of the king” (Motyer, *Psalms day by day*, 118n32)

^{vi} Isa. 53:2

^{vii} James L. Mays, *Psalms*, 181.

^{viii} Derek Kidner, “This paradox is consistent with the incarnation, but mystifying in any other context. It is an example of Old Testament language bursting its banks, to demand a more than human fulfillment” (Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 172).

^{ix} Rev. 7:14 speaks to our robes being white through his blood: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Then Rev. 19:8 speaks of how our robes will be white from our good works, “it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

*Christ does not love us first because he saw something lovely in us. Instead, he loves loveliness into us. For example, listen to how Thomas Goodwin refers to how Christ loves us, and how his love makes us beautiful. He wrote, “The foundation of God’s love is not loveliness in us.” So, Christ will desire the beauty of the church, but our beauty is not the foundation of his love. Goodwin then helps us see just how incredible Christ’s love is. He said that we cannot love something unless there is something lovely that draws out our affections toward it. But he said God resolves to love us in such a way that he commits to *making* us lovely. He said God can resolve to love the creatures that he will give being to, and then also those that he will make lovely, “and so ordain them to be holy before him, that he might delight in them” (Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 1, 82).

^{xi} Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellanies no. 271. End of Creation*. (c. 1726–27).

^{xii} Reflection in Jonathan Edwards [1743], *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758* (WJE Online Vol. 25, 187–188)

^{xiii} Jeremiah Burroughs, *Hosea Commentary*, 130.