

Psalms, IX

I want to spend a little more time on messianic psalms. We have looked at only one type, the typological messianic psalms. Let me give you a second category. There is some overlap between these two. The second type is typical-prophetic-messianic psalms. Typical-prophetic-messianic psalms have something to do with typology and something to do with prophecy in a predictive sense. Often when we talk about prophecy we think about prediction, pure and simple. But if you have studied it, you will know that it is said that prophecy is more forth-telling than foretelling. If you read the prophets, they are forth-telling the Word of God to their generation. Now, they do make some predictions about the future, but if you think about prophecy as only predictive, then you will miss the bulk of it. In this instance, however, we are talking about predictions. We will look at typical-predictive-messianic psalms. They are typological in the sense that, in a way, what is stated in the psalm presses beyond the psalmist's experience so that we are alerted to the fact that there is something more at work than just typology. In typological psalms the psalmist is experiencing something that Jesus will later experience in a heightened sense. Psalm 22 fits into the category of typical-predictive psalms.

We will look at Psalm 22 to identify elements that are clearly picked up in Christ's own experience, or are quoted about Him. Verse 1 says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These are Christ's first recorded words from the cross. Verses 7 and 8 say, "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'" Those two verses are alluded to or quoted many times. Matthew 27:43 says, "He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" This is not a direct quotation, but it definitely has the same tone and sentiment. The same kind of mockery is being dispensed. Verses 14-18 say this:

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted away within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.
Dogs have surrounded me;
a band of evil men has encircled me,
they have pierced my hands and my feet.
I can count all my bones;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing.

Verse 18 is quoted in Matthew 27. Verse 16b may perhaps be alluded to in a metaphorical sense: "Dogs have surrounded me." "They have pierced my hands and my feet." This is clearly fulfilled in Christ. "All my bones are out of joint" is also quoted.

Let me say this about Psalm 22. Yes, I think it fits David, in a sense. I could see David in some dire distress saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And I can see David in a dire distress praying these kinds of things and making this cry to God. "Dogs have surrounded me." He is using the imagery there. "I can count all my bones. People stare and they gloat over me. They divide my garments

among them; they cast lots for my clothing.” There is a sense in which we could say, “Yes, this is typology. It was true of David and it was true in a greater sense of Christ.” But there is another sense, as distinct from Psalm 69, in which we can say, “This really goes a bit beyond David.” There seems to be too much just to say, “This was all perfectly true of David.” I wonder if David himself, at the time that he composed this particular psalm, might not have been thinking, “I am speaking beyond my own experience here.” That is the nature of a typical-prophetic psalm. In the images, words, hyperbole, and the poetic language that came to David, there was a sense in which he was anticipating something far greater than his own limited experience.

Let me show you something that I think is very interesting. You may have heard messages on the words of Christ from the cross. Most of His words can be tied to Old Testament anticipation, such as Psalm 22, the first words of Christ from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The bystanders heard Him say, “*Elohim, Elohim* [...]” and they thought He was crying out for Elijah. They misunderstood Him. But He was quoting Psalm 22. Those were not just words that came to Him. Christ knew Scripture and He clearly knew Psalm 22 very well, and so He quoted this psalm of lament and extremity. Psalm 22 was in His mind. What I find interesting is that as Jesus hung on the cross this psalm was still in His mind. As He was mocked and they were saying, “He trusted in the Lord, let the Lord rescue Him now, if He wants Him,” Jesus was thinking of verse 8, which says, “He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue Him.” It was happening. It was all happening. There are other images and figures that are not directly fulfilled. I do not know if there were bulls or roaring lions, but those were figurative images. There were hostile beings surrounding the sufferer. “I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax. Dogs have surrounded me. A band of evil men has encircled me.” This was not literally true of David, but it was literally true of Christ. And I think this psalm was in His mind. It had to have been as he was seeing these things happening. Psalm 22:18 says, “They divide my garments among them; they cast lots for my clothing.” He was seeing that at the foot of the cross, taking place right before Him. The one word of Jesus from the cross that people have struggled with and have not really been able to tie to an Old Testament passage is the final word, “It is finished.” Where did Jesus get that? Listen to how Psalm 22 ends. Remember, lament psalms go from distress or complaint to petition, then to praise. Psalm 22:29 says, “All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.” It is finished. Can you see that? That really excited me. Think about that. We can get a glimpse of the mind of Christ. We know how He began on the cross, we know He saw these things taking place, and we know in the end He was able to say “it is finished.” What is finished? Salvation. “All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.” God, through Christ who is God incarnate, has done it, and it was finished.

One other example of a typical-prophetic psalm is Psalm 34:19-20. We read in those two verses that “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.” No one would contend that this verse is true of all the righteous. We do not see this as an absolute statement, but it is true of Christ. The point is made in the Gospels that His bones were not broken. This is something that is literally fulfilled in Christ, though perhaps used more figuratively by the psalmist. Psalm 2, a royal psalm, may also be a typical prophetic psalm. It was true enough of the Davidic king, but did his reign truly extend to “the ends of the earth”? The kings of Israel had a certain promised land over which they would reign, but was God’s statement, “I will give

you the ends of the earth as your inheritance,” true of them in particular? That goes beyond the experience of the Davidic king at that time, and points to the greater Davidic Son.

Now we come to the last category: prophetic-messianic psalms. The prime example is Psalm 110. This is not a purely prophetic psalm that points only and solely to Jesus. There is not a single psalm in the Psalter that has absolutely no immediate fulfillment and points only to Christ. This is a remarkable psalm. Verse 4 says, “You are a priest forever, / in the order of Melchizedek.” If we mean forever in an absolute sense, then that is truer of Christ than it could be of anyone else. And in verse 1 it says, “The LORD says to my Lord: / ‘Sit at my right hand / until I make your enemies / a footstool for your feet.’” What does Jesus do with that in the New Testament? He questions them. One example of this is in Mark 12:35-37. It reads this way:

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“The Lord said to my Lord:

‘Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.’

David himself calls him “Lord.” How then can he be his son?

Now, I do not know what to exactly make of that, how to construe it, but you do notice that Jesus implies in a way by asking the question that He could not simply be David’s son and be called Lord. He implies a negative answer, “How then can he be his son?” But he does not come out and say that He could not only be his son. The elevation of Solomon and the anointing of Solomon when Solomon was placed on the throne occurred before David’s death. Therefore there is a sense in which you could see that David could say, “YHWH, the LORD, says to my Lord,” as David turns to his son, who is now on the throne. Thus a king who abdicates in favor of the crown prince could turn to the crown prince and address him as “my Lord.” There is a sense in which David could perhaps have said that of his son. So what is Jesus talking about? (I am not trying to contradict Jesus.) I think He is simply trying to make a point to His hearers. He is saying, “I want you to think about the fact that the Messiah is maybe greater than you have imagined. He will not simply be a descendent of David who will come and re-establish an earthly, Davidic throne. There is something about this son of David that makes Him far greater than David himself, so that David addresses this son as “my Lord.” This may be one of Christ’s implicit claims to deity.

In summary, we know that all of the psalms have to do with God and His role in history and His redemptive purpose. Thus all of them, in a sense, are messianic. In a more narrow sense, I wanted you to think about the fact that we should not think in wooden terms that there is a messianic psalm that deals with nothing but prediction. God is the master crafter of history and of language. He prepared the way by providing the images and the descriptions in the life of the psalmist, some of which went far beyond his experience, but he was using them hyperbolically. He prepared that ground. Then when Christ came it was not as if there had been a prediction sitting out there waiting for fulfillment necessarily, but there was this wonderful history of God’s revelation, speech, and language, which then came to fulfillment in Christ. And suddenly in hindsight we can look back and say, “I would not have known that was predictive, but now I see that it was.” God prepared for the coming of Christ in surprising ways.

Who are the righteous in the psalms? The righteous are those who are open to God’s instruction and who live in dependence on God. I think that is so important. When we read about the righteous, and the psalmist protesting his righteousness, what do we think about? How does that strike us? We might think,

“That self-righteous psalmist. Somebody needs to tell him about original sin.” Actually, sometimes they are saying, “I am righteous,” meaning, “I am innocent of the charge being lodged against me.” But I think McCann explains that very well as the righteous are those who are open to God’s instruction and who are dependent on Him. That is righteousness. Our righteousness is never our own; it is always a matter of dependence on God. We must recognize that whatever righteousness we have is an alien righteousness. And that is not just a New Testament concept. That is right out of Psalms. Therefore when you read about the righteous, read that as “Those who rely on God.”