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*Psalms of Life, VI*

## **A Royal Marriage**

### **Psalm 45**

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Twenty-one years ago this summer there was quite a gala event that I'm sure all of you marked on your historical calendars. It happened in this very building in what is now referred to as the "old" auditorium (at that time it was the "new" auditorium) – and that was Patti's and my wedding. It was an important day to us, but it was a fairly modest affair, because we just didn't have any money. I don't know if this is supposed to be a secret or not (so kind of keep this to yourself), but Patti's wedding dress was a dress she bought at the Junior League Thrift Store. The dress had been in a fashion show and then they sold it as a used dress. It was a beautiful dress, and it was what we could afford. We honeymooned in the Midwest honeymoon capitol of Rockport, Missouri. Actually we didn't honeymoon there, that was just the first night of the honeymoon. We actually honeymooned in Bella Vista, Arkansas, because they gave you three days and three nights free if you listened to the 2-hour sales pitch, and we didn't have any money, so it worked.

So that was our wedding experience. But while we were on our honeymoon, we turned on the television and watched probably the most extravagant wedding in the last 25 years—which happened to be the same week as our wedding. That was the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. It was a spectacular event. I remember Patti and I were sitting in the motel, laughing at the comparison between our modest little wedding and that event, which was absolutely majestic.

I want you to think about that royal wedding. If you're not old enough to remember that, just imagine in your mind the most spectacular, majestic wedding scene. Picture these giant doors that open into this ivory palace, with all of the sights and smells and sounds of the most spectacular royal wedding you could imagine. Then try and imagine what it would be like to take a girl who had grown up in absolute poverty, with really nothing to her name, and make her the bride of this king. Imagine what it would be like the first time she steps up as the bride, and these doors open and there are thousands of people. There is more majesty, more splendor, and more beauty than she could even have imagined, as she now becomes the bride of the king.

It's really the story of Cinderella, and we think those things only happen in fairy tales. But I don't think that's true. It happens all the time. You say, *Well, it probably happened some where or some place in the country; but it would never happen to me.* I don't know that that is true, either. As a matter of fact, I think it probably has happened to most of you. And it's recorded in Psalm 45.

Psalm 45 is a psalm that describes a royal wedding. To really walk away with the meaning of this psalm, you do have to engage your imagination. I cannot possibly find words to describe the splendor and majesty of this event, so you are going to have to enter into your own imagination. Just imagine a scene more spectacular than words can describe. It is a royal wedding, with all of the pomp and majesty that would go with an event such as this.

We don't know for sure who wrote Psalm 45. We're not even sure whose wedding is being described, although we know it is a king in the line of David. Most scholars think it was Solomon, and that may very well be the case.

In verse 1, the psalmist opens with an introductory comment. He says, “My heart overflows with a good theme; I address my verses to the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” The psalmist is bubbling over with excitement because he has been asked to pay tribute to this magnificent event. He says it just flows out of the abundance of his heart that he gets to describe this wedding.

It’s very interesting to notice that he says “with a good theme” which could be translated: “with a noble theme.” It’s very unusual for the writers of Scripture, under the leading of the Spirit of God, to say something like that. In other words, all of the Scripture is good. It is all the God-breathed Word of God and it is all noble. So it’s very unusual that a writer would say, “This is special”—meaning it’s almost more special than something else. But, in a sense, that is what the writer is saying—that this is really something special. I think the reason is because, as you go through the psalm, you find that the psalm captures basically the message of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It pulls it all together in a beautiful imagery and essentially is saying, “This is what the whole thing is about.” It’s a beautiful, beautiful psalm.

In verses 2 through 9, the psalmist pays tribute to the king. Remember, this isn’t just a king. This is the bridegroom, so this is filled with all kinds of romance that is fitting of a wedding. One of the things we struggle with is that the Bible is filled with imagery that relates to a monarchy. We don’t understand that imagery because we haven’t lived under a king. A monarchy is very different from a democracy. With all of the beauty and majesty and pomp, a monarchy also has the absolute power; and how that is played out is just very different from what we understand. But it’s a very common imagery in the Scriptures, so we need to keep that in mind as we go through this psalm.

In verse 2, he opens by saying, “Thou art fairer than the sons of men.” The word “fairer” is the word for beautiful. It’s talking about the king, as the bridegroom, as being so impressive in his beauty. As a matter of fact, the word “fairer” (beauty) is actually stated twice in the Hebrew. So he says in verse 2: “Thou art beautiful, beautiful—more beautiful than the sons of men.”

In our culture we are so messed up with this concept of physical beauty, that we don’t even know how to process this kind of information. But we understand that God is the author of beauty, and He has made some people very beautiful. The psalmist is saying that this king is beautiful. I think, along with that, goes the idea that he is very kingly, very stately, and very majestic. He’s a beautiful groom and impressive in his beauty.

It’s followed with the statement, “Grace is poured upon Thy lips.” In other words, there’s been favor put in his mouth. He has the ability to be articulate—to be eloquent. In a monarchy, a king was the ruler and had absolute power; and most of the kings ruled through force and intimidation. They just used whatever force they needed to use to get the people to do whatever they wanted them to do. But the greatest of the kings had the ability to move the masses through the power of speech. And that was a very valued attribute. In fact, it was said of Hercules that “he had a golden chain in his mouth,” which meant not only was he physically strong, but he also was so articulate he could move the masses. He, in a sense, could “chain” them and pull them together because he was powerful in speech. That just tells us it was an attribute highly valued by these people. What we would say in our modern culture is that he had the ability to stand up and cast vision and move the masses. It was not because they had to, not out of fear and intimidation, but because he moved them to get on board to what his vision

was for the kingdom. That's really what the psalmist is referring to. Not only was the king impressive in his beauty, but he was impressive in his speech as he stood before the people.

The end of verse 2 says, "Therefore God has blessed Thee forever." The Hebrew that is translated "therefore" can also be translated "because." "Therefore" is a reference to the fact that because he's impressive in his beauty, and because he's impressive in his speech, therefore he has been blessed. But it can also be translated that *because* he is blessed, that is why he is beautiful and why he is powerful in speech. I tend to think that is the better translation. Those things are actually a reflection of the fact that God's blessing is on the king and that's why he is beautiful and powerful in speech.

In verses 3 through 5, the king is described as powerful—as a military leader. Again, in a monarchy it was very important that the king was powerful and victorious. It was important that he was a warrior, because the king was the military leader. The king was the one who brought peace and safety and security to the people. If you had a weak king, you lived with the insecurity that you may be overrun by a surrounding nation. But if you had a king that was a warrior, a military leader, you would dwell in safety.

So the writer goes on, and as he looks at this groom, he describes him now as a warrior, a powerful king. He says: "Gird Thy sword on Thy thigh, O Mighty One, in Thy splendor and Thy majesty! And in Thy majesty ride on victoriously, for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let Thy right hand teach Thee awesome things. Thy arrows are sharp; the people fall under Thee; Thy arrows are in the heart of the King's enemies." It's a very poetic description of the power of this king as a warrior. When the psalmist looks at the king as the bridegroom, he sees him as being very kingly, very stately, very beautiful. He sees him as powerful in his speech. But he also sees him as a warrior. He straps the sword on his side and he leads his people; and they live in safety and security.

You've heard the statement that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. That's true. The majority of kings were corrupt and they used their power for their own personal gain. They had no accountability—they answered to no one—so they just did whatever. It was a rare king who used his power for good. But that's what the psalmist says: this king uses his power for truth, for meekness, for righteousness.

Imagine this description of this groom. This is every girl's dream. He is the *king*. He's beautiful; he's stately; he's majestic. He's powerful in his speech. He's powerful as a warrior. His character is good. That's the description of the bridegroom king. In verse 6, it says:

Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows. All Thy garments are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia {*which is a bark they used for perfume*}; out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made Thee glad. Kings' daughters are among Thy noble ladies; at Thy right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.

It's a beautiful description of this scene that engages the senses. There's the beautiful sound of the stringed instruments. There's the romantic aroma of these fragrances that reminds us this isn't just the king—this is a groom; this is a lover. It's really quite a majestic scene.

But when we read this psalm, we start to think it sounds almost like this king is beyond human. It sounds like there's something more to this than just Solomon, a human king. It feels

that way in verses 2 through 5; it's confirmed in verse 6. In verse 6, there's a reference that goes beyond the king, to the King of kings.

The kings in the line of David were actually pictures or types of the King of kings to come—the One who would be the ultimate fulfillment of everything a king should be. We don't really have to guess about this. In Hebrews 1:8-9, the writer quotes Psalm 45 and quotes verse 6, identifying it as a reference to Jesus the Son. So we know for a fact that the psalmist is looking beyond King Solomon to the King of kings—Jesus Christ the Messiah.

When Jesus was born, the magi came to see where the King was born. That's what set Herod off. When Jesus walked this earth, He identified Himself as a King establishing a kingdom. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, it was His claim to be King that stuck in Pilate's mind. It's ultimately what pushed Pilate over the edge to condemn Him. When Jesus was flogged He wore a crown of thorns. He wore a mock cape of a king, and He was given a reed as a scepter—all those to mock His claim to be King. Even when He was nailed to the cross, what did the sign read? "King of the Jews." But this King was buried, rose again, and ascended back to His throne. While on earth, Jesus gave people the choice to respond to Him as King or not. But the Scripture says of this exalted King, that one day every knee will bow and will confess that He is Lord and He is King. One day He will demand that as a true mark.

In the Book of Revelation there is a majestic scene of the King, high and exalted, seated on His throne. But the King does mount His horse and come back to this earth with His army in order to wage war against those who have opposed Him. This isn't the wedding of a poor carpenter; this is the wedding of a majestic King. It's very important that theologically we do not limit Jesus to His incarnation on earth. Jesus was the powerful, majestic King in the Old Testament. Jesus ascended back to His throne. He is the King of kings and He is the powerful, majestic King.

Go back through what was said in the earlier part of the Psalm. As he stands there as the bridegroom, he is beautiful. He's beautiful in his majesty and his stateliness. He's a beautiful king. He's the king who speaks truth in his words to move the masses—there's power in his words. He's the king who is the victorious warrior, who leads his troops and allows his people to dwell in safety and security because he's the all-victorious king. But he uses his power for truth and for meekness and righteousness. As the psalmist describes the king, Jesus Christ the King of kings, in verses 6-9, we're also reminded this isn't just the king—this is the groom. This is a bridegroom and there is a lot of romance in the aroma and in the beauty. In this whole scene there is a reminder of the beauty and majesty of this wedding.

When I think of that scene, I try to imagine this girl who had grown up in poverty—who had never known anything materially—and what it would be like to be transplanted into that scene. She is prepared as the bride; then the doors fling open to this absolutely magnificent wedding. She knows that she is entering into this marriage with this king, that is every girl's dream.

Starting in verse 10, the writer of the psalm, then, moves from the tribute to the king, to more of a challenge to the bride. This challenge to the bride is saying, "You need to understand what you're entering into and how magnificent it is and how it needs to be celebrated. He says, "Listen, O daughter *{which is a poetic way of referring to the bride}*, give attention and incline your ear. Forget your people and your father's house." In other words, she needs to forget what she was, because she's about to become something radically different. He says, "Forget the past." Just imagine what it would be like for her to be dragging all her junk up the aisle to

meet her bridegroom. All that junk doesn't fit in with the beauty and majesty of a royal wedding. He is saying, "Leave it behind; that's not who you are anymore. Walk away."

Verse 11: "Then the King will desire your beauty." That word "desire" in the Hebrew is a very strong word. It means to desire very passionately, as a groom would desire his bride on their wedding day. It's a very romantic, intimate and passionate term. And as that bride walks away from what she was and enters into this, he responds by desiring to be intimate with her—to love her as the bride. It says "because He is your Lord, bow down to Him." There's a reminder that he's still the King. "He's your lover" but he's still the King and he deserves to be treated as the King.

Verse 12: "And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; the rich among the people will entreat your favor." Tyre was the capital of the wealthy. "The daughter of Tyre" is just simply saying "the rich, the powerful, the people of influence will now seek your favor." She's gone from this existence in poverty to being in a position where the most wealthy, the most powerful people in the world, will come to seek her favor. Just imagine the transition from what she was to what she will become—not because she's so impressive, but because of who she's now married to.

I try to imagine that scene, because it's absolutely magnificent. And then I remember who the bridegroom is. The bridegroom, this magnificent, romantic King is Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, who is the bride? Who is the bride who's experiencing this royal wedding? It's me...I am that bride. If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, you are that bride. You are that bride who has lived your life in the poverty of your sin, in hopelessness and despair. And for whatever reason, this majestic King in his beauty and in His power—everything you could ever want—has reached down and made you His bride. He's taken you from your poverty, and He wants to be your lover. He wants to romance you. He wants you to enter into His majesty and His beauty and His power.

Think of the things that have been said of this King and what you now enter into. Go back to verse 10: "Forget your people and your father's house." Remember in Genesis chapter 2 when it describes the first marriage, it says to leave and cleave. Have you ever thought about that as a theological statement? It is. It isn't just referring to marriage—it's referring to the ultimate marriage of Christ and His bride. We leave the old things behind. I leave my failures; I leave my sins; I leave my past. I leave the things of this world that I might cleave to this new majestic relationship with the King. He wants to be passionate with me. He wants to be intimate with me. He wants to romance me. He talks in verse 11 of our need, even though He's our lover, to remember He's still the King. We bow and we worship in this new relationship.

To really understand verses 13, 14 and 15 we have to have some understanding of the Jewish wedding and how that worked. When a man determined this was the woman that he wanted to marry, he worked out an arrangement with that girl's parents and paid the dowry. At that point, they became betrothed. Some people compare the betrothal with our engagement, but they are not really very similar. At the point of the betrothal, the couple would be referred to as husband and wife. It was so binding that the only way to get out of the betrothal was through a divorce. However, the bride and groom would live separately during the betrothal. They would have no physical contact until the actual wedding day. The groom would go back to his place and begin to prepare for the coming of the bride. The bride would go back to her place and prepare for the coming of the groom—for the wedding day. As a matter of fact, she would spend months taking baths in all kinds of perfumes and herbs and spices so that she was

beautiful for that wedding day. That would be the focus of her attention—to prepare herself. She also had to live in a state of readiness, because she didn't know when the bridegroom would come. That was his call. This betrothal period would often last as long as a year, maybe even a year and a half; so it was a lengthy period of time.

Finally, on a day that the groom would determine, he would put together a procession and begin to move toward the house of his bride. As that wedding party would move to the streets, people would start to call out, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" The bride would hear that; she would know it was time, and she had better be ready. So she would put together her wedding party, which would be other virgins, and they would go to meet the bridegroom. They would light candles and torches, and this magnificent wedding party would then move to the streets. It was absolute celebration.

They would finally get back to the home of the bridegroom, consummate the marriage, and enter into the wedding feast, which lasted anywhere from a week to two weeks. It was an all-out party. The Jewish people understood a lot of things, and one of the things they understood was how to throw a party. I mean, these people partied for a week or two, and they celebrated the right things—this was a magnificent event. All of this was meant to create the picture of the coming of the bridegroom for the bride.

That's what is described in verses 13, 14 and 15: "The King's daughter {*which, again, is a poetic* is interwoven with gold. She will be led to the King in embroidered work; the *reference to the bride*} is all glorious within {*meaning she's made herself ready*}; her clothing virgins, her companions who follow her, will be brought to Thee. They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing; they will enter into the King's palace." So this is that scene where the King goes; and as that bridegroom picks up his bride, they enter into this magnificent environment which was described earlier as an ivory palace with stringed instruments and the fragrance of romance. It's just a beautiful, beautiful environment. The doors swing open, and that bride perhaps captures for the first time the magnificent nature of this relationship she's entering into with the King.

In both the Old and New Testament, God uses the imagery of a romance, a wedding, and a marriage between God and His people (Christ and His Church) to really picture our salvation. This psalm is about the beauty and the romance and the majesty of what He's done for us. He's taken us from absolute poverty of sin and He has made us His royal bride, to romance the most incredible bridegroom King that we can even begin to imagine.

Sometimes we get the craziest ideas about our Christian faith. Somehow we turn it into a kind of drudgery—we make it a life of rules and regulations and we're just kind of slugging it out. The psalmist doesn't agree with that at all. The psalmist sees it as the most beautiful, majestic, wondrous thing that you could even begin to imagine—that this King of kings in all of His glory would reach out into poverty and, for whatever reason, He would choose *you* to be His bride, His lover, to romance you and make you a part of the majesty of who He is forever.

In some ways we're living today in the betrothal period. We are making ourselves ready. We're waiting to hear that voice, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" We don't know the day or hour, but He's coming. He's coming; and the bride has orders to be ready. Every day we live our lives in readiness and we prepare ourselves in the beauty and fragrance of holiness and purity. Why do we do that? Not because of rules and regulations. It's because we're longing for the bridegroom to come and take us away. We're motivated because we love Him. We're motivated because He's our lover; He has romanced us. We're motivated because

we're so excited about that day. The Book of Revelation talks about this great marriage feast when the bride and bridegroom are brought together forever.

Verses 16 and 17 are really just a benediction to the whole wedding. He says, "In place of Your fathers will be Your sons." He's talking again to the King; these are masculine pronouns. "You shall make them princes in all the earth. I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore the people will give You thanks forever and ever." He's simply saying that a king will be succeeded by his son, and his son's son...that this kingdom is a kingdom that will last forever.

What do you do with this psalm? I think the best way to apply the psalm is to understand this is a picture of the magnificence of your salvation. If you have trusted Christ as Savior, you should walk out these doors with a smile on your face and joy in your heart. What has been done to you is absolutely magnificent. It is incredible! You have been romanced by the King of kings and you have been made His bride. You have gone from poverty to royalty. And no matter what life throws your way, no matter what you've been through, this world can't take that away. That is yours forever. We're just waiting for that day when He returns and we will be with Him forever. What has happened to you is absolutely magnificent, and there is every reason for joy in your heart.

We also have to remember that we, collectively, are the bride of Christ, but we're only as prepared as each individual member. We, together, are the bride. But we each have a responsibility to be preparing ourselves, living in purity and holiness and being a bride made ready for the coming of the bridegroom. We do that individually so that we are ready collectively.

Some of you have never trusted Christ as Savior. You've never entered into this beautiful, magnificent relationship with God. But it is yours today, by faith. I don't know why God chose us; but He did. That relationship is yours if you are willing to believe that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, came to earth, became a man, lived a perfect life, was nailed to the cross in payment for your sin. He died there in your place; was buried; rose again and descended back to His throne; and He offers you salvation if you will place your trust in Jesus as your Savior. In other words, you believe that Jesus tells the truth when He says, "I died on that cross for you." You don't earn it. You don't deserve it. You just simply receive it by faith. And the moment you do that, you become the bride of the King. You enter into this most magnificent wedding—a royal wedding that will one day be consummated, and you will dwell forever with Him in glory. It is a royal wedding.

*Our Father, we're thankful that You have done what we cannot even begin to imagine. You, as the stately, beautiful, powerful, victorious King, have reached into the poverty of this world and You have made us Your bride—to enter into all the majesty, all the splendor, all the beauty that is Yours alone. Lord, help us to understand the majesty of what we have received in our salvation.*