

Glimmers of Christ the King in Psalm 47 and Psalm 45

A new favorite, fun fact! It's obvious that "clapping the hands" in **Psalm 47:1** is an act of joyous response, but the circumstance is more complex because the idiom employed normally means to "strike the hands" with another person as confirmation of a contract or agreement—like shaking hands or, better yet, like a "High Five." (Gerald Wilson, *the NIV Application Commentary: Psalms*, Vol. 1, p. 726, but the "high five" is my idea.)

1. So **Psalm 47** opens with a call for "all peoples" to be vigorously *high-fiving*, *shaking hands* with loud shouts and songs of joy. When have you been in a celebration like that?

What is the *reason* for this *summons* to exultation? (47:2)

Find a second *summons* and *reason* in 47:6-7 (for=ki in Hebrew).

2. Imagine what it would be like for all nations to "clap hands" together and be in agreement about core values.

Compare **Psalm 47** with **Genesis 11:1-9**, the important episode of the Tower of Babel. In what respects were the nations unified in Genesis 11:3-4? How is Psalm 47 different? What brings Israel and all peoples together in Psalm 47 (47:9, and Romans 4:16-17)?

3. In the original context, the image of God ascending amid shouts of joy (**47:5**) probably brought to mind the ark of the covenant being carried in procession to the temple, while people sang words similar to Psalm 24:7-10. (Later **Psalm 47** was used in the liturgy for Jewish New Year and in Christian liturgy on Ascension Day [47:5].)

Consider **Acts 2:1-12**. How does this setting provide a different way to celebrate God's ascension, as in 47:5? How does it represent a reversal of the events in Genesis 11:5-9?

4. In what respects does **Psalm 47** describe the present reality of God's reign? In what respect does it point to hope for the future? How is the victory of 47:8-9 an "already-not yet" reality?

5. Unlike the focus on rejoicing in YHWH as King in **Psalm 47**, the focus in **Psalm 45** is on the joy of an Israelite King and his bride on their wedding day. Taken in its original Old Testament context, **Psalm 45** is a wedding song written by a court poet for the celebration of a royal marriage, a marriage of God's anointed king and his bride.

What does **Psalm 45** tell you about the *values* in this kingdom? How are they different from other kingdoms?

6. The author of Hebrews applies **Psalm 45:6-7** to Jesus in **Hebrews 1:8-9** which speaks of the Son's anointing by His Father.

How does the description fit with Jesus' time on earth? How does it not fit? How can it be understood looking to the future?

7. As a future bride of Christ, what preparation is necessary before the wedding (**45:10-11**)? (Rev. 21:2)

What is appealing about the groom and his kingdom? (**45:2-9**)

How does **Psalm 45** help you to celebrate Jesus as the church's future groom? (Revelation 19:11-16 and Eph. 5:25-32)

In *Reflections on the Psalms*, C.S. Lewis writes that **Psalm 45** "restores Christmas to its proper complexity":

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. But not only the Bridegroom as the lover, the desired; the Bridegroom also as *he who makes fruitful*, the father of children still to be begotten and born...Then the poet turns to the Bride..."forget also thine own people and thy father's house....it is a terrible command; *turn your back on all you know...*" (p. 130-132, *italics mine*)

The Bride will bear the fruit of the Groom.

8. N.T. Wright writes about the importance of the concept of time in understanding Scripture. **Psalms 45 and 47** challenge us to think of "then," "now," and "not yet." (Wright, *The Case for the Psalms*, p. 44)

What are your thoughts about **Psalms 45 and 47** becoming sacramental for you, actually changing how you think and feel now, bringing about a new reality that didn't exist before, evoking a new reality in your awareness?

Walter Brueggemann observes:

Since we live in a culture decisively out of sync with God's divine governance as lived out in the Psalms, singing these poems is at one and the same time an act of hope (that God's rule *will* prevail) and an act of resolve (to participate here and now in that *new* governance.) (Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, p. 55)

Watch for glimmers of Christ the King redeeming his world; let go of our own agendas and join his.