

Finding Christ in Psalms and Proverbs
Psalms 2, 22, 45, 72, 110, 118; Proverbs 8
Dan Leppo

I'm not sure I know why, perhaps it just because I'm weird, but I'm always interested in the titles Carol gives to these lessons. Today's is "*Finding Christ in Psalms and Proverbs*." Jesus, though, isn't found in just the Psalms and Proverbs within the Old Testament. He's found and interwoven throughout the entirety of the Old Testament. This would be consistent with what Hebrews 13:8 assures us, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"

We find Him at the very beginning – starting in Genesis 1:1. The Hebrew word for God as it is presented, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth,*" is "Elohim." Elohim is a plural word – meaning God consists of more than one being or entity. I'm not going to try to explain the Holy Trinity, because it is one of the many mysteries of an infinite God to a finite human. I've found it helpful that if you can imagine a husband, a wife, and a child comprising one family, then you can begin to comprehend, a little, of what the Holy Trinity is. You have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as equal members of the Godhead "family."

Furthermore, in today's reading, we read about this mysterious character Melchizedek. Many Bible scholars believe that he is a Christophany or Theophany, which are fancy words for Jesus appearing in the Old Testament. There are multiple occurrences of an Angel of the Lord appearing in various places, and many believe this is also Jesus. One of the more blatant examples of Jesus in the Old Testament was when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were thrown into the fiery furnace for disobeying King Nebuchadnezzar commands to worship an idol made in his image. The very king who pronounced their judgment made the following testimony after seeing a fourth uninvited member in the fiery furnace, "*Look!*" he answered, "*I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*" (NKJV)

The Psalms and Proverbs Carol chose for this lesson's topic offer several components of Jesus. Simply, we see Him:

- In a declaration of Him being God
- In a declaration of Him being a sacrifice
- In a declaration of Him being a priest
- In a declaration of Him being the gate
- In a declaration of Him as the coming and conquering King

Our reading makes it pretty clear about Jesus' presence as God at the beginning of time. We hear directly from Him in Proverbs 8:27-31 when He says, "*I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.*"

One of the core essentials of the Christian faith is to believe that Jesus is God. In Psalm 2:7, we're given an amazing look into a conversation between God the Son and God the Father, "I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your father.'" Better versions of the Bible use the word "begotten" in place of "I have become your father." Begotten is an important word as it implies one type of being can only produce the same type of being. For example, a dog can only beget a dog or a cat can only beget a cat. Therefore, God can only beget God.

This foundational fact of Jesus being God is by far and away the most frequently attacked truth of Him as clearly presented in Scripture. Any attempt to diminish Jesus as God is either a veiled or an unveiled attempt to dismiss the need for salvation. If Jesus isn't a member of the Godhead, then He is not an acceptable sacrifice in the eyes of the Father. If that were the case, then Jesus would not have been

resurrected; for it is His resurrection that is the Father's stamp of approval of Him as an acceptable sacrifice. Paul states it pretty clearly what the consequences are if there is no resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:17, *"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"* So, who do you think is behind all these attacks on Jesus not being God? – Satan, the very one Jesus defeated *because* of His resurrection. Satan is no doubt defeated – that will never change. All he can hope for is to get as many people as he can to doubt Jesus' victory over him while he has time, which I believe is drawing to a close very soon. This is a critical and mandatory truth of the Scriptures and our salvation - Jesus is God.

Psalm 22 is holy ground as it is a gift of God's grace to allow us to listen to the heart of Jesus in our reading's second declaration - as our sacrifice. It starts off in verse one with the very words Jesus shouted while on the Cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* These words of anguish are a testimony to what Jesus was doing on the Cross. What could be more fitting to talk about as we are rapidly approaching the Holy Week of Palm Sunday, the Passover, the crucifixion, and the resurrection? In Psalm 22, we hear words Jesus as God would never utter. As God, He would never say to His beloved Father things like:

- "Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?" (vs. 1b)
- "My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest." (vs. 2)

These are the words of Jesus as a forsaken sacrificial lamb taking our punishment for each and every one of our sins. In the eyes of the Father, when Jesus was on the Cross, He was our sin. What does Scripture say about God and sin? Isaiah 59:2, *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."* A perfect and holy God cannot be in the presence of impurity and unholiness. So, only out of His deep and passionate love for what He creates – meaning each one of you, He chose to make a way for us to be made pure and holy. As sinners from birth, we could never make this way on our own. Only God could make a way that was acceptable to Him.

Have you ever thought about when Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, asked, *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me,"* that the Father's response was "No"? Think about that for a moment. God, the Creator of all things, knowing all things, and all powerful, when posed with a question of how to resolve the sin issue for humanity, could not come up with any other way than to sacrifice His beloved and only begotten Son. Wouldn't you think God in all His majesty and power could come up with something not so brutal and horrific? He didn't, so what does that tell you about how serious sin is in the eyes of God? The ONLY way for us unworthy sinners to be reconciled to God was Christ crucified.

Listen to how Jesus described Himself as our sin on the Cross in Psalm 22:6-7, *"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads."* These are not the words of the sinless, perfect Son of God. Jesus is speaking of the fruit of sin. Ultimately, He would be the fulfillment of Paul's words in Romans that the wages of sin is death.

Psalm 22 also speaks to the suffering Jesus was no doubt physically experiencing as our sacrifice. *"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death."* (vs. 14-15) We're even provided two fulfilled prophecies in Psalm 22:

- Verse 16c: *"they pierce my hands and feet,"* which was how He would be crucified.
- Verse 18: *"They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment,"* which was fulfilled in Matthew 27:35.

The third declaration of how we find Jesus in our reading is Him as a priest. In Psalm 110:4, we read, *"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'"* We first read about this individual in a meeting he had with Abraham in Genesis 14:18, *"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High."*

Melchizedek means “King of Righteousness” and Salem means “Peace.” What did Melchizedek bring with him? Bread and wine – those should sound familiar – symbols of Jesus’ death and the components of communion.

Hebrews 7:3 sheds some additional light on this Melchizedek, “[He was] without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.” Jesus is known in Scripture as the Alpha and the Omega, which means the beginning and the end. This sounds similar to Melchizedek’s description of having neither beginning of days nor end of life. I hope you can see the parallels between Jesus and this mysterious monarch.

This verse in Psalm 110 also resolves a problem with Jesus being our priest. With the Jews, only descendants of Aaron could be priests. Do you recall what tribe Jesus’ lineage is linked to? – Judah. Apparently, God in His providence has established a Divine priesthood that could only be fulfilled by His Son. Without Psalm 110:4, we would have to reject Jesus as our priest. What is a priest’s primary role? To be an intermediary between a holy God and a sinning human. Listen to the description of Jesus as our priest in Hebrews 7:25-27, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”

So far, we’ve covered the declarations of Jesus being God, a sacrifice, and a priest as revealed in our reading. We arrive at the fourth declaration of Jesus, and that is outlined in Psalm 118:19-20, “Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.” A gate is also referred to as a door. A gate, or door, is a mechanism of access from one place to another, and it represents a dividing line between two worlds. Jesus said in John 10:9, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” What door is He speaking to? In John 10:7, He said He is the door of the sheep. Four verses later He proclaims Himself to be the Good Shepherd.

The Lord often referred to us as sheep, which is fitting because sheep are among the dumbest of all animals. Please forgive me if I’ve offended you with this statement, but if any of you can honestly look at your lives and not point out moments of dumbness or stupidity caused by your actions or inactions, then I’ll double-down and further offend you and tell you you’re lying to yourself. Sheep need a shepherd to protect them from their dumbness, and so do we. Whether it is just in our minds, or our evil thoughts that come spewing out of our mouths, or through our sins of commission or omission, we disqualify ourselves as worthy of redemption. Yet, out of His love for us, and as our Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. As is noted in Psalm 118:19-20 there is a place of righteousness where there is only one entryway.

In the Old Testament, that place of righteousness was in the Holy of Holies in the temple. There was a thick veil that separated the rest of the temple from the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest was permitted to enter through the veil one time/year to make prayers and supplications for himself and the rest of the Nation of Israel. When Jesus breathed His last breath and gave up His spirit, the veil in the temple that separated everyone from the place of righteousness was torn from top to bottom. Who tore that veil? – God. Why did He do that? Because His Son laid down His life for His friends and became the gate or door for all who believe in Him into that place of righteousness. Through faith in Jesus’ atoning work at the Cross, God the Father looks at us fully, completely, and permanently washed in the holy and righteous blood of His Son. This provides us 24/7 access to boldly approach the throne of grace and build up our relationship with God. What a friend we have in Jesus! Amen?

The fifth declaration is Jesus, in His second coming, as the conquering King. God the Father declared about God the Son in Psalm 2:6, “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” Notice the tense of this proclamation – in God’s eyes, this is done. That’s the cool thing about an eternal God being in control. Jesus declared Himself a king in John 18, but He has not yet established His kingdom where He will rule and reign. His first coming was the proof we needed for Him to be qualified as our

fully trustworthy and faithful King. Out of His love for us, He voluntarily and willingly gave up His life so we could have everlasting life. What more could we want from a King?

Our reading provides us many examples of what Jesus' kingdom will look like when He comes again to rule and reign. Several of them are:

- All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. (Psalm 22:27-28)
- In your majesty ride forth victoriously in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve awesome deeds. (Psalm 45:4)
- Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. (Psalm 45:6)
- May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. (Psalm 72:2)
- May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. (Psalm 72:4)
- In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more. May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Psalm 72:7-8)
- May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. (Psalm 72:17)

Despite what our lost Jehovah Witnesses friends proclaim, Jesus has not, *yet*, come back as promised. When you read these pictures of what life will be like under Jesus' reign, does the current state of our world come close to resembling these descriptions? What do you think is holding Jesus back from returning again? I can tell you there are no more prophecies that need to be fulfilled that would, Biblically, prevent Him from returning even at this very moment. I'll be transparent with you and confess I have uttered the request, "Come quickly, Jesus" many times – especially in these last few years. So, what do you think is holding Him back from His second coming?

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church. He also said in John 14:3, "*I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*" If Jesus hasn't yet come to receive us to Himself, then His church must not be completed. That is what He's waiting for – for the last person to confess Him as his/her Lord and Savior and completely fulfill His church. Until that happens, we must put on the full armor of God, love others as He loves us, and declare to the people He places in our lives what He declared about Himself in today's reading that:

- He is God
- He is our sacrifice
- He is our priest
- He is our gate
- He is coming again to be our conquering King

As I conclude, let's revisit the title to this lesson "Finding Christ in Psalms and Proverbs." I believe we cannot find Christ before He first finds us. Our sinful and hardened hearts may know there's something missing in our lives, but we don't know what that is until Jesus takes the first step.

- Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "*for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" Notice the word "seek" – it's another word for "find." This is the heart of Jesus as our God.
- Jesus said in John 3:17, "*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*" This is the heart of Jesus as our sacrifice.

- Jesus said in John 17:20, *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”* This is the heart of Jesus as our priest.
- Jesus said in John 14:6: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* This is the heart of Jesus as our gate.
- Jesus said in Matthew 26:29: *“But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”* This is the heart of Jesus as our coming and conquering King – to one day, hopefully soon, dine with us in His kingdom.

Our reading offers beautiful promises to those who choose to seek and find Jesus Christ.

- Proverbs 8:17: *“I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.”*
- Proverbs 8:35: *“For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD.”*

As I said earlier, Jesus needs to reveal Himself for those to find Him. He did that in the most powerful and meaningful way through the Cross. We find in Him the fulfillment of the God-given hole in our hearts and souls. We find in Him as our door to rest and green pastures via salvation as well as the promise of eternal life – forever forgiven and fully reconciled to God. He is findable – He took the first step. Now, in His own words from Revelation 3:20, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* Isn’t that amazing? Our Creator, who is the only one who can give us eternal life at peace with God, is knocking on the door to our souls inviting Himself to dine with us and become our Lord, Savior, and friend. That’s the message of this Easter season. Please share it with those you love who don’t yet know Him. Maybe he/she will answer the Door, and maybe he/she be the last one Jesus is looking for to take us all home.

Psalms 118:28-29 proclaims, *“You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”* Let’s acknowledge these glorious truths through our standing and singing the Doxology.