

Seeing & Savoring Christ in the Psalms

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[0 : 00] Today's sermon is really more of a teach a man to fish kind of sermon. Every once in a while we want to be sure that we are explaining to people how they are to read their Bibles on their own.

And we want to make sure that that happens. I remember, gosh, not that long ago, a teenager who had grown up in my church in St. Louis had asked me if there were any resources.

And heard many, many, many, many of my sermons had asked me if I knew of any books that she could read on how to read the Bible. And I thought, okay, first of all, there's this basic phenomenon that happens with all parents.

And that is, I'll tell you a million times and you'll act like you've never heard it before. But also it did cause me to panic a little bit. And I thought, have I done enough preaching that is the kind that just explains to someone this is how we read our Bibles.

And so today is that kind of message. We are specifically going to talk about how to read the Bible in such a way as to always see or see as often as possible the main character, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 11] After the resurrection, Jesus goes to his disciples in Luke 24, 44. It says, Two things there.

One, the point of all the Old Testament scriptures is Jesus Christ. Two, seeing that goes more than just, it's going to require more than just me explaining it to you.

Jesus explained it to them, but he did a supernatural work where he opened their minds to see all the scriptures. And here, we're just totally relying on the Holy Spirit this morning to do that interior work, of course, that I have no capacity to do anything about.

So I want us to walk away today having a basic method of reading our Bibles for the rest of our lives in order to see the main character of the Bible, who is Jesus Christ.

I can't express to you how important it is that you learn to regularly, frequently meditate on Jesus Christ. I mentioned last week that one of the reasons we do this is because the Bible says that it's actually by beholding him that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another.

[2 : 55] Let me give you another reason why it's essential that you right now learn to treasure Jesus Christ. I'm going through a book again.

Even when the suffering takes this or that thing away. Thomas Watson talks about how a wealthy man worth millions of dollars, if he were to lose a button off of his jacket, he wouldn't worry about losing the button.

He obviously has a great treasure and does not need to fret about these little things that he has lost. The basic math of contentment, the basic math of enduring suffering well, is to have treasured Christ before the trial.

Friends, you don't want to wait for the trial to teach you how to treasure Christ. In fact, I'll just say that the greatest predictor for sort of the level of pain in Christ in advance.

You see, what's going to happen is something's going to be taken away. And it's going to hurt. And then what do you console yourself with in that moment? If you have a deep love for Jesus, I could tell you as your pastor, I am so sorry for this or that loss.

[4 : 31] But the good news is, is that you still have Christ and you can never lose him. And I could tell two of you that same thing in completely similar struggles. One of you having developed a lifelong love and treasure of Jesus, you will be comforted by those words.

I'll tell another one of you who is a Christian, but you've just never committed yourself to truly treasuring Christ. I'll tell you, I'm so sorry that this or that has happened to you. The good news is you still have Christ.

And you will have to, in the middle of that trial, in the middle of simply enduring that trial, you will have to learn to value Jesus. So I'd much rather have you learn to treasure Christ before the next trial.

So everything I'm doing through this series in the Psalms is just teaching you how to worship and treasure Jesus Christ. Today, we're going to speak specifically about how to do that in the Psalms.

I wanted to be able to give you this morning something that I knew that God himself had given you and not something merely that I had invented. And so I did an extensive study over the past several weeks on this simple question.

[5 : 37] How does God present Jesus to us? Is there a recognizable pattern that we see how God presents Jesus to us in the Bible? And I did find a pattern appearing in a number of New Testament scriptures, appearing actually in all the Old Testament narratives of the major characters and appearing often in the Psalms.

And so that's what I'm going to do for you this morning. I'm going to give you a simple way of thinking about Jesus as you're reading through the scriptures. And I will apply this in particular to the time that you spend reading the Psalms.

We're going to use an acronym. And that acronym is ADVENT. And it stands for six theological truths about Jesus that often appear in order, as they are indeed in chronological order.

The first is A stands for aseity. That's probably the only word in this acronym that might not be familiar to you. It simply means that God is completely and perfectly self-sufficient and has no needs.

We'll talk more about that in a minute. The D in ADVENT is descent. Not only is Jesus presented as being completely God and all self-sufficient, but then we see coupled with that truth, something like the word became flesh.

[6 : 53] So the D in ADVENT stands for descent, which refers to his incarnation. The V refers to the excellencies of his morality, the virtues of Jesus, the perfect obedience and moral excellence while he was in the flesh.

The E stands for execution, which is just another way of talking about the cross. And then we go to the N, which stands for new life, which is, of course, the resurrection. And finally, the T stands for throne, which just represents the ongoing intercession, rule and reign of Jesus as he sits at the right hand of the Father.

This is basically how the Bible presents Jesus to us. Sometimes it does so in a very small passage like Philippians 2 or John 1 or Hebrews 1 and 2. I'll show you those here in a moment.

Sometimes it does it over a whole book, like in Romans or Ephesians. But essentially, whenever God goes to tell us about Jesus, these are the main themes he discusses.

These are the main glories. And they usually appear, maybe not always completely, but at least partially in order. So let's talk about aseity, the one that is probably the least familiar to us.

- [8 : 01] It's just a theology term that means that God is independent in everything, that he is perfectly self-sufficient, not dependent on anything outside himself. He is the eternal foundational being, the source of life, the sustenance of all things.
- He's self-existent. He wasn't created. He isn't dependent on anyone to do anything for him so that he can continue to create or to continue to exist. He's the source of everything, so on and so forth.
- That's what the word aseity means. And in the New Testament, the aseity of Christ is usually presented in two ways. We are told about his equality with God, and we are told about his supremacy over creation.
- When the New Testament writers want to tell us about Jesus pre-incarnate before he took on flesh, we are told his equality with God and his authority over creation.
- So when John sets out to tell us about Jesus in John chapter 1, this is how he begins. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.
- [9 : 09] He was in the beginning with God, and all things were made through him, and without him was not anything that was made. See that there? God, Jesus has existed forever.
- He's equal with God, and he is actually the creator. Jesus actually is the creator. Hebrews 1, 1. Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.
- But in these last days, he's spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.
- Again, we see aseity asserted in two ways, his equality with God, his authority over creation. And what are the Bible writers doing when they talk about God's authority over creation?
- Is that just to tell us that he's powerful? Is that just to tell us that he's big? No, by saying that he has created all things and over all things, it's actually telling us that he doesn't need anything.
- [10 : 17] That's the main thing going on when we see God's authority over creation. It's to tell us that he doesn't need anything. In Acts 17, when Paul is talking to the Athenians who believe that God must be served with certain sacrifices and so forth, Paul says that God created everything and is not served by human hands as if he needed anything.
- So whenever you read these creational statements in the scripture, what are they basically trying to tell you? Are they trying to contradict Charles Darwin? No, they're not trying. They just do, of course.
- Are they trying to give you an apologetic point about cosmology? No, mainly what they're doing is they're telling you about something very fundamental for you to understand before you can appreciate God and Jesus Christ.
- And that is he didn't need us. He didn't need us. There was nothing about us that he needed. He didn't need our worship. He didn't need our love. He didn't need our help.
- He could make all of those things in limitless supply with the mere whisper of his will. So we see in the New Testament in particular, and you can think of why this is, they're trying to show us that Jesus is God.
- [11 : 28] You'll see all of these New Testament references that Jesus as creator, John, all things are made through him. Hebrews, he upholds the universe by the word of his power.
- Colossians 1.15, he's the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation. For by him all things were created, so on and so forth. So that's the A in aseity.
- Now, when you're in the Psalms, you're going to run into a lot of Psalms that have to do with the self-sufficiency, independence, and perfect richness of God.

You're going to come across like a Psalm. This is very typical. I'm not just cherry picking. Psalm 93.2. This is a very typical statement. Your throne is established from old. You are from everlasting.

A lot of them are linked. You're going to read a lot about creation in the Psalms. You're going to read a lot about creation. The heavens declare the majesty of God, and so on and so forth. What are you doing when you're reading about that?

[12 : 23] What has the New Testament told you? Who has the New Testament told you to think about when you're in the Psalms reading about the Creator? John, Hebrews, Colossians, Jesus Christ, the agent of creation.

So one of the ways to see Jesus in the Psalms is you're going to come into these places where you see creation everywhere. Remember, it is your Savior, your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who spoke the universe into existence and upholds the universe by the word of his power.

When you go into the Psalms and see stuff about creation, you know that Creator by the name Jesus Christ. You're going to see Psalms that talk about his independence over creation.

Psalm 92, Before the mountains were brought forth, or you would ever form the earth or the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Psalm 102, 25, Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you will remain. And every once in a while, you'll get one that's really, really obviously Jesus. This is where John gets his language from.

[13 : 34] The beginning of John, John 1, is borrowed from this passage in Psalm 33. For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.

He loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth, all their host.

So that's the A, aseity. God's self-sufficient. Jesus is self-sufficient. He did not need us. He did not come in order to acquire something he lacked.

The next letter in our acronym is D, for descent. This, of course, just refers to the incarnation. Usually in the New Testament, you have his aseity, his perfect eternal perfections and self-sufficiency.

You have that connected to his descent. So John will say, in the beginning was the word, the word was with us, so the word was with God, and so forth. And then it'll say, and the word became flesh.

[14 : 37] That's the next step in the sequence. You have this high and mighty being who, out of pure love, condescended to walk the earth with us. Hebrews goes on, after presenting this majestic view of Jesus, to say, God made him a little lower than the angels.

Philippians 2, 6-7, who though he was in the form of God did not account equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

When you get to certain Psalms, you'll see that this is talking about the incarnation. Psalm 2, verse 7, Hebrews tells us that Psalm 8 is about the incarnation.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him, that you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet. So when you go to the Psalms and you see these things, know Jesus is represented as the incarnate God-man in the Psalms.

[15 : 59] Now you've got these two doctrines together, the high and mightiness of Jesus and then the condescension. And these are linked to create a certain kind of worship. And that is simply that he did not need to do this.

And here is an infinite gap. The Puritans talk about the infinite gap between the nature of God and the nature of man. Thomas Watson said, it is more appropriate for God to turn all of the angels who have ever been created into worms than it is for God to become a man.

John Owen, I paraphrase this for you. He's a very tough nut to crack. He's not the best writer. So this is my paraphrase. But he says, the whole creation in all its excellency cannot contribute one might unto the satisfaction or blessedness of God.

He has in all infinite perfection from himself and his own nature. How magnificent is the humility of the Son of God in taking on the role of mediator.

The divine nature is so perfect and infinitely distant from all creation. And God is so completely self-sufficient in his eternal joy, lacking nothing and needing no addition, that any attention he gives to his creatures is an act of humble condescension from his supreme position.

[17 : 17] What heart can grasp or words describe the glory of the Son's condescension when he freely took our human nature, making it its own, making it his own to serve as our mediator and represent us before God.

So those are the first two letters in our acronym. The aseity of God, the descent of God, we'll move more quickly through the next. From there, you have the virtues. The V in Advent stands for the virtue or moral excellency of Jesus.

We've already covered this topic in the last couple of Psalm sermons where we talked about the uncanny valley in the Psalms. You see a man in the Psalms who's just a little too perfect.

We talked about the extraordinary claims of moral righteousness in the Psalms and how we've always found those difficult when we read them. I can't say these things. You know, you get to Psalm 15 and you know, this is verse one.

So it just kind of makes you feel like opting out right away. It says, who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly. I'm like, well, eject button. Like, I don't, this one isn't for me.

[18 : 26] Psalm 24, three, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in his holy place. He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

So you're going to get to these Psalms where this imminent moral virtue is presented before you. And you're like, what do I do with this? The New Testament is all about this. It tells us over and over again about Jesus's perfect obedience, his perfect obedience to the Father.

And so these are all just pointing us to Jesus and his moral perfections. And I talked a lot about that last week. The E in Advent stands for execution, which just has a reference to the cross of Jesus Christ.

This is the next phase, the next note in the song, if you will, in this sequence that God presents to us. He is high and mighty, perfect in every way over all of creation.

He condescends and takes on flesh. He lives a perfectly righteous life, so righteous that he obeys God even at the most hard moment. And that is obedience to death even upon the cross.

[19 : 31] I'm quoting from Philippians 2 there. So the E stands for execution. Now this is a good one in the Psalms for two reasons. One, as you might know, when Jesus is speaking on the cross, he's almost entirely quoting the Psalms.

Specifically, Psalm 22, amongst others. So you're going to read Psalms where the author, usually David, is suffering greatly. And what you need to do is understand that there was someone who was greater than David who suffered a greater injustice than David.

And he is actually the author of that Psalm, speaking it through David so that one day he could be on a cross and say God's perfect words to God.

It really is remarkable to consider that Psalm 22 was written for Jesus. to say exactly the right thing on the cross when he was the God-man. And that's actually what, that's the truth.

You're going to come into these Psalms that talk a lot about being surrounded by your enemies. Guys, use your imagination to understand that's exactly what's going on at the cross. He's got one thief over here who was blaspheming.

[20 : 37] He's got people yelling he saved others but he can't save himself. He's got the Romans against him. He's got the Jews against him which is a symbolic figuration of the entire nations.

The entire world is against him. So you're going to come to Psalm 3, Psalm 6 where the writer of the Psalm is surrounded by their enemies. That is most true of Jesus than it is anybody else.

And this gives us another opportunity to deal with a potential stumbling block when you read the Psalms. I'm telling you to read the Psalms always assuming that it's Christ, right?

That's what I keep telling you. Well, you're going to come to certain Psalms where the Psalmist talks about his sin. And now you're like, well Chris, what do I do with that? Jesus didn't sin. What do I do with these passages like Psalm 51?

My sin is ever before me. Well friends, remember what the Bible teaches in the New Testament about what something theologians call the great exchange. Do you know what the great exchange is?

[21 : 37] It's probably best articulated in 2 Corinthians 5:21. He who knew no sin became sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Galatians 3 tells us that Christ became a curse for us. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

So there are going to be times when you read the Psalms and the Psalmist talks about sin. And this is your way to think, you know, I'm sinful of course and I could pray this Psalm as a man and it means something to me. But I'm so glad that I am not ultimately the one who has to answer for my sin.

Jesus Christ, the perfect and almighty God, the creator of all things, needed nothing, condescended, took on flesh, lived a perfect righteous life and offered himself up as a sacrifice in order to exchange his righteousness for my sin.

And the Psalms will get you there. John Piper talks about the great exchange as well as anybody and he says, we need righteousness to be acceptable to God but we don't have it. What we have is sin.

[22 : 47] So God has what we need and don't deserve righteousness and we have what God hates and rejects, sin. What is God's answer to this situation? His answer is Jesus Christ, the son of God who died in our place and bore our condemnation.

By sending his own son and the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he, God, condemned sin in the flesh. Whose flesh bore the condemnation?

His. Whose sins were being condemned? Ours. This is the great exchange. So when you do get to those Psalms where the psalmist is talking about his sin being a problem for him and so on and so forth remember that as Jesus is dying on the cross what is fundamentally happening to him is your sin had been placed on him and God is pouring out his wrath on Jesus rather than you.

When you read the Psalms and see a man struggling with sin remember there is one man who struggled with sin who never sinned. And somehow in some way we can connect these two and say just like we did with aseity and descent we can connect these other two and say he is so virtuous all the way to the cross and now he is so sinful and you understand that this righteous man who became sin for us is indeed our only hope.

Well from there we go on to in in our acronym advent we go to in which is standing for new life which is just a reference to the resurrection. Even here did you know the Psalms contain many references to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 24] sometimes they have to do with sleeping in the midst of great terrible warfare. Psalm 3 5-6 This man is being oppressed he's being surrounded what's he doing sleeping?

Well sleeping guys is throughout scripture analogous with death. Psalm 3 5-6 I lay down and slept I woke again for the Lord sustained me I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who set themselves against me all around.

The classic resurrection psalm is Psalm 16-10 You will not abandon my soul to shoal or let your holy ones seek corruption. Another classic is Psalm 31-3 I will extol you O Lord for you've drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me O Lord my God.

I cried to you for help and you've healed me O Lord you have brought up my soul from shoal and you've restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

I think Psalm 30 is a great resurrection psalm I love the section verse 5 Weeping may last for a night but joy comes in the morning and we just read a text about the joy of Jesus the resurrected Christ in the morning.

[25 : 39] But finally the last letter in our acronym is T for throne this includes the ascension the rule and reign of Jesus after the resurrection.

He ascended or descended from on high perfect in every way took on flesh lived a perfectly moral obedient life to God offered that perfect morality on the cross as a great exchange was raised from the dead because death could not hold him as the innocent one that he was.

We get to this idea of what comes next after the resurrection Jesus ascends to the right hand of the father where he rules and reigns and you're going to see that I mean a massive number of psalms have to do with this a massive number basically all the times you see enemies being discussed they fall under this broader heading of Psalm 110 which as I've told you many times is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament Psalm 110 1 the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make all your enemies your footstool that's exactly what Paul tells us Jesus is doing right now in 1 Corinthians 15 he is sitting at the right hand of the father ruling and subduing until all of his enemies are made his footstool Psalm 72 1 through 11 give the king your justice oh God your righteousness to the royal son may he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice let the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills and righteousness may he defend the cause of the poor of the people give deliverance to the children of the needy and crush the oppressor

Jesus Christ is on the throne right now doing exactly this and has promised to do so until the very end of the age and of course we've got Psalm 2 which is the second most referenced psalm in the New Testament I have set my king in Zion ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage so that's a overview of how to read the psalms and really every other passage in scripture in a Christological way you're looking for these six themes and you're just looking to identify them and celebrate them by the way I did check on Amazon there's a six pack of six different colored highlighters Bible safe highlighters for six dollars and some of you would benefit greatly because you don't really know what you're doing when you get to the Bible some of you would benefit greatly from just taking this dumb thing that I came up with and saying I'm going to work through the psalms and I'm just going to color code aseity descent so on and so forth if you don't have a plan here's a plan you could do that this summer and you would see much fruitfulness come from it why well remember what we said at the beginning it is actually by seeing and savoring

Christ that you are transformed and secondly it is much better for you to learn to treasure Christ before the trial than to try to learn to treasure him in the midst of the trial now I don't want to be completely done with this tea yet I want to talk about one other stumbling block you'll wind up with in the psalms due to a real gross level of theological malfeasance over the years certain Christians have been trained to read references to Israel and think only of Israel when the New Testament is very clear that we if we are Christians have been engrafted in to the larger people of God and so we need to be able to know what to do when we come across well there's lots of words like this but you'll read the psalms and you'll come across the word Zion a lot which is just a reference to the holy city to Jerusalem Psalm 2 references Zion you'll see this a lot

[29 : 36] Psalm 126 1 when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream and if you have been incorrectly taught about this it's just going to create this weirdness because you're going to get to the end where God where the psalmist calls for some blessing on Zion happens all the time and you're going to be like I don't know what to do with this like yay Israel I guess right like what am I supposed to do with this well let me give you one key scripture in the New Testament that helps us properly interpret these references John 4 21 Jesus had just spoken or is speaking with the woman at the well and she asked him which mountain will the people worship God on in the end is it the mountain in Samaria or is it the mountain in Jerusalem and Jesus says in verse 21 of John 4 woman believe me the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the father now what does that do for us as we read the Psalms it helps us to remember that ultimately these places were ultimately had a spiritual fulfillment and that Zion simply just represents the people of God at large

Jesus says it's not going to be you're not going to worship me in a particular place anymore he says the hour is coming and it's now here when the true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and truth for the father is seeking such people to worship him again this tells us that Old Testament places were always more than places they had spiritual meanings that were fulfilled after Christ had come so for instance when we read Psalm 126 1 when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream you could apply this to a national revival in America you could apply this to a group of people who were broken and were eventually healed you could apply this to all sorts of other things Psalm 129 5 may all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backwards the proper theological way to handle that verse is to say may all who hate the church be turned backwards Psalm 149 2 let Israel be glad in his maker let the children of Zion rejoice in their king proper New Testament theological way to handle these is to say that's all of us that's everybody who believes in

Jesus and no one who doesn't by the way if you want more information on this I did a podcast on this subject called the status of the Jews in the new covenant and just explains how the Bible teaches us to understand these Old Testament references that feel very Jewish so that's what I wanted to share with you today I believe that if you just use this acronym not only to study the Psalms but merely when you're going through the Bible if you don't have a method this is just one but it's a way for you to investigate the treasures of Christ in the New Testament when we ask this fundamental question which we began with how do we read the Bible we see the answer look for Jesus and then we ask well how does Jesus show up how does God present him these six themes his perfect eternal aseity his condescension to take on flesh his virtuous moral life while in the flesh all the way to the E to execution to the cross but because he was morally perfect the grave could not hold him so he has new life he's resurrected and then after 40 days of showing himself to many witnesses he ascended to the right hand of the father where he now rules and reigns to subdue his enemies and protect and prosper his people that's the story of

Jesus and you will find that story of Jesus in the Psalms if you know where to look for communion today I just invite you to come and partake of these elements which Jesus himself set aside as a way for you to worship him if you're a follower of Jesus Christ just take this opportunity to take this bread and to take this cup and to think oh my goodness the great God who needed nothing took on flesh so that he could die for me so that when I now read these psalms about the sins of this man or that man I think I am so grateful that I can say along with David blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven whose trespasses the Lord does not count against him so why don't you come and get your elements return to your seat and we'll partake together