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Series: Summer In the Psalms

Praise, Psalm 145

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Introduction

- The book of Psalms has attracted more attention from Christians than any other OT book, with Christians today considering it the heart of the OT. It is intellectually and emotionally stimulating as the prayers reveal an intense personal relationship with God and strike a responsive chord among us today. This is surprising when we recognize how ancient the psalms are, being written between 1300 – 400 years before Christ was born. They were written by many authors, with a number, including today's Psalm, being written by King David.
- The Psalms, in their most basic sense, were the hymnbook of ancient Israel and what makes them different from other books of the OT, especially the prophets, such as Micah or Isaiah, is that they present us with the words of humanity addressed to God, rather than the word of God addressed to humanity. It is a book composed almost entirely of prayers to God, prayers that are rich with bare honesty, confusion, adoration, request, despair, hope, hostility, and beauty. They represent the vulnerability of the human heart as it understands and perhaps fails to understand the God of the universe.
- So over the next six weeks, we are going to delve into the six basic themes of the Psalms. Of course, an individual Psalm may have multiple themes running through it, and so this is not a prescriptive grid of the Psalms as much as it is a descriptive grid of the Psalms. We will look at Psalms of praise, wisdom, lament, royalty, hymnody, and psalms of

thanksgiving. So to start us off today, we are going to begin with Psalms of praise by studying Psalm 145 together.

Two of the most basic types of psalms in the Psalter are the lament and the praise. The lament psalms fly low. They go down into the depths of our suffering and pain. They are psalms that help us pray to God, through complaint or petition. “Help me, O Lord.” “How long, O Lord?” The lament is a very common psalm. Then there are the praise psalms. These are the psalms that soar to the heavens. They exalt and praise and worship in gladness toward God.

Psalms of praise remind us of our glorious future in Christ, “This suffering and pain will end. There will be a day when all sad things will be made untrue.” We have hope in that. When the Psalmist is overflowing with praise, it is in response to how the Psalmist knows and experiences God.

So as we delve into the theme of praise in the Psalms, let’s remember that first and important nature of the Psalms: that they are primarily responsive in nature. They are honest with God in response to who he is and how the Psalmist experiences God. As the Psalms unfold, they reveal the character and heart of God while at the same time being free to reveal the utter honesty and questions of the human heart.

Fran will read Psalm 145, and then we’ll pray together. Let’s hear God’s Word.

Let’s pray.

This is what we want, God. We pray that You would help us see your heart in Your Word today. May you grow in our own hearts, Lord. Amen.

Someone called this psalm the “Alphabet Psalm.” Your Bible’s footnote might mention that it’s an acrostic psalm. That means David wrote this using the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It would be similar to us deciding to go through the English alphabet, going from A to Z, recalling things about God. We’d feel sorry for the poor person with X, right? What are they going to say?

That’s what this psalm is doing. It’s a creative, worshipful psalm that delights in God. For example, verse 3 says, “His greatness is unsearchable.” How else do you come close to exhausting Who God is, unless you go through your entire vocabulary and go to the depth of what you know about God? That’s what David is doing—delighting in God. There is so much more to God. We can’t measure how great He is. We’ll never fathom how wonderful the Lord is. As with the galaxies, there is so much more; so many more planets we haven’t seen. We’re just touching on Who the Lord is. We’re just getting to know Him. As the hymn writer has said, “What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend?” (from O Sacred Head Now Wounded; anonymous hymn writer).

These are the last recorded words of David and in Psalm 145 he reveals us his real desire, verse 21 says: “My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord. Let all flesh,” that’s all of us, “bless his holy name forever.” The intention of this psalm is to lead us toward praise. David’s point is that the focus of our lives should be centered on Who God is. David knows firsthand what happens when God becomes off-center. He understands the temptation that results in other things taking our attention. We know it as well. There are times when we’re more excited about a new movie or a new iPhone or sports that have just returned, or a house we’re going to buy. Sometimes these things can capture us, becoming so central in our thinking that they start controlling us. Our problem is not worship. We were all created to worship. The problem is the

object of our worship. We're made to worship, but we get caught up in worshipping things that are designed to point toward God rather than worshipping God himself. Let's unpack that statement.

God calls all of creation good and so everything—even Hockey Night In Canada—can and is a signpost to the goodness of God. Now, imagine that you're on the 417 heading to Montreal. You're just past Casselman and you see a green sign that says, "145km to Montreal." If you stop at the sign as your final destination and think you're experiencing all Montreal has to offer within the confines of green paint and a steel board, you're really missing out on the beauty and grandeur of Montreal. That's what it's like when we stop at signposts in life as our final destination rather than letting them point us to the fullness and beauty and grandeur of Jesus. If we insist on staying at the signpost, we start to worship a false god.

The danger of false worship is that whatever our heart delights in controls us. To put it simply: "You become what you behold." (repeat)

Whatever you're treasuring, it captures you, controls you and ends up being what you live for. We are created to worship.

Here's a little quiz. Fill in the blank: "If only I had _____, I would be happy." How would you answer that? What is going on in your heart?

What David is trying to get at in this Psalm of praise is that our very lives need to be besotted, captured, captivated by the reality of who God is. David is calling us to ask if our knowledge of God changes us? Is it awakening us? Is there something in here that really enlivens us? This is what David is trying to accomplish in this psalm. He says, "Let all flesh bless his holy name." He wants us to be caught up with God. Otherwise, we're just enslaved by substitutes for

God and not by God Himself. To praise is to give your full adoration, your allegiance, your affection, your devotion. To praise is to be consumed by someone so great that all your love, all your devotion, all your heart is pulled into seeing and savouring the one you love.

So as we go through this psalm, let's pray that our hearts will be captured by God's greatness and that He would be first in our lives. As we go through this Psalm, I want us to ask the question of **What is** it about God that captures David's imagination and causes him to worship?

I'm going to suggest that there are two characteristics of God David recalls: **God's graciousness and His righteousness**. These are attributes of God that will draw us into pondering God's nature and responding to it in praise. David sets out the pattern for us of recalling who God is specifically by remembering who God has been to David in the past. David then praises God for that, and as David fixes his attention and affection on God, he finds that he is becoming more like the God he loves. You become what you behold. So first...

The graciousness of God draws us into worship.

When David says in verse 8, "The Lord is gracious," he is not randomly picking an adjective to describe God. His thoughts are rooted in history: both the history of Israel and his personal history.

As David looks back on God's mighty grace, he is amazed at God's mercy toward him, a sinner. Having committed adultery and murder, David now clings with all his might to the promise from long ago, **that God is gracious**. The grace of God is compelling him to praise God in this psalm.

It's quite profound how David communicates this. David boldly captures a challenging and yet profound truth about God's grace. He shows that God's grace is both inclusive and exclusive.

In verses 9 – 21 there is this interplay of two opposite truths: 1) the Lord is gracious to all, and 2) the Lord is gracious to those who call to him in truth. The nature of God that is both exclusive and inclusive reminds me of the words of the Swiss poet and painter Herman Hesse who said, "The opposite of every great truth is just as true!"

Consider this with verse 9 where David speaks of God's love for all people: "The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made." **This verses remind us of God's heart for all people, for all creation.** These are great verses to meditate on. Ponder the Creator God and inclusive His heart for this world.

It reminds me of Matthew 5, where Jesus said we're to be like our Father in heaven, Who makes the sun rise on the evil and the good. He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust. God has amazing grace for a world that doesn't deserve it.

As you meditate on verse 9— "The Lord is good to all..."—is there anyone in your life whom you are really concerned about? Maybe someone who is hardened toward the Lord, who shows no interest in God. Take heart: the Lord is good to all. That kindness can break through, leading that person to repentance, as Romans 2 teaches.

Yet along with these inclusive verses come some very exclusive statements. Verse 18 says, "The Lord is near to all who call on him..." Now he is speaking to ..."all who call on him in truth." Verse 19, "He fulfills the desire of those who fear him..." Fear means to revere and to submit to God.

And so the second truth running parallel is God's exclusivity. This exclusivity doesn't water down God's heart for all people. It should energize you to know that God loves your neighbor, even though you're struggling with him. There is a sense where we're driven by God's big heart for all people. He wants them to know Him. Yet it's very clear that no one will be with God without calling on Him with fear and trembling.

Maybe one way to think about this parallelism of inclusion and exclusion is to consider how parents have hearts for all the kids in the neighborhood, maybe even all the kids in the world. They give money to educate children through organizations like World Vision. They have big hearts. But as parents, you have a special place for your own children, the ones in your home, the ones you're caring for and who will inherit from you. You can see how both loves can co-exist.

This is God's invitation to those who are wayward—to come to God's home. He has a big home, and He will adopt into His home all who would come to Him through faith.

So we must emphasize both loves, both sides of God. If we only emphasize one, we can sound like a universalist—“Everyone is going to heaven.” But if we only emphasize the other, we sound territorial or tribal, as if it's completely exclusive. We got in, but no one else can. It's important to see both come together, so we can grasp the full picture of God's heart for everyone, but also His requirement that people come through faith in His revelation of Christ.

So as we look back on God's graciousness to us personally, how he has forgiven us and brought us into his life through faith—just as he did with David--we are drawn to worship him, to praise him.

What motivates our praise? Knowing His grace—and secondly...

The righteousness of God draws us into praise.

Verse 17, “The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.” This is another unusual combination: *kindness and righteousness*. We tend to either be righteous with a strict policy, or kind but without an ability to correct anyone.

To be righteous means to re-establish a right order in the universe. It’s to fix everything that’s wrong. To be righteous, in its most basic form, is to be kind. The Lord is righteous, and He’s going to fix everything that’s out of sync with His will. Look at verse 14, “The Lord upholds all who are falling.” This is a King Who cares for the disabled, for the elderly, for those in need. This is a King Who will catch you when you fall. “...He raises up all who are bowed down.” This is a King Who straightens up backs that are bent over and weighed down in this world.

Verse 15, this is a King Who provides food for all His creatures. He knows all of them from the smallest to the largest. He cares for people and has a heart for His creation. We have a righteous and kind God.

Verse 16 says His hand is open. He’s not tight-fisted, but open-handed. He’s not taxing everyone and abusing power. He is generous in all His ways.

Verse 18 tells us, “The Lord is near to all who call on him...” He is a King Who answers prayer. He hears your cry and will come to your aid.

Verse 19, “He fulfills the desire of those who fear him...”

Verse 20, “The Lord preserves those who love him...”

This is what God is like. He cares. He provides. He's generous. He hears us when we pray. Is this not Someone we can orient our lives around? You become what you behold. The more we worship the more delight we'll have. If these characteristics are the values of the One you worship, consider how they'll also shape your heart and what you value. What will you look like in society? Will you be caring and a good listener? Will you help the widow and orphan? These values become your values. The more you worship God, the more they become a reality in your life.

As we find joy in signposts that point to God, while not making them our final destination, but merely allowing them to be signs that point us to God, we begin to see Jesus more clearly and steer all of our affections toward him. We see God as gracious, as kind, as righteous and as we praise him for who he is. As we deeply ponder his character, his heart, we become like the one we are beholding. Our praise of Jesus, by the work of the Spirit, is part of the work of becoming like the one we love.

Let's pray, thanking God for His goodness to us, adoring him for his grace, and finding that by his grace, as we behold him, he makes us more gracious, loving, and compassionate.

Benediction

Children of God,

Called into the grace and righteousness of Christ,

Remember that it is the Holy Spirit in you who enables you to become more like Christ as you set your focus, your praise, and your affection on him. And as you do it, may you receive God's promise of blessing for you from Numbers 6:24-26:

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*