

Views from the Pews – Psalm 145

We sang this last week. These 150 ‘songs’ offer a wonderful window into the pre-Christian Jewish world view. Readers and singers of Ps 145 will immediately be struck by the close relationship between God and the singer, by the consistent use of the First Person, and by the themes that occur over 21 verses. Themes include the singer’s duty to offer daily praise, the praise that stretches from one generation to another, God’s status as architect, as author both of terrible acts but also of abundant goodness, the upholder of the fallen, and as listener to all who cry out. This is truly a one on one relationship, despite the context of human generations, and despite the presence of wider creation.

So, although the Messiah was long-expected, and frequently prophesied by generations of Jewish theologians, Christ’s arrival, death and resurrection would have been a challenging idea for the Psalms’ original consumers. Let alone the descent of the Holy Spirit! We are used to the idea of a Trinity, although explaining it can challenge even the best preachers. So our Christian world today seems light-years away from the world portrayed by the Psalmist.

This seems worth bearing in mind when we ourselves struggle to understand the survival of Judaism, its resilience, and its apparent reluctance to climb on the Christian bandwagon despite Christ’s clear identity as King of the Jews. Different people have different world views, and we are lucky that we have an Old Testament as a window into a world that is both ‘Old’ but simultaneously contemporary. To learn about the Jewish world-view (in all its diversity and potential for internal conflict) is the equip ourselves to cope with contemporary world events.

Can we then take a further step, and ask ourselves whether there are equivalent Islamic writings? In all probability there are. This is the third of three faiths that refers to holy scripture for validation and identity. Misconstruing Islam gets us into as much trouble as does misconstruing Judaism. A believer needs to be able to spot and then reject extremism; getting to know the holy writings of all 3 faiths will help with that.

We need to keep singing Psalms for all we’re worth. A tree cannot survive without roots and a quick dip into the Psalms produces much familiarity; just look at Psalm 148 for instance. Where have we heard that before?

Richard Swarbrick