

Sermon 52, A Love Song, Pt. 1: The King, Psalm 45:1-9

Proposition: An Israelite wedding guest sings the good news of the divine king's superlative perfections.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this is the only psalm titled "A Love Song." And is it ever beautiful! We have come from the sufferings of Christ and His people in Ps

44 into the glories to follow in Ps 45. This royal wedding was not easily achieved. It took the king's life to reach this moment. It took the bride's rescue from sin, her cleansing, and her being dressed in gold of Ophir. But this psalm does not discuss how we got here. It takes us to the moment of the Lamb's wedding and invites us to celebrate. It describes the royal groom in loving detail, and says a little bit about the bridal procession too. It moves from the wedding into a future with many children who become princes in all the earth, even as the king's rule expands to cover all peoples, who respond to Him with grateful worship for His excellent and blessed dominion. We will linger over the details of the character and costume of our Beloved Bridegroom, for it is He whom we worship, He to whom we bow — He who desires our beauty! Next week we will look at the second half of the psalm and meditate on the bride and bridal procession into the king's palace, and His rule over a multi-ethnic empire of joy. Today, though, I want you to see with me the good news of the divine king's superlative perfections.

I. The Wedding Guest Sings, v. 1

The first thing we need to discuss is the identity of the speaker. Who says "My" and "I" in v. 1 and again in v. 17? There is clearly a first-person speaker here, and it is clearly not the king. I have told you that the speaker in every psalm is the king, but that is a generalization that is not always perfectly applicable to each psalm. Clearly this psalm is *about* the king, but just as clearly, the king is not the first-person speaker but the second-person addressee. So who's talking to him?

The answer is that the speaker is the same as the speaker in Ps 44. It is Joe Israelite, a faithful one among the congregation who is dedicated to God and His Anointed but earnestly trying to make sense of what he sees. I call the speaker "the wedding guest" because instead of mourning the destruction of his nation as he was in Ps 44, he is now having the time of his life, attending the wedding of God's Anointed King to this beautiful queen we know as the Church. The speaker says three things about himself.

A. A Heart Overflowing with Gospel Truth

The first is that his heart is full. In fact, it is overflowing. He is utterly moved, carried away by the intensity and rapture of the occasion. I have had the privilege of attending quite a number of weddings in the last two years. All of them have been joyful occasions. But of none of them could I honestly say "My heart overflows." I was glad to be there, and I sincerely rejoiced with all the couples. But this wedding is at a whole 'nother level. The guest who witnesses this wedding and sings about it is moved to the roots of his being, because this wedding is not just a good time. It is good news. The literal Hebrew is "good word." It is a good word in the gospel sense, good news for the human race and for the whole cosmos. The wedding guest's heart is overflowing with the good news that this king, the king from Ps 2 who is also God's Son and God's Anointed, is getting married. The news of the marriage supper of the Lamb is the news of the gospel: He has successfully saved His bride from God's wrath, the Devil's spite, the world's corruptions, and her own sin. The wedding is happening. The bride is worth marrying.

That's good news. That's astonishing news. Only the Son of God could have rescued humanity and made us a fitting bride for Himself, worthy to dwell in His palace for eternity. No

wonder the wedding guest's heart is full! He is not only witnessing the wedding; he is a part of the bride. It is not just a wedding; it's *his* wedding, and yours and mine.

Does your heart overflow with that truth? Girls, the perfect romantic wedding day that you may already be planning is addressed in these lines. It's coming — the fulfillment of all your wildest dreams, plus many more. Guys, the perfect manly man who carries the burdens of the world and fixes all its problems — he really exists. And He wants to marry you as part of His bride. He is so manly that compared to Him, we are all feminine, as C.S. Lewis said. We are about to get a better look at Him — and as you look, love. To both boys and girls I say: Respond to Him as your bridegroom. Desire His beauty, and show that desire by bowing to him.

Meditate on the truths of Ps 45 until your heart overflows. Being killed all day long is one aspect of the Christian life. But standing in a dress of gold at the king's right hand, celebrating in procession with gladness and rejoicing, is another. In fact, being the bride is what makes the suffering and dying worth it. Let your heart overflow with delight in your bridegroom who is also your king, just as the speaker of Ps 45 lets his heart overflow with delight.

B. A Poem Addressed to the King

The second thing this ecstatic wedding guest reveals to us is that he has to compliment the king. The king's beauty is so overwhelming that we have to tell him about it. Sometimes you see someone who is dressed so well, who looks so good, that you simply have to go up to that person and say "You look really good." Well, that is how this wedding guest responds to Jesus Christ. He is not to be ignored, or even to be celebrated in the third person. It is only fitting to tell Him how much you delight in His beauty, how full and overflowing your heart is. Thus, this poem is addressed to the king. So yes, strictly speaking the king is not the speaker of the poem — but He is the one spoken to.

Do you dedicate your works of craftsmanship to the Lord Jesus Christ? The word translated "verses" is more literally "work." The wedding guest is clearly a great poet, and he turns all of his poetic skill toward making an enduring work of art, indeed, one that he says will last for eternity (v. 17). And then he dedicates that artwork to Christ. This wedding guest gives us a model for how to think about all of our daily work. You may not be a great poet. I hope the next Dante and Shakespeare are members of this church, but whether they are or not, all of us have skills in craftsmanship. All of us make or fix things — meals, cars, clean rooms, acts of athleticism, and more. As you use your skills, dedicate that work to King Jesus. Do it for Him. Honor your father and mother for Him. They may be ungrateful; thankfully, you are doing it for Jesus, who is always grateful. He is the best critic of art, literature, food, music, sports, and more. No performance is wasted if He is in the audience.

C. A Tongue Used Like an Expert Scribe's Pen

The final thing we learn about the wedding guest is that he has a very skilled tongue. Now, skill with the tongue is an equivocal gift. Being able to speak glibly too often turns into being able to lie glibly, to cast a vision with no substance and get people to follow you even though you consistently fail to deliver. *The Economist* called Sam Altman a genius "with a trustworthiness problem" yesterday. That's exactly what someone with a skilled tongue often lapses into. Put

simply, if you can speak well, you are tempted to lie fluently. Thank God that is not how this wedding guest operates! He speaks the truth. He uses his eloquence not to build his own kingdom, or to celebrate his own virtuosity with language, but to describe and celebrate the beauty of the king and his bride.

You know what I'm going to say next: If you have the gift of language, whether with tongue or keyboard, you should be using it for that same purpose. Use your ability to write to glorify God, to extol the beauties of the Son of Man — not to build your own kingdom or to erect an empire of lies.

Scribes were an important professional class in those days. They are comparable to the bureaucrats, secretaries, and administrators of our own day. You can't run a kingdom without scribes. And this wedding guest is able to speak about the king as readily as a well-trained scribe can write, calculate, and organize documents. So let's listen to what he says.

II. The King's Beauty, vv. 2-9

Pride of place goes to the king's beauty, but the psalmist lists and celebrates at least a dozen qualities of our king.

A. His Beauty Surpasses the Sons of Men

He is fairer than the sons of men. Some of the modern translations say "handsome" or "excellent." Clearly this is a word that refers to good looks. Some of its other occurrences:

"When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are'" (Gen 12:11 CSB)

"Leah's eyes were tender, but Rachel had a lovely figure and beautiful appearance" (Gen 29:17)

"Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves" (Sol 1:15)

"Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty; they will see a land that stretches afar" (Isa 33:17)

"Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty" (Eze 16:13 ESV)

The Hebrews, as you can see, did not hesitate to use the same word for "beauty" to apply to both men and women. And Ps 45 is crystal clear: this King is the best-looking, the most beautiful, of all men. He is flawless in form and appearance. All that scripture says directly about His looks is that "His eyes are darker than wine and His teeth whiter than milk" (Gen 49). Even that is enough to tell us that He is dark and handsome.

Have you ever been to a wedding where the happy couple was just ugly? It's a little unfortunate. It's not the way things are supposed to be. Certainly on your wedding day you are supposed to look your best; it is fitting for the occasion for the bride to be radiant and the groom to be every bit her match in looks and appearance. You don't want to be saying "What's she doing with him?" or vice versa. And at this wedding, you won't. You will be saying "God Almighty, I say it reverently, but she is gorgeous and He is even better."

Do you know Jesus Christ in this way? I'm not talking about knowing Him according to the flesh. But I do mean that you need to recognize that His beauty is such as to make it all worth it, all the suffering, all the wet feet and lost money and lost friendships and everything else that you suffer in this world. Once glance at Him will more than make up for all you have lost in living the Christian life.

B. Gracious Words Fall from His Lips, Luke 4:22

Of course, He's no empty suit. His lips are slathered with grace; the Father has poured out grace upon Him with tremendous liberality. He does not have the Holy Spirit by measure, but limitlessly. Luk 4:22 "And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" His neighbors in Nazareth were blown away by the grace of His lips, as well they might be. Do you know anyone who can say things like "Look at the lilies of the field, how they grow" or "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's?" I certainly don't. There is a certain level of profundity of which the ordinary human being is capable, and then there is the profundity of the truly wise, and then, far beyond that, is the profundity and majesty with which Jesus Christ spoke on all occasions.

Listen to His words. Know Him as the great preacher of righteousness. Love to listen to what He has to say, and learn to speak with grace like He does.

C. He Is Eternally Blessed by God

He is eternally blessed by God. Where did He get the good looks? Where did He get the good words? From His Father. And yet the text also says that God rewards His own gifts, that on account of them He has blessed His Son forever. Who is the blessed man who meditates in God's law day and night? Who considers the poor? It's this man, this beautiful, well-spoken man. He is the recipient of God's word of blessing, yes, and He shall be blessed though all Hell howl curses and all earth take His name in vain. He is blessed, and those who bless Him will be blessed, while those who curse Him will be cursed.

D. He Is Armed with a Sword

Also, He carries a sword. The wedding guest, speaking to this magnificent specimen of manhood, urges Him to strap the sword to His thigh. Some sources suggest that Eastern warriors wore the sword on their back except on ceremonial occasions, when they would strap it to their thigh. Ps 45 clearly celebrates a ceremonial occasion, and urges the king to gird on His sword. This man, this king, is not just a looker and a talker; he is also a warrior. He is everything a king should be. It is not written that He is a grill master, that He is a fantastic cook, that He is very good at mowing the lawn. Those skills are useful and have their place. But the most honored of all professions, alongside priesthood and kingship, is that of the warrior. And this our king is. He bears not the sword in vain. It's not very clear that any of the Joint Chiefs of Staff could win a knife fight with a jihadi or a cartel member. I must say that none of them strikes me as a real, hand-to-hand combat warrior. But our king can, and has. He duelled Satan, and won. He did not take up the sword against the mob armed with swords and clubs that came out to arrest Him — but when He returns, we will get to see His sword at work.

Warriors wear weapons to their weddings, not because they need them there, but because they are comfortable with their weapons. They want to show their guests that they have a sword and they know how to use it.

Do you fear Him? Are you aware that your King is armed to the teeth but that He does not need a sword to break you? He will fell the prince of darkness with one little word. If His glance is fire, what must His sword be?

E. He Possesses Divine Majesty

One of the functions of the sword is to emphasize our King's majesty. He doesn't carry a purse. He doesn't carry a wrench. He doesn't carry a rake or a hammer and tongs. He carries the insignia of His office, and that office is kingly. He carries it with majesty — something that only God Almighty possesses, in the language of Scripture. Remember Ps 8? "How majestic is your name in all the earth?" We might call kings "Your majesty," but it is a polite fiction. There is nothing fictional about the majesty of Jesus Christ. He has the majesty of God, and He bears it well.

F. He Uses His Power for Truth, Humility, and Righteousness

Indeed, though a horse is not mentioned, clearly this mightiest of princes is riding one — presumably, shall we say, a white horse. He is riding forth conquering and to conquer, and He fights on the side of truth, humility, and righteousness. Those qualities do have a champion after all! Where is the great man who will fight for truth? The billionaire who will buy the *New York Times* and fills its pages with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? The politician who will both commend and practice humility? The man who has it all and uses it all for the sake of the church, for the cause of righteousness, who gives billions to missions and refuses to trade in products and services that sap the moral fiber of society? If any, speak!

I'm afraid that you know as well as I do that there are no such champions, or if there are, the world has hushed them up so thoroughly that they may as well not exist. But there is one champion of truth, humility, and righteousness — and He is the mightiest of all mighty champions, the doughtiest of all warriors, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He swears that the poor will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the needy perish forever. And He has the power to back it up. Grace is poured on His lips, so He only speaks the truth. A sword is on His thigh, so the powers of darkness must obey Him. The law of His God is in His heart, and none of His steps shall slip.

G. He Subdues His Enemies with Arrows to the Heart

Of course, what happened to this champion when He met the real world? It killed Him right away. But He is prepared for that eventuality. This psalm takes place after all of that; now His bow is ready, His arrows razors, and those who fight for lies, pride, and wickedness will get shot in the heart, fall down, and bleed out. These are their just desserts. At the Second Coming, Jesus Christ will stand for truth, meekness, and righteousness, and this time He will live and His enemies will die. He has a sword, a bow, and a warhorse, and nothing can stop this King. His right hand will teach Him terrible things as He mows His enemies down, an unstoppable

whirlwind of wrath and justice. The Prince of Peace is awesome in battle. The day of His wrath will come, and who can stand?

H. He Is God Almighty

If the psalm ended at v. 4, it would already be impressive. But it is just getting started. The king whom this wedding guest is addressing is actually God Almighty. That's what the speaker calls Him: "Your throne, O God." Wait. Hold it right there. Who is the king? Yahweh Sabaoth, He is the king of glory! The psalms have been very clear about that repeatedly, with the declaration of Ps 24 being utterly explicit. This king whom the psalm celebrates, the King of Glory, is the LORD of Hosts. No wonder He is so beautiful and glorious. He is no mere mortal. He is God in the flesh. Half a dozen qualities swarm like courtiers around the wedding guest's open declaration that the king of glory is the LORD of Hosts.

1. His Throne Is Eternal

The first of these is that His reign endures forever. That is symbolized by His throne. A throne is a big decorative chair that a king sits in. And the throne of God is eternal. That is a way of saying that God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He will always reign. And that is true not just of God the Father, but also of God the Son. The Son is our human king, and He is also eternal just like His Father. He sits on a throne that will never pass away or be destroyed.

2. His Scepter Is Upright

As our king, He wields a scepter. A scepter is a symbol of kingly office. It's like a mace, a decorative war hammer. The king holds it to show His power over life and death. Our king uses His scepter only for good — for truth and meekness and righteousness. The power of His office is not used to enrich His own pocket, to give His cronies plum positions, to favor lawlessness over righteousness. These things happen in even the best-run earthly kingdoms. But they do not happen in the Kingdom of God.

3. He Loves and Hates Rightly

The reason that our king rules so uprightly is that He loves what is lovely and hates what is hateful. His affections are rightly ordered. He does not love gluttony. He does not love sloth. He does not love outrage and folly. He does love cultivated fields. He does love joyful families. He does love heartfelt singing of praise. He loves what is good and hates what is wicked. The good overlaps completely with the true and the beautiful; our king loves the good, the true, and the beautiful. By the same token, He hates the wicked, the false, and the defaced.

4. He Is in Covenant with God

Our king is in covenant with God. He is God, and He has a God who is His God. "God, your God," is how the wedding guest phrases it. The only way to understand this puzzle is in the union of the Father and the Son. Both are God, but to Jesus, His Father is God.

5. He Is God's Anointed One

He knows Himself to be God's Anointed, who carries the Holy Spirit measurelessly. The first fruit of the Spirit is love, and the second is joy. This king is altogether lovely, and He is also altogether joyful. He has been anointed with the oil of joy superlatively, far beyond His companions.

6. He Is More Joyful than His Fellowmen

And who are those companions? Us! The fellow recipients of the Holy Spirit, the ones who hang on the coattails of the King of Glory, carried into His royal palace and basking in His eternal bliss not because we deserve it but because He has granted us to do so. Jesus Christ is supremely joyful. We Christians are called to rejoice. But Jesus has all blessedness, all joy. A dour and sour Christian is a contradiction. Don't be that way. Cultivate the presence and power of the Spirit of Joy, not least by meditating on the joy of your Lord!

I. He Is a Delight to the Nose

But there's even more: Jesus is a delight not just to the mind and the eye, but also to the nose. His garments are perfumed; He always smells amazing. In our culture, men are scared of glamor. It sounds effeminate to us. Not so in the eastern culture from which Jesus sprang. There it is no shame for a man to be perfumed. Our Lord's body was anointed with myrrh and aloes by Nicodemus (John 19:39); and He shares those spicy scents with His bride: "Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates With choice fruits, henna with nard plants, Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, With all the trees of frankincense, Myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest spices. You are a garden spring, A well of fresh water, And streams flowing from Lebanon" (Sol 4:13-15).

I don't know why more Christians don't use myrrh and aloes to craft their personal scent; certainly scripture is not shy about telling us that Jesus is bliss for the nose.

J. He Is a Delight to the Ear

He is a delight to the ear — or better, His ear delights in music that comes from stringed instruments in ivory palaces. Let's just say that if they are in ivory palaces, they are not playing John Cage or the Beatles. They are playing something fitting for the setting, the kind of music that belongs in a very non-woke ivory palace. That's what accompanies Jesus Christ at His wedding.

K. He Is the Perfect Gentleman, Attended by Royal Women

Two more things that the wedding guest notes about our king: the first is that royal women, king's daughters, attend Him. He is the perfect gentleman. Kings send their daughters to His court because they have no fear that their daughters will be mistreated there. But also, our King takes commoners, ordinary women from poor backgrounds, and makes them His royal ladies-in-waiting. The multitude of people is the glory of a prince, and the size of this king's court yields to no one. In fact, Heaven itself is His royal court, and millions upon millions of faithful ladies, devoted to Him heart and soul, are there in absolute purity and glory. You can see some of them if you look around the room this morning. You are worshipping with princesses who make it their delight to serve this royal bridegroom.

L. He Is the Perfect Bridegroom

But the second, and climactic thing, is that this our King is the perfect bridegroom. The queen stands at His right hand in gold of Ophir.

1. He Honors His Queen

What does that mean? First of all, He honors His queen. She does not stand behind him. She is not trodden beneath His feet. She is not prostrate in front of Him. She stands at His side, at His right hand, the place of honor. Jesus does not denigrate His queen, or seek to make her grovel. He is the opposite of Dostoevsky's nasty character Pyotr Petrovich Luzhin. The narrator of *Crime and Punishment* tells us that Luzhin

brooded with relish, in profound secret, over the image of a girl—virtuous, poor (she must be poor), very young, very pretty, of good birth and education, very timid, one who had suffered much, and was completely humbled before him, one who would all her life look on him as her saviour, worship him, admire him and only him. How many scenes, how many amorous episodes he had imagined on this seductive and playful theme . . .¹

That is not how Jesus Christ is. He honors the queen rather than seeking to completely humble her before Himself.

2. He Provides Richly for His Queen

And He provides richly for the queen. Forget a wedding ring; her dowry is a dress made of the finest gold. There is no expense spared for this wedding. You need only look at the dress to know that this queen will be richly provided for and entirely beloved. This is the climax of the picture of the king. A single gentleman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife — and this prince has her. He got the girl, and we worship Him for that as for everything else.

III. The King's Beauty Applied, vv. 10-15

So this is your king, brothers and sisters. How do you live in light of His beauty and His love and generosity to His bride?

A. This Is the Image to Which You're Being Conformed

Know first of all that this is the image to which you're being conformed. The Son of God is the slain Lamb, but He is also the conquering hero whose bride dresses tastefully in cloth of gold. That's the kind of person He is. He's not tacky or trying too hard. At His wedding He can wear a sword and she can wear a dress made of gold and it works. In fact, it's beautiful.

We are so used to the humdrum, this-worldly people by whom we are surrounded, and which we ourselves are, that we can hardly even believe in a hero like this and a bride like this. But there is no poetic license here. This is the sober truth. When Shakespeare says about Cleopatra, "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, burned on the water," we know that he is exaggerating. Human glory simply does not reach that high. Marvel Studios with its thousand animators can't show us such a thing.

But what is said of Jesus Christ here is all true. Your eyes will see the king in His beauty. You will get to be at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not as a flowergirl or caterer, *but as the bride*. You will get to see Him and be like Him. You will bear the image of the man of heaven,

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett, Pt. 4, ch. 3, [Crime and Punishment | Project Gutenberg](#).

grace on your lips, sword on your thigh, smelling like myrrh and aloes. How is this possible? Through His miraculous saving grace. The glory of earth will be swallowed up by the greater glory, the transcendent glory, of heaven.

B. Listen to Him, v. 10

So you need to listen to Him. That's how the wedding guest applies this heavenly vision. When you see the glory of the Son of God on His wedding day, the day of the gladness of His heart, you will pay careful attention to every word He says. You must listen and incline your ear.

You need to be in church hearing sermons. You need to be opening your Bible and listening to what Jesus Christ has to say to you on a daily basis. You need to be full of Scripture, ready to bleed Bibline, as Spurgeon said. Listen to Him! If you can't quote a single verse of Scripture, if you can't tell me what's in Romans or Psalms, you are not living like the bride of Christ. Incline your ear and make a habit of listening.

C. Bow to Him, v. 11

And when you listen, bow. He raises the queen to stand beside Him, but in a very real sense, we are indeed called to look on Christ as Luzhin wanted his bride to look on him. Luzhin had a Messiah complex, but our Messiah does not. Our Messiah is the real deal. He has lifted us up from the gates of death, and the least we can do is worship Him for the rest of eternity. So bow in worship before King Jesus. He is your head and husband, but He is also your God.

Fundamentally, this is why egalitarian theories of marriage simply don't work. They are mistaken about the dynamics of the archetypal marriage — the one between Christ and His bride. He is your Lord; bow to Him! It doesn't go the other way. You will never see Jesus bowing to you.

D. Dwell in His House, v. 15

Finally, as you see at the end of the psalm, the king and queen go into the king's palace, there to dwell happily ever after. That is your calling and your privilege as a Christian. You get to dwell in the house of the LORD forever, as His bride.

How do you dwell in His house here? By coming to church. By loving to be in worship. By being at home in the congregation of the saints in a way that you are not at home anywhere else on this planet. The house of the LORD is, by grace, your house. He will live joyfully ever after, anointed as He is with the oil of joy beyond all His companions. You and I need to do so too. Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! Amen.