

Greatness and Goodness to Every Generation

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[0 : 00] So you look into the mirror of the Psalms and what do you see? You see yourself as you really are, which is in Jesus Christ. So the Psalms, they take us through all occasions of life. They meet us in the valley of the shadow of death.

They're there with us in the greatest heights and successes of our lives. We can enter into them from anywhere in the experience of life. Of sadness, sickness, happiness, joy, victory, defeat, we can enter into them.

But no matter where we enter into them, they all run toward the same goal. They're all heading towards the same destination. And that goal is the kingdom of God, life in the city of God.

So for all their willingness to enter into the raw mess of crucified human life, they all aim at resurrection joy. And that's what we see, that resurrection joy is what we see as we come to Psalm 145 here at the end of the Psalter.

So Psalm 145 is the end of the fifth and final book of Psalms. There's five books and Psalm 145 is at the end of the fifth book.

[1 : 10] It transitions to the conclusion and the conclusion is Psalms 146 to 150. It's this hallelujah chorus where it just breaks out with joy and singing.

So when we come to Psalm 145, we're really coming to the climax of the whole thing. And this Psalm has long been recognized as having a special status.

So it shows up more than any other Psalm in the Jewish prayer book. The Babylonian Talmud gave it this sort of creedal status that the rabbis would say, if anyone says this, recites this Psalm three times per day, they can know that they are a child of the world to come.

So this is the climax of the Psalms. It's a special summary Psalm of what they're all about. And let me show you a little bit why this is the case.

We'll just geek out for a second. If you want more info on this, ask me later. But this is one of a few acrostic Psalms. So an acrostic is a Psalm where each verse starts with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

[2 : 16] So what we're doing here as we go into this acrostic Psalm is we're being taken through the ABCs of God's goodness, of God's greatness. And the theme of the whole Psalm is there in verse one.

It says, I will extol you, my God and my King. This is one of the few places in the entire Psalter where God is not just called a king or the king, but he's called my king.

And if you dig a little bit deeper and you look at the structure of this Psalm, well, the middle of it is right there in verses 10 to 13. And the alphabet of that middle section, verses 10 to 13, the letters in Hebrew are Yod, Kaf, Lamed, Melek.

Which may not mean that much to you, but let me put it this way. If you, they spell my king backwards. It's a little nugget here to tell us this whole Psalm, like the whole Psalter, is designed to get the truth of God as king deep down into your heart.

So he's not only the king, but he's my king. So this Psalm wants to help us worship God as king in a deep and transformative way. And we're going to look at what it asks us to do to enter into that experience.

[3 : 36] I think it tells us to do three things. Number one, marvel at his greatness. Number two, rehearse his goodness. And number three, sing of his glory. Let's look at each of those together briefly.

First, let me pray. Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Oh, Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Thank you for giving us the scripture and specifically the Psalms. They are the one portion more than any other that you've given to us so that we can address you and pour our lives into the mold of Christ.

And we pray that we'd be blessed in the hearing of your word this evening. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So here's the first thing that I see in this Psalm. Number one, marvel at his greatness. Stand in awe of the king. Let your mind and your heart be dazzled by his infinite splendor. Look at verses one and two. It's subtle here. The psalmist sets himself to blessing and praising God's name.

[4 : 40] He says, I will extol you, my God and king, and bless your name forever and ever. He says, every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

And then in verse three, he mentions the name of God explicitly. It's there as the Lord in all caps. It's Yahweh, the covenant name of God.

The great I am that I am. The absolute, indefinable, self-existent one. And the psalmist calls us to recognize not only that the Lord is great in some relative sense, but that he is great in an absolute sense.

That he's unsearchable, inexhaustible, and infinite. His greatness is unsearchable, it says in verse three. Unsearchable greatness.

Plato, the philosopher, was known to have said, to know God is hard, but to describe him impossible. To know God is hard, but to describe him impossible.

[5 : 46] But the church father, Gregory of Nazianza, says, no, Plato has it wrong. He says, it's more like this. To describe God is not possible, but to know him is even less possible.

What does he mean? In other words, Plato says, we have some sort of intuitive grasp of God. We already know him, and we just need to remember what we already know. What's already there present to us.

Even if we can't put it into words. And Gregory says, no, God transcends our system and our thoughts about him entirely. And the only way we can know him is if he reveals himself to us. And that's why throughout the Old Testament, when God shows up, he doesn't show up as an old familiar friend. Hello, I haven't seen you in a while. No, he shows up as a surprising and liberating and even frightening God.

He's holy, and he has to veil himself in order to appear. So he shows up in a burning bush. He appears through angels of various sorts. In Exodus 33, when Moses asks to see God's face, God responds, you cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live.

[7 : 03] There's true knowledge of God. But what Gregory of Nazianzus was saying is that we have to recognize he always vastly exceeds us. We can never plumb the depths of his glory.

His greatness is unsearchable. Even when he reveals himself, it's true and adequate. But there's an infinite plenitude and depth to who he is.

Why is this important to recognize? Is it just some esoteric, abstract point? I like esoteric and abstract points, so I could be guilty of that. But no, it's a key principle of worship.

It's a key principle of worship. It's a key principle of worship. And it can rescue us from our bored and boring pragmatism. See, to be pragmatic is to divine something's worth by its usefulness for achieving some other goal.

And this is America. We are pragmatic. This is what we do. And when this infects our Christianity, though, we can even start treating God as a means to an end.

[8 : 04] As a means to achieving some goal. So God's, the worth of being a Christian is that it provides ethical bearings. Or the worth of our faith is that the spiritual practices are therapeutic in some sense.

Or that it gives us community. And these things are all true. Definitely. And they're goods. But what the psalm calls us to, and what the Bible calls us to, by pointing out that God's greatness is unsearchable.

That he's transcendentally great. Is to say that God can never be reduced to a means to an end. God is the end for which every other means was created.

He is what we are seeking in everything else. And the great irony of this is only when we stop seeking God as a means to an end. And seek him rather as the end to every means.

Only then do we become the whole and healthy people that God created us to be. This is a call. The psalms are a call to worship God. To adore him for who he is.

[9 : 11] There is a lot for us to do as Christians. There's a lot of things to get done. And there is a lot that Christianity does for us. But the end goal of the Christian faith is the vision of God.

And if we're not learning that now to worship him. To adore him. What's this all for? Everyone in this city really wants to accomplish something.

And that's great. But you know what God cares about first and foremost? Is that we delight in him. That we delight in him. So the psalm calls us. We've camped out here for a minute.

But the psalm calls us. Marvel at his greatness. At who he is. Stand in awe of the king. Be dazzled by his infinite splendor.

Of course, worshiping God as king is not just fathoming his sheer greatness. In fact, his greatness only becomes known to us in what he does for us.

[10 : 12] In his saving acts. Where he shares his greatness with us. And so this leads to the second thing. And that is, we need to rehearse his goodness. Rehearse his goodness.

To have our hearts formed by the saving things he has done. Know his gracious acts as they relate to us. This is where the psalmist spends the bulk of his time.

He says in verse 4. One generation shall commend your works to another. And shall declare your mighty acts. In verses 5 and 7.

You can glance over that and see. He focuses our attention on wondrous works. Awesome deeds. Abundant goodness. And the establishment of righteousness.

And the point that's being made here. Is that this great God is not just distant or hidden from us. But that he steps into our lives. And he acts on our behalf.

[11 : 09] He takes all of his power. His infinite greatness. And he puts it to work. For the sake of his people. And in verses 8 and 9. We see what this means.

More specifically. It's mercy. It's mercy. He restrains his anger. He shows steadfast love. Look at verses 8. The Lord is gracious and merciful.

Slow to anger. And abounding. In steadfast love. Or look down to verse 14. And following. He upholds those who are falling. He raises up those who are bowed down.

He provides for the needs of his creatures. He's kind in everything he does. He's near to those who call on him. He saves. Rather than destroys.

I don't have any particularly profound way to say this. But I just want to say it simply. The infinitely great God loves you.

[12 : 09] He loves us. He loves us not just because we're strong and successful. He loves sinners and failures. He shows mercy to us.

And he doesn't just show mercy to us begrudgingly. As I too often do. Micah. The book of Micah. Chapter 7 verse 18.

It says the Lord delights to show mercy. The prayer of preparation. Or the prayer of humble access that we pray each week before the Eucharist. It says that his nature is always to have mercy.

Showing mercy is God's thing. This is his thing. It is his thing to save people from difficult situations. To rescue them. To provide for our needs. He acts mercifully on his people. For his people. Again and again throughout the Old Testament. He keeps acting in mercy.

[13 : 08] Time and time again. They keep failing. And he lifts them up. And it's this story. Over and over. For God's unfailing mercy. And it's all a picture of what he does once and for all in Jesus Christ.

See from all eternity. God the Holy Trinity. Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. Willed to share the infinite plenitude of his life with us in Jesus.

And we couldn't ascend to the heights. To share that reality. Because we're creatures. And because we're sinners. So what does he do? What does he do? He condescends.

He condescends. He comes down to our level in Jesus. He becomes human. And in his death. He overcomes godlessness. So that we can be sons and daughters of God.

You might say. Okay. We know that. We go to church. The advent. It's the basic gospel message. We know these things.

[14 : 08] Do we really know them? Do we really know them? In our epistle today. We read a prayer from. From. That Paul wrote to the Ephesians.

And the book of Ephesians is really interesting. Because it's. It's the one epistle. As far as I can tell. Where there are no problems mentioned. You know.

Paul's writing this letter. And it's not like Corinth. He's just telling them. But. But yet. Even though we don't know of any problems. They had. Paul's prayer for them. Is still. That they might be transformed.

So that they might quote. Know the immeasurable greatness of God's power. That they might have the eyes. Of their hearts enlightened. Not. He wants them not just to know the gospel message in theory.

Or as a grand story out there. He wants them to know it in such a way. As it defines. The way that they see the world. The way that they think about things. The way that they feel.

[15:04] That it becomes this filter. Through which they engage the world. He wants them to. Experience God's salvation. In the context of their daily lives. Don't you want that in a fresh way?

I do. I need that. I need that. I want to know. God's gracious acts. Intimately and personally. I want to.

Rehearse. His goodness toward me. Paul's prayer. In Ephesians. Is that the spirit would do that work.

And it is a work of the spirit. But. Is there something I can do. To get the spirit. To enlighten the eyes of my heart. To make. This transformation. Happen in my life.

Well. It is the spirit. It is the spirit's work. But there is one thing we can do. More than one. But there's one big thing. This is the third point. And it's simple.

[16:04] Sing. Sing. Sing of his glorious kingdom. Put the words of the psalmist. On your lips. In prayers. And in songs. Songs. It's easy to forget.

When you're studying this psalm. And geeking out on acrostic stuff. That this was never meant to be analyzed. Or read with objectivity. At least ultimately. The words are given.

In order that you might make them your own. There's songs to be sung. And there's this. Centrifugal force to this song. This outward force to it. So look.

Just briefly. In verses 1 and 2. It starts out with this lone psalmist. Praising God. The Davidic figure. The type of Christ. Then you skip to verse 10.

And he invites the saints. Into the song. For the second verse. And then you go down. And it ends in verse 21. With this opening to all.

[17:01] Let all flesh bless his holy name. Forever and ever. And this kind of. This ending with this opening. Leads to the. The last five psalms.

Which are full of this command. Praise. Praise. Sing. Sing. Sing. I'm not sure.

But I almost get the impression. That the Bible actually wants us to sing. To make singing a significant part of our spiritual lives.

I almost get the impression that singing might be important. That maybe it actually does something. That we can't just marvel intellectually. We can't just rehearse the greatness of God in detached terms.

That we really have to sing it into us. For most people throughout the world. That's probably painfully obvious. The value of singing.

[17:57] But I tend to. I think we tend to have a bit of a left-brained view of things. I don't know if it's cultural or hangover of modernism or what.

But so let me just try to convince you that singing really does something. A few points. Number one. The Bible tells you to do it. Okay. Throughout scripture.

The work of the spirit is often accomplished through music. So a lot of scholars or traditionally think. Well hey.

When did David start writing psalms? He started writing them in 1 Samuel 16. When the spirit came upon him. So he could write this music. To help soothe the tormented king Saul.

In Ephesians 5. We're encouraged to be filled with the spirit. And what comes as we see that? The next phrase. Be filled with the spirit. Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[18:56] Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. So the Bible tells you to do it. That should be good enough for you. But here is a theological argument.

The great theologian Jonathan Edwards. Says that singing is the closest we can get. To the eternal kingdom of God. Because God himself.

The Holy Trinity. Is the supreme harmony of all. He says the supreme harmony of all. Bringing together one in three. And three in one difference. In ultimate unity.

And the singing community. Edwards thinks. Brings together this diversity in unity. In a profound way. That nothing else does. He says.

When I would form in my mind. An idea of a society. In the highest degree happy. I think of them as expressing their love. Their joy. And the inward concord and harmony.

[19 : 55] And spiritual beauty of their souls. By sweetly singing to each other. Something heavenly. About singing. And if that's not enough.

The Bible. And theology. Well. Even scientific research. Has verified. That there's something powerful. And transformative. About singing in general.

And especially. Singing together. And one of the things. That the studies I looked at. Said that's so encouraging. Is they went out of their way.

To emphasize. Even when the music. Is of mediocre quality. Now. You don't have mediocre quality music. Here. But. Anything I do.

In my car. Is very mediocre. And so. That encourages me. But if singing. Is therapeutic. And satisfying. And transformative. In general. How much more.

[20 : 53] When we. Sing. Of Christ. And his gospel. As the psalms. Teach us to do. So here's the application. For you.

Sing. Make singing. A significant part. Of your personal. Devotional life. Make it part of your core group. If you're a core group leader. Come and engage church.

With excitement. In this discipline. Of singing. You know. I used. At my. The old church. That I was at. In Australia. There were.

There was a guy. That would. Wait outside. During the singing. And then he would come in. Just to hear the sermon. Take the Lord's Supper. And then he would leave. Before we started singing again.

And. I just. Always thought. That was so sad. Like. He. He thinks. The singing. Is just sort of. Window dressing. The singing. Is not just. Window dressing.

[21 : 47] It's how we. We get the gospel. Into our heart. It's why it's so central. It's why we have a song book. The center of the Bible. There were other people. That just came for the singing.

And didn't. And would leave for the sermon. And. That was probably my fault. But. So sing. Of God's glory. Put the words of praise. On your lips.

Literally. You know. I. My wife Annie. And I were married. For. Almost 10 years. Without children. And we.

Went from zero. To three children. In the space of three months. Foster. A sibling set of foster children. And. I. I didn't know. How much work it would be.

And how busy the mornings would be. And so it's really hard to get as much time to pray. And to read my Bible. And to have my. You know. And. I've had to really.

[22 : 42] Sort of. Look to music. To help me connect with God. In. In ways. In ways. Where I don't have. As much time as I'd love. And it's a great discipline.

To put it on in the car. And the other thing is. Is. The kids. We try to read them. You know. The. The. The older ones. We try to read them. Bible stories. And. I'm not sure. Any of it's taking.

But they know. The songs. That they're learning at church. And they know the songs. We play. For them in the morning. And so. I would really encourage you. You know. If you're not already.

Using music. As a spiritual discipline. And a tool. Then. Then do. Lean into that. So. In. In closing. Let me just. Encourage you.

Think about. As far as the church. Think about the role. That songs play. In every patriotic expression. We have. You know. There's never been. A political revolution. Without music.

[23 : 37] For that revolution. Armies. March off the battle. With songs. And so. Ask yourself. You know. Singing. And marveling.

At God's glory. It does not seem. Like a very productive thing. To do. But. Ask yourself. If.

Marveling. At God's greatness. And goodness. Through song. Might actually. Make the church. More.

Not less. Active. For the advance. Of God's kingdom. I think it might. And so. We're going to. Close. By singing. A hymn. It's.

Written by. The 19th century. Englishman. Robert Grant. Robert Grant. Was the son. Of a member. Of the Clapham sect. And he was. Himself.

A Christian lawyer. He was a politician. Dedicated. To social reform. And Christian mission. He served. In parliament. He. Passionately. Fought. To emancipate.

[24 : 31] England's Jews. He served. In all sorts. Of high. Government posts. And in the midst. Of all of his busyness. And his activism.

For the kingdom of God. He found. Time for praise. He prays. In fact. He wrote. Hymns. And I think. If we were to ask him. He would say. It's not that he found. Time for praise.

It's that his praise. Fueled. His life. And the things. He was able to accomplish. For the kingdom of God. And so. He wrote. One of the best hymns.

In the English language. Oh. Worship the king. One of my favorites. And. It wasn't inspired. By Psalm 145. But. It. It. Suits it. Really well.

So. I'm going to. Have Dan come up. And. He's going to. Help us. Sing this. Or at least. A couple of verses. Oh. No.