

King David and Praise

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[0 : 0 0] word. Lord, we ask that you would change us by your spirit and conform us into his image. In Jesus' name, amen. My father is a seminary professor, and he once had a student who was from Hong Kong, and had grown up hearing about a very small secretive sect of churches that were called the Weeping Churches. And these churches were known for gathering together and then confessing their sins to each other and then weeping as the center point of their entire worship service.

And my father's student decided he wanted to write his master's dissertation on this set of churches, and so he entered China via Hong Kong, and after quite a bit of effort, he was able to find these churches, and he was able to convince them to let him interview them. And what he discovered was the reason why they focused so much on weeping. Apparently, decades before, American missionaries had come and begun to translate Charles Hodge's famous three-volume systematic theology.

And these missionaries made some progress, but then they had to leave, and they left quite suddenly, and so the translation was never complete. But this student was able to identify almost precisely where in that three-volume work the translation had cut off. And it was right after the section on repentance, and right before the section on saving faith. And so this small, isolated Chinese church grew up with a theology that had a massive emphasis upon sin and repentance, but startlingly little knowledge about what it means to stand forgiven before God with assurance of pardon. Now there's some lessons in there that I think we can glean. Perhaps one of them is the danger of reading only a little bit of systematic theology. I say that as someone who loves systematic theology. I am getting a PhD in systematic theology. But it is a terrifying thing for a Christian to only have 20 pages of a 2,000 page work. That's a terrifying thing. But I think there's also a lesson about how important it is for Christians to not merely repent, but also have assurance of pardon.

If I can put it this way, those weeping churches were stuck in Psalm 51, the greatest psalm of repentance, that's a great thing. But they never made it to Psalm 103, which is where David sings in praise of his God who has removed his sin. And Christians need Psalm 51 because we do sin. We need to repent, but we also need to move on to Psalm 103 and rest in assurance. Now some have suggested that Psalm 103 was actually written directly after Psalm 51, after David had gained assurance for his sin with Bathsheba.

And I don't know if that's true, but I also don't think it actually matters that much. Because theologically, Psalm 103 fulfills Psalm 51. After committing adultery, it is not that David is turning through his psalter and he comes to Psalm 103 and then says to himself, I can never sing this again.

[3 : 3 1] Or at least my heart can never truly be in it because of how, because how can I rejoice when I have committed such heinous sins? No, Psalm 51 is true. And so David can be in the sanctuary belting out Psalm 103 at the top of his lungs and he should be silently thinking to himself about how Psalm 51 makes this psalm more glorious, not less. And this evening, what I want to do is I want you to think about this psalm as the next step in the Christian life. This morning we saw Psalm 51, today we're seeing the next step.

True repentance of sin leads to assurance and joyous praise. And we're going to be looking at this psalm under three headings all about praising God. First, praising God is the goal. Second, praising God for what he has done. And third, praising God for who he is. But first, I want you to see that praising God is the goal. It is the goal of this psalm, but it is also the goal of David's entire life.

Notice that this psalm is bookended with commands to praise God. In the first two verses, David commands himself three separate times to praise the Lord and praise his holy name.

And he ends it in the same way, repeating praise the Lord four times in a row. And the reason David is repeating that line over and over is because it isn't just something he needs to hear and keep in mind while he's singing verse by verse. This is something that he needs to have ringing in his ears well after he has finished singing this psalm. Because the whole of his life is supposed to be one of praise.

There is never a time in David's life when those words do not apply. They are constant. They are total. And that's why David also sees praise as the goal of his entire being.

[5 : 43] He isn't simply praising God with his tongue. He isn't going through the motions. As he says in verse 1, praise the Lord my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name. David wants the very core of his being to be devoted in praise to God. His mind, his heart, his very soul and will need to be engaged in their fullness. Praise needs to pour out of every facet of his being.

And David even sees praising God as the goal of all creation generally and also you specifically. From all of creation down to you in the pew, it is the very goal.

Look at the closing verses. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul. David is commanding the angels to worship God, but then he goes down and then he says all of Israel, really the entire world, needs to be praising God. And then he focuses attention down upon his very own self, himself individually. And David starts with the hosts, but he ends with himself in the pew. It all matters.

Everyone is supposed to be praising God together and every voice matters down to the smallest child. God wants everyone to be praising God with their innermost beings all together.

You know, in Hebrew, if you want to emphasize something, you repeat it. You know, if you think about that famous passage in Isaiah 6, 3, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

[7 : 40] When you see something repeated over and over and over again, three separate times, that is a really, really, really big deal. Isaiah is hitting you over the head saying, You need to pay attention.

God is holy. And while David is doing something very similar, he closes this psalm by repeating the command, not once, not twice, not thrice, but four times, all in a row, because it's something that he needs to hear and to remember, and we need to remember.

We are created to worship God. Now think back to your Westminster Shorter Catechisms. What is the chief end of man? It's to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

What that means is worship and enjoying worship. You're supposed to do all of it. When God created Adam and Eve in the garden, he made them in his own image.

And part of what that means is that we are made to know God and to worship him. You know, God created a lot of things. God created cats and dogs, and cats and dogs glorify God in their own specific way.

[8 : 50] They can't sing. And they purposefully can't sing. They cannot sing praises to God like we do. They can't worship like we do. And in some ways, we are really the most human we can be when we are in here together and we are singing to our God, when we are fulfilling our chief end, when we're doing what we were created for.

But it's not just what we were created for. It is also what we are saved for. We are saved to worship God too. The entire reason that God has redeemed us is so that we can praise him and commune with him.

As 1 Peter 2.9 says, You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

God had a plan in mind when he saved you. The goal was to gather a people who could sing Psalm 103 together. And you can see that in the book of Revelation, which essentially ends in one large worship service.

The end of all things is to be joining together in worship to our God above. And what that means, and that's what I mean when I say that Psalm 51 is the starting place for the Christian life.

[10 : 19] And Psalm 103 comes after. We begin our Christian lives repenting and we continue repenting until our dying breath. Repenting in some fashion. Yet, the goal of our repentance is not more repentance.

The goal of our repentance is communion with God and praising him forever. And there will come a day when Psalm 51 is sung not for repentance but for remembrance.

Because there will be no need for us to repent. Because we will be glorified before God. But there will never be a day when Psalm 103 is not sung by God's people.

And so, seeing God's praise as the goal of your Christian life is necessary as Christians. After all, you're going to spend your entire eternity doing it.

Praising God. That's also part of the reason why you should want to have assurance in the first place. You want to have assurance not just because it is a massive relief for your soul and it is easier for you to go through your Christian life with assurance.

[11 : 25] Though that's definitely a good reason. But it's also that you can begin to go about the business of praising God while forgetting yourself. And perhaps forget is too strong a word.

But what I mean is there should be a point where you begin to fade into the background. Your attention is focused upon God, upon his name, upon what he has done. And you can begin to dedicate yourself to think of new reasons to praise God.

And to work the reasons you already know more and more deeply into your own heart. Thinking about how to praise is something that we need to spend time doing.

Because we're liable to forget. And I suspect it's the reason why David repeats this call of praise to himself too. Because we are sinful. We are liable to forget.

And so David launches himself into praising God for what he has done. Trying to call to mind things that God has done for him, for him to praise.

[12 : 30] And that's our second point for this evening. Praising God for what he has done. David begins to stir up his worship of God by focusing on what God has done for him.

As he says in verse 2, praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. And well, what follows is David cataloging the benefits that God has given him.

And what God has done for his people. And what we want to see in verses 3 to 5 is that everything is a gift. Everything is a gift from God and is a reason to praise him.

God has forgiven David's sin. He has healed his diseases. He has even saved his life and even his very soul from death. He has crowned him with love and mercy and given him good things to satisfy him.

And what that means is that there is not a good reason for you not to praise God. Everything that you have in your life is a reason to praise God. Every good thing.

[13 : 33] For a Christian, yes, one of the chief reasons to praise God is our redemption in Christ. That's one of the main focuses of this song. But really every breath you take is a wonder of God's grace.

We live in a world where every blade of grass has been put there by our loving Heavenly Father for us to enjoy. And every one of those blades of grass is a reason to praise.

Your car, your money, your family, they are all given to you. And it frankly seems almost pedantic for me. I could stand up here and I could list things for hours.

Things that are so obvious. And yet all of it is a gift from God. All of it is something that God has done. And yet so often we forget.

We don't call to mind the benefits of God like we should. And if we did, we would live lives of perpetual thankfulness. We would instinctively and constantly seek God in prayer and in praise.

[14 : 37] But forgetting is an age-old struggle for God's people. Hezekiah, he was one of the great and godly kings of Judah. And God richly blessed him.

But we see in 2 Corinthians 12, 25, that even he, he became proud and he forgot. Gone. And this is one of the chief warnings of Deuteronomy 8.

Which warns Israel, be careful lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them. And when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied.

And all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God. Now it's interesting. Often people who have very little are actually more thankful for what they have in their life, not less.

It seems that just like the people of Israel, the more prosperous we become, the more ungrateful we become as well. And I suspect part of it is because we begin to think that we're in control.

[15 : 44] Which is simply not true. We are not in control. Not ultimately. Nothing we receive from God is deserved. And we are called to receive it all as a gift from the hand of our loving Heavenly Father.

A significant portion of your Christian life should be focused upon remembering. Because when you remember, you are called to prayer and to praise.

You can do a lot worse than setting aside just a portion of every single day. Even just 10, 20 minutes. And just sitting there thinking of all the blessings that you have.

And then seeking to thank God for every single one of them. You'll never run out of things to thank God for. If you do run out of things, you're doing it wrong.

You can think of even the smallest things, such as the food you have. Or you can go to your great blessings in Christ. How we are predestined from all eternity by a loving God.

[16 : 49] How we are united with Christ. How we are saved by His blood. Adopted as children. And are even now indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And are being prepared for the coming day when our faith shall be sight.

Everything from the small mercies to the great mercies. All come from God. And what we need to do is we need to train our eyes to look for these things as gifts from God.

Because once you do that, you begin to realize that literally everywhere you look, there is a reason for praise. There is a reason for thankful prayer. That's something that we need.

Is to instinctively praise God for everything that He has done. But the majority of this psalm, I think, is praising God not simply for what He has done.

But praising God for who He is. And that's our third point this evening. David is chiefly praising God for His character.

[17 : 51] Particularly His loving character. One of the reoccurring words in this psalm, in the translation we're using, is love. And that's one of the set translations for a real big \$10 word in the Hebrew Bible.

It's the word chesed. Which maybe you've heard of. That's God's faithful covenantal love. The faithful covenantal love. It's sometimes translated as steadfast love.

Loving kindness, compassion, or mercy. And the reason there are so many different translations is that it's a hard idea to translate. Chesed is God's loyalty to His people even when they have forgotten Him.

And even when there is nothing in them that seems worthy of love. And yet God still loves them. In a way that boggles the mind. God's covenantal love that bears from generation to generation.

The reason David brings that up is... That's really the reason David brings up the Exodus in verse 6 and 7. God's bringing the Israelites out of Egypt is the perfect example of God's love.

[19 : 00] Because as God says in Deuteronomy 7, It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you. For you were the fewest of all peoples.

It is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers. Realize what's being said there.

God loves you because He loves you. That's what's being told to the people of Israel. That's really the ground well. The springing up of God's steadfast covenantal love.

A love that staggers the mind. And it's that same love which is the reason God persevered with Israel through the wilderness. The time and even the time of the judges. When it seems like every other chapter there's something going wrong.

Some idolatry is taking place. The people seem to be constantly leaving God. Every other moment. But yet, as David says, He will not always chide.

[19 : 59] Nor will He keep His anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins. Nor repay us according to our iniquities. David knew what it meant for God to be angry with him.

He was very well aware of that. God had made His displeasure with him very well known. He knew that there were consequences for his sin. And he experienced the consequences for his sin with Bathsheba.

And yet, David always understood that behind that anger was a God who loved him and cared for him. And one thing that's easy to overlook when you read 2 Samuel 12.

When Nathan rebukes David. Is that as soon as David repents in verse 13. Nathan immediately responds. He immediately says. The Lord has put away your sin.

Even in the darkest moment of David's life. God doesn't leave David without hope. Which is something that I think many of us would actually be inclined to do.

[21 : 08] We might say. Well, David has committed such horrible sins. He's committed adultery. He's committed murder. Let's let him stew for a day or two. Let's let him sweat. He'll be good for him. Build character.

That's not what God does. As soon as he repents. He is given. He knows that he is forgiven. And even though he does suffer earthly consequences for his sin.

He is told. Your sin has been put away. There is hope. Even in that feeling of God's anger. You know, Psalm 103 could theoretically not be directly about Bathsheba.

And the sin of David. But David would have certainly thought about that sin. When he sang verse 12. As far as the east is from the west.

So far as he removed our transgressions from us. When God removes your sin. He doesn't just give it a restraining order. It's not that he says.

[22 : 06] Well, you can live nearby you. But as long as it doesn't come within a hundred feet of you. Everything's fine. Your sin isn't allowed to live in the same country. Or even the same planet. As far as the east is from the west.

Is incomprehensible. It is an infinite distance. And if you were able to take your sin. You were able to ball it up. And God were to instantly transfer it to the other end of the universe.

And it would take however many billions of years. For light to travel from that little remote corner here. God would say that is still too close. That sin needs to be removed even further.

And forgiveness of that magnitude. Is a sign of God's love. In verse 11 it says. For as high as the heavens are above the earth.

So great is his love for those who fear him. The forgiveness we have been given by God. Is incomprehensible. Because God's love is incomprehensible.

[23 : 10] You can think about that love every day. For the rest of your life. And yet you will not come to the bottom of it. Every blessing you receive. Is but a small drop. From that eternal fountain.

That infinite fountain of love. Love. And David compares. God's loving compassion. To a father. Caring for his children.

In verse 13. But God is greater than earthly fathers. In every single way. Now I have a daughter. I love my daughter. But after my daughter was born.

A pastor told me. Realize. As much as you love your daughter. God loves you more. And he was right. And that stuck with me. When God says that he is our father.

He's doing that not so that he contains his love. But because that's the best example he can think to communicate with us. He's really accommodating himself to us.

[24 : 09] The way Calvin puts it. He says that God is engaging in baby talk. With us. He's making little sounds. And little noises. Little signs. Trying to get us to understand something.

Which is beyond us. It's too much for us to handle. And so we recognize that God has revealed himself to us as a father. As our loving father.

And yet we know the truth is far more wondrous than we can imagine. We have a loving father who cares for us. Who knows our weaknesses. And bears with us.

We have a father whose love is as it says in verse 17. Is from everlasting to everlasting. It is eternally established. And as unchangeable as the kingdom of God itself.

In verse 19. This is a love that just like the kingdom. Has neither beginning nor end. It cannot change. Because God cannot change.

[25 : 09] God is love. And as long as that eternal throne stands. God's covenant people knows. That our God of love is reigning. And that we can come to him.

Not simply as a master. But as children. To our father. This is a love. That we can see on the cross. When Jesus became sin. And died for us.

Taking the wrath of our sins. It is a love we can overhear. In the upper room. When we listen in. On Jesus' high priestly prayer. When he says. The glory that you have given me.

I have given to them. That they may be one. Even as we are one. I in them. And you in me. That they may become perfectly one. So that the world may know.

That you have sent me. And love them. Even as you love me. It is the same love that we see. When Christ sent his Holy Spirit to the church. To minister to them.

[26 : 05] And it is the same love we will see and know. When Christ returns for his bride. The church. When it is finished being prepared. By his heavenly father. And yet this sheer.

Incomprehensible love. Is beyond all of that. But Christians. Are called. To measure the unmeasurable. We are called.

To plumb the unplumbable. And that is. What Paul is getting at. In Ephesians 3. When he prayed. That the Ephesians. May have strength. To comprehend. With all the saints.

What is the breadth. And length. And height. And depth. And to know. The love of Christ. That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled.

With the fullness of God. Because as we go about. The helpless. The hopeless task. Of seeking to comprehend. The love of God. We love our God.

[27 : 04] And Savior. More and more. We know. More and more. About who. He is. And who we should be. By looking. And seeking. His love.

Praising God. For who he is. Is our highest calling. As Christians. I was reading. One of John Owen's. Sermons. A week or two ago. And I came across.

A passage. That struck me. He warned. That Christians. Should not just be. Spending all their time. Thinking about. The blessings of Christ. And his works. But not Christ himself.

He said. It's not that it's a sign. That you're not a Christian. If you spend. All your time. Thinking about. Christ's blessings. But it is a sign. That you're not growing. The way you should. Spirit. We are called.

To love Christ. Christ himself. And Christ's person. Is more glorious. Than his work. We need to see. The glory. Beauty.

[28 : 04] And love. In Christ. In himself. And it is not. That we are called. To ignore. Christ's blessings. Far from it. But we are called. To receive. Those blessings. To admire them.

To be thankful. For them. And then look up. At the giver. Who has given them. And then see. What that gift. Tells us. About God himself. What this loving gift.

Tells us. About our loving. God. He is the one. Who is our greatest comfort. In life. And in death. He is the one. Who was our greatest thought.

By day. And by night. He is the one. We long to be with. In the new heavens. And the new earth. And the one. We desire to sing about. God. That's what it means.

To praise God. For who. He is. So as you leave. This evening. I want. To encourage you. Use your redemption. Well. Get assurance.

[29 : 01] Of pardon. Don't be. Bugged down. In the mire. Of your sin. And guilt. Flee to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him. Be washed in his blood. And have assurance.

So that you can lift your head. And you can praise him. So that you can worship him. So that you can desire him. More and more. Spend time thinking.

About God. About who he is. Upon his glory. Upon Christ himself. I promise you. It will not be time. That is poorly spent.

It will be good. Worship is your destiny. As a Christian. It's what you're called to. We are called. To praise God.

Just like David did. In love. For all. Eternity. Let us pray. Most gracious. And loving.

[29 : 56] Heavenly Father. Lord. We are thankful. That you have called us. To yourself. That you have washed us. In Christ. and that we may. Think.