

The Lord Is...

Psalm 145

John Breon

Why do we praise God? In the Psalms, we've seen many examples of praise and calls to praise the Lord.

C. S. Lewis describes a struggle he had with the idea of praise:

When I first began to draw near to belief in God and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should "praise" God; still more in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it.

Lewis admits to being thick-headed about this and says that those who haven't struggled with it may even find his difficulty funny. But the call to praise God made him think of a person who demands constant assurance of their own virtue, intelligence, or appearance. In his mind, and maybe the minds of others, it was like God was saying, "What I want most is to be told that I am good and great." He felt like he could understand gratitude to God, or reverence or obedience to God, but not this "perpetual eulogy."

Lewis eventually came to see that God is the One that for us to admire or appreciate "is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world" and not to appreciate God "is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all."

As God is worshiped, God communicates his presence to us. As we praise God for who he is, we get to know God better and we experience his presence and his action more fully. God doesn't need or crave our worship like a vain person craving compliments (*Reflections on the Psalms*, chap. IX, "A Word About Praising").

I once heard a preacher talk about how praise helps us get our needs met. He said, "God has a need for praise. We meet his need and he meets ours" (Terry Law, Oral Roberts Ministries Healing Crusade, Tulsa, Oct 22, 1983). I then wrote a research paper for a theology class exploring the

question of what God “needs” and refuting what that preacher said. I didn’t know about Lewis’ writing on this at the time or I would have used it.

Lewis goes on to describe praise as “inner health made audible.” We spontaneously praise whatever we value and we urge others to join us in praising it. “Isn’t the sky spectacular?” “Isn’t our team playing great?” “Wasn’t that music glorious?” “Look at that!” “Listen to this!” “It’s great!” We delight to praise what we enjoy and we invite others to praise it because the praise doesn’t just express the enjoyment; it completes it (Lewis 94, 95). Praise is part of the experience.

Praising God and knowing God go together. Psalm 145 gathers up a lot of what’s been said in the Book of Psalms. And it aims toward the conclusion. There are five more psalms after it and each of them includes the call for people to praise the LORD: Hallelujah!

Psalm 145 is an alphabetic acrostic. The Hebrew readers tell us that each line of the psalm begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. That’s a memory device or teaching aid. We do something similar in English to help children learn the alphabet. I remember reading this Mother Goose rhyme to our kids:

A was an Apple pie, B Bit it, C Cut it, D Dealt it, E Eat it, F Fought for it, G Got it, H Had it, I Inspected it, J Joined for it, K Kept it, L Longed for it. M Mourned for it, N Nodded at it, O Opened it, P Peeped in it, Q Quartered it, R Ran for it, S Stole it, T Took it, U Upset it, V Viewed it, W Wanted it, XYZ All wished for a piece in hand.

<https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/tragical-death-apple-pie>

The psalm writer may have used this technique to help teach the alphabet, but more likely it was to teach about God and to be comprehensive in praising God.

The psalmist declares the intention to praise God every day and for all time. Then the psalm gives many reasons to praise God. It alternates between telling who God is and what God does.

Read through the psalm and mark all the places it says, “The LORD is.” I made a list. The LORD is: great, gracious, compassionate, slow to anger,

rich in love, good, trustworthy, faithful, righteous, and near. The LORD God is all of those. There's another description of God here. The LORD is King. It doesn't say it in those words, but the psalmist address God this way: "I will exalt you, my God the King" (verse 1). It talks about all of God's works telling of the glory of God's kingdom and it affirms, "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations" (12-13).

Hearing those characteristics of God, don't you want to know this God better? Don't you want to praise the LORD?

We can sum all this up with something else we teach our children. Maybe you learned this little prayer for mealtimes: "God is great. God is good. Let us thank him for our food." God is both great and good. In some belief systems, God's simply great. He's powerful and sovereign, but without goodness, he can seem to have little regard for people. In other systems, God is simply good. He cares, he wants what's best for us. But without greatness, we can get an idea of God as Santa Claus or a cosmic grandpa. Or a God who cares but can't do much.

A full, rich biblical view of God holds God's goodness and greatness together. God is the great and powerful, righteous and holy ruler. We bow before God's majesty. At the same time, God is the good and loving, gracious, compassionate, and faithful ruler who is near to all who call on him.

When life is good and all is well with us, God rules; God is good and great. When floods come, God rules; God is good and great. Now I don't believe God caused the flooding in Texas or Nepal or Sierra Leone. I think God has set up the world to run a certain way. And to some extent, God lets it run its course. When conditions are right, there are storms and sometimes they're devastating. But God's still King. God's still great and good. Our urge to donate, to help in various ways, is a reflection of God's goodness or an expression of God's goodness in us.

I said the psalm alternates between telling who God is and what God does. Read through it again and mark every place it describes God's action. Here's my list. The LORD does mighty acts, wonderful and awesome works, great deeds; the LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed

down; the LORD gives food, opens his hand, satisfies, fulfills desires, hears the cry of those who fear him and saves them, watches over all who love him, but destroys the wicked.

Let's remember that "the wicked" are those who set themselves against God and God's way. They organize their lives around rejecting God instead of knowing and praising him. If we do that, we cut ourselves off from the source of life. What could follow except destruction?

But the focus here is on the good and great things that the good and great God does. The writer and the singers of this psalm would think of the exodus—how God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, rescued them through the Red Sea, led them through the wilderness, made covenant with them, provided for them, and brought them into the land.

They would probably also remember Israel's idolatry and oppression of the poor that led to being conquered by powerful empires, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the people going into exile. But then God in grace and power brought his exiled people home.

We see all that fulfilled in Jesus. He's our Passover Lamb. He rescues us from slavery to sin and death. He leads us through the wilderness and provides for us. He brings us home from exile. He will bring us into the promised land of resurrection, of new heavens and earth.

What mighty acts and wonderful works of God do you see in your life? When you fall, do you know that God is there, catching you, holding you, lifting you up? When you're bowed down with burdens that are too heavy for you, do you experience the Lord lifting you up? Do you know that God hears your cry? Do you see God's open hand generously giving to you what you need?

So we see who God is: good and great. We see the wonderful things God does. Now what? Do we respond to God? I invite you to go through Psalm 145 one more time and mark what God's people do, what we do. Here's another list. We exalt, praise, extol the LORD; we commend God's works to another generation and tell of his mighty acts; we speak, meditate, tell, and proclaim; we celebrate and joyfully sing; we look to God, call on God in truth, fear God (remember that means reverence shown in trust and obedience), cry to God, and love God.

We do all that because the LORD makes himself known and we know who God is. We recognize what God does. How can we keep from singing? How can we keep from celebrating? How can we keep from praising the LORD?

In Communion, we praise God for who he is: the holy God of power and might, the Lord of steadfast love. We thank God for all he has done in Israel and, especially, in God's coming to us in Jesus Christ and his life and ministry, his death and resurrection. We commend God's works to all generations. We declare what God is doing. We cry out to God. We call upon God in truth and he is near to us.

INVITATION

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen. *(UM*

Hymnal 6)

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Thanks be to God.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Almighty God, we bless you for creation and all that you have made, for your gracious covenant with Israel, and for your steadfast love in sending the prophets to call us to repent and to walk in your ways.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

With thanksgiving we remember your love for the world in sending your Son to live and die as one of us. You put your Spirit upon him. He proclaimed release to the captives, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.

Before his death on the cross he took bread and said, "Eat this bread—it is my body—and remember me." After supper he took the cup and said, "Drink this wine—it is my blood—and remember me."

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church and made all things new.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

By your Holy Spirit make this bread and wine to be for us the body and blood of Christ. So fill us with your love that being one with Christ we may daily welcome your new creation with acts of compassion and justice. Make us one with Christ and one with each other until we share his heavenly banquet. Through Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory are yours, almighty God, now and forever. **Amen.**

And now, with confidence as God's children, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

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