

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Psalm 117
Maschil and Michtam
(Audio is good)

Editorial Note: It is my belief that this series on Psalms was recorded while Sidney and Violet Cox resided in retirement at The Eventide residence in Detroit, Michigan. This was during the period 1962 through 1972. Sidney Cox was 75 years of age in 1962.

At various points in the recordings, he states that he is meeting with this group weekly to lead this series; however, when listening to the recordings, there does not seem to be a live congregation. At another spot in the series, he explains that he has also been taping these messages for further distribution.

During this period in his life, Sidney Cox often preached and taught in various churches around the Detroit area, but for a variety of reasons, including the declining health of his beloved wife, Violet, he was increasingly unable to travel extensively. As a result, he began to experiment with tape-recording his messages and lessons in order to send them to interested groups.

Thus, it is impossible to know if he delivered this series in person to a church group, or whether he recorded the series for them to listen to in their Sunday School or other meetings. It was likely both.

The order in which he presented the weekly series was: Psalm 24, Psalm 40, Psalm 46, Psalm 91 and Psalm 117. In addition, there are two recordings made in two different settings of Psalm 29, which do not seem to be part of the formal series.

The audio quality of these recordings varies a great deal. Some are quite good while others are poor.

J. Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. July 30, 2010.

It has been real delight and a privilege to have these Wednesday night hours with you in which we have considered some of the great and familiar Psalms. I shall never forget the joy of it all and the high privilege that you have given to me and I shall not soon forget the sight of you and the look upon your faces as we have thought together about the great messages of these familiar Psalms. We have been traveling over a pathway that has proved to be, I'm quite sure, of interest and perhaps of blessing. It has certainly been of interest to me and of great blessing to my own heart that I've been able to talk out some of these things with a group of folks like you.

Now, we began, as you know, with Psalm 24, then we moved on to Psalm 40. We moved to Psalm 46. Last week we were considering Psalm 91 and tonight our thought will center in Psalm 117.

Again, it may interest you to know, and I'm sure it will, that we are arranging this series of Psalm messages on tape so that they can be sent to little classes here and there, or maybe larger classes here and there. And we shall be praying, and I'm sure you will, that God will be able to use them. So not only will the sound of these messages have reached our ears, but through the medium of tape, I almost said the magic of it, but through the medium of tape they may reach the ears of others who need the message just as much as we do, and perhaps more.

Now, we've been talking part of the time about the book of Psalms as a whole and we mentioned quite a number of incidental or perhaps fundamental facts regarding this book that is so meaningful and so important to so many folks.

For instance, we discussed the meaning of the word Psalm - the word that means, a song to be sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments. And the moment that we mention that, of course, we are immediately aware of the stringed instruments of the Bible and we think not only of the stringed instruments of the Bible, but apparently the stringed instruments of heaven. For one of the most quickening and lovely statements that can be found anywhere in the scripture is that simple verse that comes leaping at us out of the Book of the Revelation, "And I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne."¹ The word Psalm - a song to be sung to stringed instrument accompaniment.

And then we paused at the words that you find so frequently at the heading of a Psalm: To the chief musician. And we reminded ourselves that the psalm evidently was written to be set to music and sung at some point or other in the temple services. As a matter of fact, there are fifty-five of these psalms thus designated: For the chief musician.

And then we went still further and noted some of the distinct and particular, and perhaps peculiar, names that we find at the head of some of the Psalms. For instance, the word Gittith, which means wine presses.² And then we paused a moment to look at that rather strange, but beautiful word Shoshannim, which means lilies.³ And that reminded us, of course, that while some of these songs were intended to be sung at any time of the year, there were others, obviously, that were intended to be sung at some distinct time of the year.

For example, when we think of the time of the wine presses, what time of the year do we have in mind? Not the springtime. The fall, when the harvest is being gathered in. And we are reminded there that one of the great feasts of the harvest time was the Feast of the Tabernacles. And then when we remember that the meaning of the word Shoshannim is lilies, that just takes our mind back to the springtime. So here was a song that was intended to be sung at the springtime of the year, possibly at the Feast of the Passover which occurred in the early part of the year.

Now, before we go any further, I want to just remind you of the importance of these strange statements.

¹ Revelation 14:2,3

² Used in Psalms 8, 81 and 84. While it is true that "Gittith" can refer to a form of wine press, the word also refers to a stringed musical instrument from Biblical times.

³ Used in Psalms 45 and 69. The strict Hebrew meaning is "lilies." However, some believe it also refers to a lily-shaped straight trumpet.

The average person who reads the Psalm is without any particular knowledge as to what these things mean. But when we grasp the meaning of some of these, it adds a new value, a new dimension to our understanding of the Psalms. And perhaps sometime, when you have a few minutes to spare and you have your book of Psalms open, why not pass on this information to someone else? Give it away. After all, that's the genius of the thing that we're doing, isn't it? That in order to possess anything, we must give it away. In the realm where Christ is central, the only thing that is of value to any of us is that which we are privileged to give away to somebody else. That which we keep for ourselves is eventually lost in the hay and wood and stubble of life. But that which we give away to someone else, that becomes gold and silver and precious stones. And so I'm hoping and perhaps encouraging you to take some of these thoughts and give them away to somebody else.

There are two other words that we wish to mention tonight. One is the word, *maschil*. And the meaning of that word is, instruction. And it has in mind a teacher with a class. Now, here is a teacher sitting down with his heart throbbing with desire to impart some information of value to those who are listening to him. And if that is the thought back of a word like, *maschil*, when we come across it, would it not be wise to take a second look at the psalm itself and see what is that thought that the teacher had in mind to impart to his students? What is the thought that is so important? And you will find the words, or the word rather, in the following psalms. Now, here they are: Psalm 32, 42, 44, 45, and 52.

Now, there's another word that appears there that seems rather strange. I think it would to the average Christian reader, and that's the word, *michtam*. And the word means, engraven. It is some thought that is written with permanence in mind. And, of course, any message of that kind also has importance in mind. So that here we've got another word that reminds us that some of the messages of the Psalms are so important that they should be written in such a way that they cannot be erased. They should be engraved, with the thought of permanence and importance. Now, here are the psalms that bear that title: 16, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60. Now, occasionally, as we read commentaries on the Book of the Psalms, we come across some description that is so beautiful that it stirs our hearts and perhaps brings tears to our eyes by its sheer beauty.

One of the writers that I like very much is Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter.⁴ He is one of those who has a marvelous grip of the English language and a poetry in his writing and music in the things that he utters; beauty in the things that he obviously sees. And he gave this word of description of the Book of Psalms. This is what he says about it. "It is a garden of flowers that never lose their fragrance, though some of the roses have sharp thorns. It is a stringed instrument which registers every note of praise and prayer, of triumph and trouble, of gladness and sadness, of hope and fear and unites them all in the full multi-chord of human experience." Here then was a description from J. Sidlow Baxter of the Book of Psalms, this garden of flowers, where the flowers never lose their fragrance.

⁴ J. Sidlow Baxter (born in Australia, 1903; died 1999) was a pastor and theologian who authored as many as thirty books analysing the Bible and advocating a Christian theological perspective. His most popular work was *Explore the Book*, a 1760 page tome that analyses and summarizes each book of the Bible. Baxter was raised in Lancashire, England, and attended Spurgeon's College in London before pastoring in England and Scotland, in Northampton and Sunderland. Sidney Cox was born and reared in Northampton, England.

Now with that introduction, let's turn for a few moments to the Psalm that lies before us, Psalms 117. Now, several things will immediately suggest themselves to us. First of all, it is the shortest psalm of the 150. Then, if we consider a psalm to be a chapter, it is also the shortest chapter in the Bible. Someone has counted the words in the Bible on each side of this psalm, which by the way is in the exact center of the Word of God. And when this party counted the words on either side of Psalm 117, he found that there was exactly the same number on both sides going back to Genesis on the one side and onward to the Book of Revelation. This little Psalm 117 is in the exact center of the Bible.

Now, let's look again, and you will notice at once that this psalm begins and ends with exactly the same word, the word that is translated in our common use as the word, Hallelujah, the "Praise the Lord" that is there. And it begins and ends with exactly the same word. Now any psalm that begins and ends with the same words is called an "envelope psalm." And you can see the figure that is being used there. Here are the two ends like the two sides of an envelope, and then into the envelope itself is poured the content of the psalm. And so we have before us this interesting fact also about Psalm 117.

Now, you will find a few psalms like that; not too many of them. For instance, you find Psalm 8 is also one of the envelope psalms. If you turn to it, you will find that David is crying out in a loud voice. "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth."⁵ And when you turn to the end of it you hear the same echo of the same voice. "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth."⁶

And the psalm that immediately follows it has another very interesting word that is there. It's the word, muth-labben. Now, it is sometimes supposed that the word that appears at the beginning of a certain psalm also applies to the psalm that is immediately before it. And if that is the case, then the thought of so many of our commentators is confirmed, for in this psalm where David is saying, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth," it is generally supposed that he had in mind the death of the great champion that he faced - the champion of the Philistines, Goliath. And in that chapter, he is thinking in terms of the downfall of a great champion. Muth-labben is the word that means, the death of the champion.

And when you remember the words that are at the beginning and the ending of Psalm 8, you can see the connection there. For when David faced Goliath and said to this great and terrible figure, flesh personified, nine feet six tall, with a spear like a weaver's beam, this stripling of a lad faced him and said, "You come to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts."⁷ And you can see the connection between this exclamation and the great psalm that we are referring to, incidentally perhaps, at this particular time.

In Psalm 117 you find there are 33 words in the English translation. 17 words in the Hebrew record of it. And it contains one of the greatest, if not the greatest, central revelation of God's truth to be found anywhere in the scripture. A very short psalm, standing in the center of the Book of God and as we would expect, out of the midst of it, flowing out of it like a crystal stream, is this marvelous truth that is there. The great central truth of the Bible is right here in this little psalm that we call Psalm 117.

5 Psalm 8:1

6 Psalm 8:9

7 I Samuel 17:45

Notice, if you please, the people that are there in view. The nations, the people. Obviously the Gentiles on the one side and the Jew on the other, reminding us that God's great truth applies to both - that he does not set on one side one group at the expense of another. But the great words of redemption and goodwill and loving kindness are for all men, no matter where they are, that the gospel is equally available to a Gentile as it is to a Jew. And here is the thought that is there in the introductory statement of it. "All ye people and all ye nations." They are in exactly the same basis.

Now, this is the message that is there. What does he have to say to the nations on the one side and the peoples on the other that can bring them together and form one people so that there is no middle wall of partition between them anymore? What is this message? It is in two great words that glow like neon lights in God's sky: merciful kindness. Unchanging truth. This is the word that stands right in the middle of the Bible. God's merciful kindness. God's unchanging truth. And here we have it.

Mercy for those who are in deepest need. Truth to those in darkest need. For remember, dear, that the word mercy applies to those, particularly who are deeply concerned about their sin. Do you remember a man who was in the back of the temple one day and wouldn't lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast and cried, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."⁸ A man deeply disturbed about his sin. And that's where the word merciful particularly applies to those who are in deep need and in deep darkness and in deep distress because of the fact of their sin.

It's wonderful to think how God himself is described in the scripture as the Father of Mercies.⁹ How he is described as the one, rich in mercies.¹⁰ The one who is described as the truth, not merely speaking truth, he is truth. Truth in its entirety.

But there's another and beautiful meaning to it, and that is that the word mercy is seen in the New Testament as well. Mercy so frequently. This particular reference to it and there we find that the word appears, the same word as, propitiation. He is the propitiation for our sin.

And in the Old Testament, the blessed word of, mercy seat. The place where the blood was sprinkled and where the Shekinah glory glowed and where the priest stood once a year and sprinkled the top of the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat with the blood of sacrifice; and came out and told the people that in response to their obedience and the value of the thing that God had Himself prescribed, that God had accepted the sacrifice and that reconciliation had been accomplished. This is the word, the mercy seat.

This man at the back of the temple had that in mind, "God provide me, a sinner, a mercy seat; somewhere where the blood is sprinkled; somewhere where a guilty sinner can come and where God can be on one side and the sinner on the other." And because of the shed blood there can be meeting and reconciliation between a holy God and a sinful man. And there isn't any other place in the universe where anything like that could ever be accomplished. The mercy seat. And thus, we see some of the beauty of this lovely thing that lies before us.

8 Luke 18:13

9 II Corinthians 1:3

10 Ephesians 2:4

A little bit of a psalm right in the center of the book with a beginning of Hallelujah and the ending of Hallelujah. With its few words, but their glowing with unearthly beauty is this great truth, perhaps the greatest truth, that God's arms of mercy are extended to all men. You can almost hear the echo of the words, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son."¹¹

And I'd like to remind you that this meditation that we have been, I hope, enjoying to some extent tonight is but the beginning of things. It's only touching the hem of the garment. And I look into your dear faces tonight, I'm just hoping that something may have been said that will stir within each one of us the desire to go back to it again and read it over and over and over again. And with a prayer in our hearts that the Holy Spirit may continue to reveal far more truth in it than you have heard tonight. For we have only touched, as we expressed, the hem of the garment. Out there beyond our eye's horizons, there is immeasurably more. Let's go seek for it. Let's reach out our hands for it. Let's open our hearts for it. Let it flow in and then flow out again.

We have been discussing tonight in this brief and all together inadequate way one of the loveliest bits of scripture that we speak of as Psalm 117.

Prayer:

We pray, our Father, that our meditation shall have been profitable to all of us. That in these brief moments we have spent together we may have heard, not merely a human voice blundering along, but we may have heard the voice of God talking to our hearts and reminding us of the fact that we sing so frequently, how great thou art. This great God of unlimited mercy and unchanging truth. Bless these dear folks, we pray. In Jesus precious name, Amen.

(audio ends)

¹¹ John 3:16