



*Singing the praises of* THE  
INIMITABLE AND  
IRREPLACEABLE  
PSALTER

*meaning the Book of Psalms; otherwise known  
as the Psalmody or simply as the Psalms*

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ELIJAH THOMAS CHACKO

The Psalter is conceived in the womb of infinite wisdom and holy sympathy from eternity past. The value and place of the Psalter in the spiritual experience of saints and seekers alike can never be overemphasised.

**T**he Psalter is absolutely sufficient. The contemplation of this feature can inspire awe. The Psalter is a book for all seasons, the winter, summer, spring and autumn of our souls. It is a complete manual of hymns for redemptive experience. The Psalter provides appropriate songs for all occasions; there are psalms for high praises and there are psalms for plaintive supplications. There are psalms for instruction and correction; there are psalms which cherish historical events and psalms which are receptacles of prophecies and promises. There is an apt psalm for every milestone of our spiritual pilgrimage. Providence is a divine mystery that yields a flux of circumstances but our gracious God in His mercy and wisdom has given us a complete hymnal to address every possible situation. Whether it be in the throes of anguish, the euphoria of triumph, the fortitude of faith, the ashes of defeat, the depletion of weariness, the cynicism of unbelief, the tedium of travels, the ecstasy of blessed spiritual experiences, the thralldom of fears, the anticipation of waiting, the sore disappointments of life, the bitterness of being betrayed, the forlornness when salvation appears so remote, the disquietness when God seems withdrawn and silent, the fatigue of attrition, the reproach of scorners, whatever it be, wherever it be, there is a psalm, or two or a few that greet the particular occasion.

The Psalter is timeless. It is just as relevant for the Church in the Gospel age as it was for Israel in the Old Testament dispensation. The historical events pertaining to the incarnation, the death, the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ do not in any way change the significance and practical relevance of all the psalms. Those who suggest that the Psalmody is out of vogue and out of date for Christianity are only debunking their own ignorance and confusion. The birth of Christ Jesus, the God-man, and His eventual glorification at the right hand of the Majesty on high only render crystal clear the interpretation and exegesis of the prophecies and promises in the Psalter. The Person of Jesus Christ and the redemption that is in Him are the central subjects of the Psalter. All the promises and prophecies in the Psalter are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. He who delights himself in the Psalmody will soon discover the Saviour revealed more and more within him.

The Psalter is rich in doctrines. It is so comprehensive in theological range that it can be said to be a compendium of the Bible. It is also essentially Gospelic. The incarnation and sufferings of Christ are prefigured by the lives and experiences of the Psalmists. The Psalmody is inundated with Gospel connotations. Yet the Psalter is best appreciated as a devotional manual. It is primarily meant for spiritual exercises. God in His great empathy and compassion intended it for such an end. It is divinely designed for the improvement of our soul and augmenting of our faith.

In a sense, the Psalmody was created even before the foundation of the world. These everlasting songs were devised in the heart of God but brought to fruition and formulation through a band of composers from varying epochs of history. Through their own trials and triumphs, sufferings and sorrows, the Psalmists were plenarily inspired to pen down the lyrics that were conceived in the womb of infinite wisdom and holy sympathy from eternity past. Our Lord Jesus Christ had created the Psalter for the sake of His Church spanning every age and every generation. Out of His mercy and compassion, Christ had meant the one hundred and fifty psalms to cater for every possible Christian exposure. It is obvious that the life of Christ on earth embraced the whole range of Christian experience (*Hebrews 2:16-18; 4:15*). Incomprehensible as it may sound, the Psalmody is an authorised and adequate repository of Christ's earthly experiences!

The Psalmody comprises songs of the pilgrims of life. *"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage"* (*Psalm 119:54*). Whenever pilgrims of all ages and all places sing them, they are bounded mystically together in faith and fellowship of Christian practice. God's people of every generation have a common vision, an identical culture, one hope and the self-same doctrinal premises. The Psalter consists of songs that affirm our peculiar heritage, hope and sufferings. By singing them we evoke a solidarity that transcends the barriers of time and place. *"How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?"* (*Psalm 137:4*). Only the Lord's people, having the self-same experiences of faith gendered by the free grace of God, can experimentally identify with the hymns of the Psalter. It is our same heritage and legacy that brings us together in a familiar place, even the promised land of Zion. Though Zion is a

geographical designation of a hill on which Jerusalem is built, it also signifies the eminent and unspeakable inheritance of those who are redeemed in Christ. That is why we call the Psalter the songs of Zion (*Psalms 137:3*). "*Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined*" (*Psalms 50:2*). What the Psalmist means here is that God's most perfect and beautiful work upon the earth is the Church. Zion in the New Testament context bespeaks the spiritual fraternity of true Christians of every generation. How inspiring it is to know that the psalms we sing today are the same hymns sung by David and all the distinguished saints of the bygone ages (*Psalms 133; Psalms 100:1,6*).

The Psalter, like the rest of Scriptures, is a sanctifying book. The fact that it is intended for devotional exercises magnifies its power to leave an impact on those who employ it constantly. It instills the fear of God. It creates love for the Beloved of our soul, even the Lord Jesus Christ. It brings to us the solace of God through His eternal Spirit. It generates holy aspirations and breeds the graces of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every time we use the Psalter by faith, it injects sacred life to our soul. When employed effectively, it weeds out hypocrisies, smothers pride and debilitates our evil propensities within. Those that acquaint much with it will allow the Holy Ghost to wrought much of His power and let Christ's countenance shine upon their lives. It keeps at bay the wickedness of the depraved human heart. It breeds godliness and piety. It enthuses us with spiritual zeal. It evokes in us spiritual thirst. If the book of Proverbs is a school that educates us to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in the secular world, the Psalter is a sanctuary which renews our spirits, cleanses our souls and replenishes our faith. Little wonder the singing of these psalms have been to generations of godly brethren the entrance as well as the exit of seasons of worship. It is most uncharacteristic to convene and to close a daily family worship without the singing of a psalm or two.

The Psalmody is also a searching book. It discovers to us the depths of our heart. We see the vulnerability, caprice and frailty of our own heart through the probing power of the psalms. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the human heart: "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his*

ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (*Jeremiah 17:9,10*). The Psalter helps us to search out our sins and iniquities, regardless we be saved or sinners seeking for the forgiveness of God. This in turn has a humbling and solemnising outcome that prepares us to meet the Lord.

One of the principal aims of the psalms is to draw us nearer to God. The Psalter reveals the Godhead to us. While the Psalmody affirms the unity of the Godhead, it also unfolds the distinction of the Persons. God the Father is distinguished from the Lord Jesus Christ, His eternal Son (*Psalm 110:1, Psalm 45:7*). Neither is the Person of the Holy Spirit overlooked. "*And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me*" (*Psalm 51:11b*). In the Psalter, God is acknowledged as the Creator, the Author of the Holy Scriptures, and the Author and Executor of the eternal counsel of Providence. Above all, God is revealed to us as the Author and Finisher of the eternal salvation of the elect. The Psalter magnifies the special relationships that the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit mutually bear One towards the Other especially in the realm of redemption. The Psalmody directs us to seek God diligently for the salvation of our souls and to love all three Persons of the Godhead supremely for their roles therein.

There are many who fail to see the Psalter as a pastoral book. Yet its ultimate aim is to warn and guide us to find salvation and to secure us the assurance thereof. Anyone who has any degree of authentic spiritual experience must know something of the indispensability of the Psalter in the quest for eternal salvation of their souls. Perhaps no other book furnishes us with the kind of help that the Psalter renders in delivering us from the hands of our enemies and bringing us to Christ Jesus as our Redeemer and our Lord. The psalms aid us to vent our anguish and desperation before God. Also by them, God sympathises and succours us in all points. The Psalter is a principal instrument by which Christ discharges His high priestly office in the lives of His people. "*Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me*" (*Psalm 42:7*). Since much of the Psalter is didactic in purpose, our Lord also undertakes His prophetic office through it. It is also a book by which Christ asserts His kingly supremacy upon our lives. Often we are like straying sheep, distracted and defecting from the presence of God. Our lackadaisical attitude may well warrant God's

displeasure and wrath but by means of the psalms, Christ Jesus enjoins us to return. *"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments"* (Psalm 119:176).

The Psalter is to be attended daily. Anything short of an intimate acquaintance and constant application of the Psalter may well lead to the gross negligence of our soul. The Psalter is God's special hymnal to perfect the man of God, throughly furnishing him unto all good works. Our lives become an eloquent testimony of Christ's grace when we allow the Psalter to minister to us. He who sings the delectable psalms constantly will make his life a sweet song of the grace of God.

Any attempt to supplement or supplant the Psalter is a flagrant denial of its sufficiency, a direct affront to the wisdom of God and a nefarious spurning of the love of Christ. It is ridiculous for men to put on par with God's Word the uninspired words of fallible men, no matter how pious they may be. The Psalms, as St Chrysostom puts it, must be "first, last and midst". The woeful history of Christendom in the 19th and 20th centuries elicits that the massive erosion of doctrinal purity and the usurping of the true Gospel by a cluster of false gospels are largely attributable to the replacement of the Psalmody with man-made hymnals and song books in Protestant churches. As the Lord Jesus Christ resisted the treachery of those who made the temple into a den of thieves, so should all His true disciples by withstanding those who attempt to displace the Psalter with the works of men, particularly in the sphere of congregational worship. The value and place of the Psalter in the spiritual experience of saints and seekers alike can never be overemphasised. The Psalter defies imitation and prohibits replacement, if we esteem eternal life in Christ Jesus as the one needful thing. ¶



YISHUN CENTRAL P.O. BOX 0193, SINGAPORE 917607

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