

Songs for Life

D DAY HAS DAWNED

Anyone know what the best selling single of all time is? The answer is “White Christmas!” sung by Bing Crosby. It was written by Irving Berlin. Apparently he said to his secretary: “Grab your pen and take down this song. I just wrote the best song I’ve ever written - I just wrote the best song that anybody’s ever written!”

The Guinness Book of Records lists the song as selling 100 million copies of all versions recorded. The Bing Crosby version is credited as selling 50 million copies. Thing is – aren’t you dreaming of a White Christmas? Wouldn’t it be fun??!! The idea of a White Christmas conjures all sorts of images doesn’t it?

- All wrapped up warm around the Christmas tree with the snow outside
- The warmth of the fire while we all sing around the Christmas tree
- Carol singers wrapped up in scarves and gloves making music on the doorstep
- A warm glass of mulled wine watching the children run around in the snow
- Sledges and snowballs, snowmen and snow angels and Santa and his sleigh flying through the air laden with all the presents you dreamed of!

There’s something about the thought of a White Christmas that captures the imagination. Perhaps that’s why the song has proved so popular. Dreaming and Christmas go together don’t they? We dream for all sorts of things don’t we?

- We dream about the gifts we’d like to give to special people
- We dream about the gifts special people might give to us
- We dream about that fabulous Christmas dinner that really is going to be all it should be this year

- We dream of family get togethers that find everyone amenable, friendly, polite and pleased to see each other
- We dream of lazy days instead of the frantic chasing from one thing to another
- We dream of children staying in bed until at least 7am on Christmas day!
- We dream of the time when its “just us” and we can relax and savour the moment
- We dream that perhaps next year we will all be together instead of spread out in so many places.

And sometimes a song captures a dream.

When you think about Christmas, what do you dream? I know another song that captures quite a different dream which might have something to do with Christmas. It’s a bit more edgy than “White Christmas” and it’s a dream of a completely different kind. It’s a dream that has a completely different view of what’s happening at Christmas.

Evidently no-one is quite sure when Irving Berlin wrote “White Christmas” but it is possible it was in 1940. In 1940 Irvin Berlin was dreaming of a White Christmas. In 1940 across the pond, we were engaged in one of the epic battles of World War 2 ‘The Battle of Britain.’ It was, of course a war that would eventually engage the USA too – where “White Christmas” had been written! The point is, while that song was being penned, there was a war going on. ‘White Christmas’ had nothing to say about World War 2 – it was just a dream. But another song I know has much more to do with a war that was going on and is still going on. It is a song that reminds us that D Day has dawned, and although the battle is not quite over, the war has been won!

Psalm 110

The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

The Lord will extend your might sceptre from Zion: You will rule in the midst of your enemies.
Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.

Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:
“You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.
He will judge nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.
He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

Psalm 110 is in many ways a difficult Psalm to understand. Scholars don't really know what verse 3 and 7 mean, there are different opinions out there, but they don't seem to be able to agree. But in other ways Psalm 110 is quite simple and carries a very powerful message.

I don't know about you, but I'm fascinated by the current Iraqi investigations that are going on. I'm not really convinced it will shed any new light on what happened, but I am fascinated by what went on in the corridors of power; what were the people with the power really thinking; what did they really know; who said what to who; who was really influencing who; what was the real motivation for what took place in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq; what did they really hope to gain? How long did they really think it would all take? What kind of Iraq did they think would emerge? Did they really think a war would solve the problems in the region? I would love to have been a fly on the wall – wouldn't you?

Psalm 110 affords us the privilege of what is really going on in the inner sanctum of where ultimate power lies, and this is a D Day song – because here we realize that there was something far greater being dreamed that first Christmas than a little bit of snow! Here in Psalm 110 God invites the King of Jerusalem to sit with God on the throne of the world. He is to be God's right hand man, this is a place of immense honour and privilege. Here he can be assured that no opposition or enemy will be too strong or powerful for him. In fact, he can be assured as King that any enemy will be routed and defeated. But the offer is even better than that. The promise is that there will be a ready supply of troops who will offer themselves willingly to serve in the Kings army; they will not be forced to fight but

they will do so eagerly and willingly. When D Day comes the King will not be found wanting, victory will be total.

The invitation and promise to the King of Jerusalem goes further. God makes an unbreakable oath to the King the he will be a King in the order of Melchizedek (v4). Melchizedek was the King of Salem (later to be called Jerusalem) whom Abraham met. He was not only a King – he was also a priest who served El Elyon – God Most High. When Abraham met him he was so struck by his authority that he paid him tithes and was blessed by him. The promise is that the King will continuously mediate for his people and the King of Jerusalem will bring justice to the world.

This Psalm, this song was most probably used at the coronation ceremony of a King. So how come it dreams a dream while a war is going on about Christmas and D Day? Here's where I think its meaning is simple and carries a very powerful message. Psalm 110 is the most used Psalm in the New Testament and the most quoted by the Apostles. Now why would that be? It is because the writers of the New Testament sees in this Psalm more than a coronation song of a King in Jerusalem. Jesus himself quotes Psalm 110 to the Pharisees and stuns them with the thought that the Messiah could be greater than David (Mathew 22 v 41-46), because Jesus himself saw this as a bigger meaning than the coronation of an earthly King.

It was the Apostles who were in no doubt as to the bigger meaning of Psalm 110. This was a song about a King alright, but this King was not just an earthly King with an earthly Kingdom. This King was the Messiah, the one who had left all the glory of heaven, made his dwelling among them, lived with them, died on a cross for them, been raised from the dead and ascended to the Father. They knew in their hearts that this Jesus was the Messiah and he was Lord of all the earth.

When it was written it might have applied to David as King, but David had died and his tomb was still there. David did not ascend to be seated at the right hand of God the Father. This is only true now of Jesus, the resurrected Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father and who will come again to judge the living and the dead. Jesus who now rules and reigns with the Father and who sustains all things

by his powerful word. He is the one who even now intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father: he makes our peace; he makes us whole, and he has the power to win back those who are lost, and he has the power to defeat death itself by his own death and resurrection.

One day the scourge of death will finally be swept from God's world, there will be a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more sadness, sickness, tears or death, because God's love will prevail. 'White Christmas' may have been written in 1940 while a war was raging. D Day came 'a bit later', and while the war had effectively been won, battles still raged for a while.

Psalm 110 was written while a war raged and while the war for the world still raged, a baby was born that first Christmas. D Day had dawned. With his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension the war was won. We know that the battles still rage don't they?

When we think of Christmas our dream can be entirely different. We do not fight fire with fire, terrorism with terrorism, strength with strength, consumerism by amassing more. We fight with the power of love, self-sacrifice and forgiveness. However much we might learn from the latest Iraq inquiry, the truth is that no political system will ever eradicate evil. There is only one who has the power and the credentials for that. There is only one community that has the gift to be able to embody and live out God's way of living and only Jesus himself can dispense perfect justice. What we have to decide is whose side we are on – do we stand with god's enemies, or as willing recruits?

'White Christmas' is a really clever song – one that has the ability to touch our minds at Christmas. But there's a better song that sees a bigger and wholly different Christmas message and one bright hour this will be the most sung song anywhere, in all time.

Revelation 7 v 9 & 10

After I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm

branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Amen

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 20th December by Rev. Ian Phillips.