

*Thy Statutes Have Been
My Songs In The House
Of My Pilgrimage*

Psalm 119:54

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PREFACES

Singing The Praises Of The Inimitable And Irreplaceable Psalter

The 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the bitterness of being betrayed, the forlornness when salvation appears so remote, the disquietedness when God seems withdrawn and silent, the fatigue of attrition, the reproach of scorners, whatever it be, wherever it be, there is a psalm, or two or a few that greet the particular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 Those who suggest that the Psalmody is out of vogue and out of date for Christianity are only exposing their own ignorance and confusion.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 plenary inspired to pen 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 (*Psalm 137:3*). *"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Psalm 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 bygone ages (*Psalms 133; Psalm 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 in them 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 way, 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 saints 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 (*Psalms 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 in 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 (*II Timothy 3:17*). 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.

By ELIJAH THOMAS CHACKO

4 August 2000 AD

PREFACE

*“Thy statutes have been my songs
in the house of my pilgrimage.”*

— Psalm 119:54

Amid an acutely hostile environment saturated with treacherous contemporaries, the psalmist found it immensely difficult to practice faith in Jehovah God. When the deluge of evil surged upon him and ominously threatened to utterly overwhelm him, the psalmist withstood it not only to survive but to triumph gloriously. The secret of the psalmist's success can be attributed to his constant and reverential esteem towards the Word of God; he resorted to it continually, dwelling upon and delving into its precepts, statutes, testimonies, commandments, law and words; therein he found and imbibed strength, resolve, courage, comfort and vision. Like his Saviour and Lord, the psalmist could testify, through the deep spiritual experiences he had undergone, of the words of our Lord: *“they are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63b)*. And in this particular verse of the acrostic psalm, he intimates one of the modes by which facilitation was made for the contemplation and delight of the Word of God: through the singing of songs! Indeed the psalmist reckons himself as a singing pilgrim, the sum and substance of his songs being the Word of God. It could be that by this means, the psalmist would have reminded himself that *“for here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13:14)*. Hence there was a provision

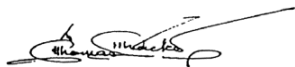
afforded to help him to have a detached sense to the material, tangible things of this world and to stimulate him to spur on despite the fierce warfare he was engaged in.

Christians of every age are bound to suffer loss if they fail to learn this vital instruction and emulate this profitable and godly example from the psalmist. This is particularly so in the era in which we live in when Christendom has been pervaded by the spirit of Antichrist. The Antichrist spirit has substituted true religion by a “form of godliness”. Today many are giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy because they pretend to be Christians, nay leaders of Christendom. This is manifestly seen today in the flourishing of the ecumenical movement when many professing Christians are now easily assimilated to the unity that acclaims and submits to the leadership of the pope whose avowed goal is to destroy the fabric of biblical Christianity.

What should characterize the lives of faithful saints in such times? A people constantly resorting to the Word of God to know it and to obey it. Perfect, continual and cheerful obedience to the Scriptures is the very evidence and assurance of an unfeigned and living faith. When the Word of God becomes the very spring and source of the whole outlook on life and the essence of our living, how can we not sing it? Far worse, how can we sing another song? It is both purposeful, meaningful and resourceful for the saints of God who are in Jesus Christ to sing the Scriptures. It marks them out distinctly from a people that sing another kind of songs – the songs of this world. But the faithful are merely sojourners here and therefore they sing the pilgrims’ song, which comprise the statutes of Jehovah Elohim.

Wherefore the necessity to compile this file so as to facilitate the singing of the Scriptures. It underlines our circumspection and resoluteness in rendering compliance to the instruction of the Word of God in the realm of worship.

On behalf of the churches in the Word of God, the churches in Singapore, Australia, India, the Philippines,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elijah Thomas Chacko', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Elijah Thomas Chacko

(Psalm 1:1-3)

A VISION OF GODLYMEN OF OLD AND OURS, ENDORSED BY THE SCRIPTURES ITSELF

In his remarkable preface to his Greek Testament, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) penned these words:

“I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveler should beguile with their stories the tedium of the journey.”

Drawing inspiration from Erasmus’ Greek Testament, William Tindale (1494-1536) unflinchingly set to work on translating the Scriptures to the English language. Tindale’s aspirations were somewhat akin to Erasmus, perhaps more definite and intense. Enduring all the fiery persecutions and the enormous difficulties, Tindale eventually realized his cherished desires. History bears attestation that Tindale rendered the most significant contribution towards the production of the classic masterpiece of the English translations, the King James Version. Echoing the sentiments of Erasmus, Tindale once replied to an arrogant Roman Catholic priest who had said to him that it was better they be without God’s laws than the pope’s:

“I defy the pope and all his laws: and if God spares my life I will, before many years have passed, cause the boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than you do.”

In endeavouring to attain his noble vision, Tindale was incessantly harassed, hunted and haunted. Eventually he suffered martyrdom. But before he was ruthlessly pounced upon and devoured by the papists, Tindale had already achieved his life-long ambition. Tindale’s English New Testament had the whole of England clamouring voraciously for the Word of God. The battle for truth had just been kindled in the English land!

In these last days, when the righteous would resolve and toil to scatter the precious seed of God’s Word, the devil and his cohorts would indulge themselves feverishly in disseminating the devil’s tares, Today the spreading of these tares are not only perpetrated from the Roman Catholic pulpits but also by the cults and heretics, the modernists and liberals and the ecumenical churches. The latter have treacherously committed whoredom with the Vatican. Identifying with the ecumenical movement are Protestant citadels that once stood up valiantly and faithfully for the Word of life but now have degenerated to become epitaphs of desolation and death. Included in this shameful catalogue are the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Brethren and the Baptists. Acting as their catalysts are the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements which are actuated and energized by the devil himself.

In the midst of the mushrooming apostasy, the only recourse for the righteous is to immerse themselves in the life-

infusing doctrines of Christ and to wield the sword of the Spirit, even the Word of God, to expose the works of darkness. For it is the craft of the devil to sow the counterfeit seed which may have the semblance of the Word of God but is totally devoid of pure truth and divine efficacy. We have for instance many dubious and unfaithful versions that claim to be good translations in spite of the fact that they are based on perverted and unreliable manuscripts. These arises therefore, from such a predicament, a crucial need to know and guard the Word of God lest we fall easy prey to the devil's subtlety. For as he had deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, so the devil's most artful ploy is still to distort and pollute the Scriptures in such a way that it is oblivious and elusive.

It is to withstand triumphantly the grave and sly dangers of deviating from the Word of the truth that Paul the apostle admonished Timothy in his swan-song epistle, II Timothy 1:13,

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

For it is a penchant and an itch in corrupted man, even in regenerated man, to detract to add or to misinterpret the import of Scriptures. Hence even the best efforts of the most venerable of saints are subjects to errors, aberrations and inaccuracies.

Hence the task of paraphrasing the Word of God would inevitably render it as the word of man or even the word of the devil. This is why there is no substitute for the Word of God. We dare not meddle nor tamper with it! The prose or lyrics, though they might have semblance of soundness,

spirituality and attractiveness, cannot substitute nor replace the Word of God.

Wherefore our endeavour to affix and furnish appropriate music scores to facilitate the singing of the Word of God. Inevitably there would be a dire lack of rhyme and rhythm. Consequently, the tunes or music might suffer but better this than for the truth to suffer. To some who are cultured in the fine art of music, the whole thing might seem ridiculous. Yet we are determined to give no leeway to their banterings and scorn. We encourage ourselves that in this way we are able to conform to the precept which Paul the apostle has enjoined us in Colossians 3:16,

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Another immense practical value of appending tunes to Scriptures is vouched by the fact of man’s intrinsic power to facilitate remembrance through music. By this we are able to fulfill the holy resolve of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:93,

“I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them Thou has quickened me.”

But above all, by the furnishing and compiling of these scriptural songs, the cherished expectations of Erasmus and Tindale can be literally materialized, though we humbly admit there is so much more scope for the perfection of the mode of its accomplishment.

For the brethren who gave themselves so readily, anxiously and diligently to this solemn task of matching the music with the portions of Scriptures and all the other ancillary labours involved therein, this service has been a great privilege. The endeavour was an expression of their faith and love in Christ Jesus.

This labour of love was also inspired by a vision. And our joy would only be complete when this vision is realized. Notwithstanding the avalanche of apostasy, if men and women would refuse to succumb to its devastating spell but instead sing the Word of life to stir, encourage and gird themselves to stand up for the truth; it could be a weary farmer ploughing the field in the scorching heat of the noonday sun; or it could be a discouraged student wilting under the pressure of incessant work; it could be an encumbered housewife patiently performing her endless chores; it could be a busy hawker in pensive mood; it could be a haggard old man whose mobility has been affected by the ravages of times; it could be a concerned mother anxious to teach her growing toddler the fear of the LORD; O, if only these in their sundry walks of life and in divers situations could muster strength, hope, faith and love by singing the Word of God, then our vision would have assumed a more definite shape.

But this is not merely our vision alone. It was the vision of Erasmus and Tindale. It was also the vision of Paul the apostle. Moses, the servant of God, could have surely commended this as one of the surest means in carrying out the spirit of the solemn charge he gave to the people of God in Deuteronomy 6:4-9,

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

What of the Psalmist? Has he not prescribed this and reiterated it in numerous ways, say, as in Psalm 100:1-2,

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before His presence with singing.”

He confirms of what constituted the substance of his songs in the verse we have now borrowed to ascribe a title to this work:

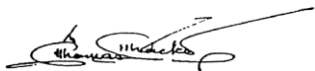
“Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”

(Psalm 119:54)

Yea, it could have been the vision of countless saints who lived and suffered for the faith in the process of time, some through the furnace of fire, others through the floods of water.

Indeed it should be the vision of all those who sincerely love Jesus Christ, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. Envisaging such a vision will evoke another, an enlarged and more glorious one: it is to be in the triumphant company of the redeemed that will sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb across the Jasper sea, even in Beulah Land!

With a new song and making melody, a fellowsoldier in the army of God and a fellowsinger in the choir of the redeemed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elijah Thomas Chacko', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Elijah Thomas Chacko
(Psalm 1:1-3)

Caveats To The Psalter

The metrication of the Psalms and selected scriptural portions in the AV (1611) has been done to facilitate singing in public worship.

1. Each underscore is indication of a musical note (though not indicative of the note value).
2. Generally, at least three underscores have been allocated to 'the LORD'. This is to enable it to be sung as 'Jehovah'.
3. Owing to certain constraints, certain exceptions are to be noted:
 - (i) Three underscores allocated to 'O LORD'. When sung as 'Jehovah', the word 'O' is silent. This includes psalms 7:8b; 8:1; 9:13; 17:1; 20:2; 28:8; 30:2; 31:5; 31:1 (Alternative tune); 33:22, 59:8; 83:16; 85:7; 89:8; 92:5; 93:3b; 94:1; 115:16; 119:31,33,65; 137:7; 138:4,8; 144:5; Isa 25:1; Lam 3:64; Lam 5:19.
 - (ii) Three underscores allocated to 'The LORD is'. When sung as 'Jehovah', the contraction renders it 'Jehovah's'. For e.g. Psalm 28:8; 34:18; 2 Samuel 22:2.
4. Generally, at least 4 underscores have been allocated to the phrase 'Praise ye the LORD'. This is to enable it to be sung as 'AlleluJAH'. These include psalms 104:35; 106:1,48; 111:1; 112:1; 113:1,9; 115:17,18; 116:19; 117:2; 118:5,14,17,18,19; 146:1,10; 147:1,20; 148:1,14; 149:1,9; 150:1,6.

5. In certain psalms, the words 'LORD' or 'the LORD' could be sung as 'Jah'. This includes psalms 36:6; 68:18; 77:11; 94:12; 135:4; 150:1,6 'Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD'.
6. There is the use of contractions such as He'll (He will), e'en (even) to facilitate the singing without altering the essential meaning.
7. A dash followed by an italicised phrase indicates it is a repeat of the previous line.
8. A three-space indent line indicates that it is a continuation of the previous line.