

God's Personal Name

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[0 : 0 0] So we're following a series over these few weeks on names for God, names of God. And today we're thinking about the theme, God's personal name.

In that passage there from Psalm 68, we read, Sing to God, sing praise to his name. This is very much out of the kind of context of worship.

David is worshipping his God as he writes this psalm, and as this psalm has been sung over the centuries. So there's a sense of identifying God as a deeply personal being who is named as such.

And the context there is worship. And it perhaps raises a question that's, I think, one that is not an uncommon question to ask.

And it's this, why would God, if God's love, if he's a loving God, why would God create human beings in order to receive worship from us?

[1 : 1 6] That's a question that I found myself wrestling with actually quite a long time. I found the words of C.S. Lewis quite helpful in this respect. And C.S. Lewis put it like this.

He said that God created us, creates us, and sustains us in life in order to enjoy God. In order to have a relationship with God, not just as an impersonal being that we believe in, but actually a loving being who we have a living relationship with in a meaningful way.

And in order to enjoy that relationship, praise is a part of that. Because praise is a part of anything that we enjoy in life.

For example, if you're eating something that you're really enjoying, you kind of praise the food. When you say, mmm. You know, in the same way, if you stub your toe, you go, ouch.

Or something worse. When you have a positive experience, you know, the positive, ouch, is a mmm. And it's not just in food.

[2 : 3 5] It's in anything. If you're listening to a piece of music, you'll be expressing something. You might actually find yourself kind of humming along with something as you're listening to it.

Then afterwards, you'd be saying, oh, that's just amazing. And then you might be breaking it down and saying, that bit there was absolutely superb. Or if you've seen an amazing film afterwards, you'll be telling people about it.

You've got to see this film. It's absolutely amazing. Or if you're out on a walk and there's an amazing scenery, and you're with somebody and say, look at that over there.

Isn't that absolutely stunning? You know, when we're generally caught up in the moment of enjoying a reality of life, there's something about the very act of enjoying it that causes us to praise.

That might not always be the word that we might think of using, but we praise it. In other words, we express the enjoyment that we have of it. C.S. Lewis wrote this.

[3 : 3 3] He said, The most obvious fact about praise strangely escaped me. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.

The world rings with praise. Walkers praising the countryside. Players praising their favourite game. Praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps.

Not quite sure about that one, but anyway, if that's your thing, enjoy it. Rare books, even sometimes politicians, maybe, and scholars.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy, because the praise not merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment in its appointed consummation.

It's not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete until it is expressed.

[4 : 47] In other words, worship and praise is consummation of joy. And that's important when we come to think here about the way in which David names his God in worship, because it's not just some sort of sterile thing that he's doing with his mind.

It's something that overflows from the heart. As he outpours his worship, so we see something of the way in which the name of God is expressed.

We see the enjoyment of God expressed in this psalm. So as David celebrates God, he celebrates him not as an abstract concept, but for the very real practical ways in which he sees him in action in his daily lives.

Sing to God, says the psalm. Sing to God. Sing praise to his name. His name is the Lord. Now in Jewish thinking, in Hebrew thinking, God considered so holy that there could be no name for God as such.

And eventually they came with, they arrived at the term Yahweh, but most of the time in English, modern English translations, that is translated into the word the Lord.

[6 : 11] But what we see here is David praising the Lord, who is so holy other that cannot actually be given a name, but he calls him Yahweh the Lord.

But as he does so, so in this psalm, we can see a number of specific things that emerge that David identifies in practical terms what that means and why he wishes to praise his God in this way.

I want to suggest three things. There are many more, but I want to suggest three things that come out of these verses. Firstly, we see David experience, experience poured out in praise as he refers to God, who he sees is always before us, who goes before us.

Secondly, how that is the same God who bears our daily burdens. And thirdly, how he calls him Father. Let's just think of those in turn.

Firstly, he says that God is the God who goes before us. In verse seven in this psalm, it says, when you went out before your people, oh God, when you marched through the wasteland, the earth shook and the heavens poured down rain.

[7 : 24] As this psalm is expressing this, so it's pointing back to the time when God's people were set free from slavery in Egypt and they went into the desert with the promise that one day they would enter a promised land.

And all the while, God was in front of them leading the way. And as David recounts that experience in this psalm here, we can imagine that David, as a king leading Israel during an extremely turbulent time in its history, was acknowledging that in his daily experience when he wasn't, when he didn't know what was going to happen to him and to his country, nevertheless, he believed, he had this conviction that God goes before us.

There's a story about a little girl who first time was on a train, like a train journey. She was excited, but she was also quite nervous. And she was particularly nervous as on this train, she looked out of the window and she could see on the horizon a vast, expansive lake.

And the train was heading towards it. And she was worried what was going to happen when the train hit the lake. She couldn't see the bridge until the split second before the train actually passed across the lake.

And as she did so, she just said to her mum, someone's put a bridge here for us. And life can sometimes be like that, where sometimes, you know, we're held on tender hooks, we don't quite know what's going to happen, we see this thing coming down the track at us.

[9 : 06] And it's only when we get to that place that then we sense, no, it's okay, God's got this. And I sense that was probably David's experience. God goes before us.

Whatever situation you've got going on in your life right now that you might be feeling apprehensive about, God goes ahead of you into that situation. You can't see how that's going to play out because we can't see the future, but the reassurance here is that God does.

He goes ahead. God puts the bridges out ahead of us for when we get there. The second part there is that David goes on and says that God daily bears our burdens in verse 19.

He is the God who daily bears our burdens. Again, David's experience of leading his country during this turbulent time was that sense that every day God bears our burdens.

Now, what does that mean? Clearly, it does not mean that somehow when we believe in God, when we follow Jesus, that we're suddenly immunised from problems.

[10 : 24] It doesn't work like that and Jesus never said it would be. But there's a certain power in this dynamic of casting our burdens and learning that dynamic of casting our burdens onto God.

when we experience that sense of looking down the track and we don't know what the future is going to be like, we're called to entrust to cast our burdens onto him.

1 Peter 5, verse 7 says, cast all your anxiety, all your burdens onto him because he cares for you. So what does that actually look like in practical terms?

Well, apparently, the only other place in the whole of the New Testament where that word casting actually appears is in Luke chapter 19 and it's when the disciples get the colt that Jesus rides on into Jerusalem in what was celebrated as Palm Sunday and we're told that the disciples took the colt and they cast their cloaks onto the colt before Jesus got on it.

So what you've got there is something, a visual idea of what that actually, you know, if you want to know what that looks like, just think of Jesus' disciples taking off their robes and just casting them onto the colt.

[11 : 44] They're throwing them on and that's the same word that is then used in 1 Peter chapter 5. Cast your anxieties onto God.

Now that's not an easy thing. In some ways, it's a lifelong process that we're called every day of our lives to learn and to practice more and more and more but it's an ancient practice and one that we see going on in David as he talks about the God who carries our burdens daily.

He promises to carry them but he calls us to cast those burdens in trust onto him. George Muller, he lived from 1805 to 1898 and during his magnificent life he did some extraordinary things but he was most known for setting up the orphanages just up the road in Bristol.

During his lifetime it's estimated that over 10,000 orphans were taken care of by George Muller's homes. Over 10,000 young people.

It's extraordinary. He was not only just a practical man, principally he was a man of prayer. And during the time of setting these orphanages up he never made public appeals for money.

[13 : 03] They were all unsolicited gifts apparently. But he just prayed that the provision would come. And he was known and you may have heard many stories before about how it wasn't an uncommon experience for him to set out everything not knowing where the next meal was going to come from.

One occasion there was even 300 children out and they even said grace before the food actually arrived that day.

It was another occasion when the boiler broke down and he just prayed that the people would come along and fix it and that it would happen and it did. It was another occasion when he was out on a ship and they needed to get somewhere but there was fog everywhere and they had to stop, they had to slow right down and he said to the captain of the ship let's go and pray and the captain just said you're wasting your time, you cannot change the meteorological conditions by prayer and apparently Muller said let's just go down and pray and he insisted and he went down reluctantly and apparently Muller led in this prayer and the captain could see this man was earnest so he started to then pray and Muller apparently clasped him by the arm and said you can stop there and he just said we've got to come and pray and he said no no you don't need to, I've already said it, you don't need to say it again, honestly, believe me, the fog has lifted, they went upstairs on ship and sure enough the fog had just gone, but apparently Muller was once asked how on earth he managed to keep up with so much activity during his life, how he managed to keep going in the middle of a hectic day with continual uncertainties as to how he would keep these orphanages going.

And apparently he said this, I rolled 60 things onto the Lord this morning. Casting your burdens. It's simple, it's not easy though.

Of course it's not easy, sometimes the most simple things are the most challenging things. And this is a challenging thing even though it's a very simple thing. But that's what we're called to do, to trust in that same God that is named by David as the one who carries our burdens daily.

[15 : 19] And in practical terms, what does that look like? What it looks like learning that discipline, just being able to let go and to get on with it. The last thing here that David says is that he refers to God as he is the father of the fatherless.

That was David's experience. You need to remember, David was, when David became king and all his brothers were all lined up as he was going to be a, you know, the prophet went along to his house and said, who's going to be the new king?

And I'll just know when it's the new king and I'll anoint the one with oil who is lined up. All his brothers brought in and David was, and he was just still out in the field looking after the sheep. He was the runt of the litter.

He didn't think he was worth even bringing in. No, no, he's got to be brought in. And David eventually was brought in straight away. Yeah, here's the one. Here's the one who's going to be chosen, promoted from shepherd to king, just like that.

So that was David's experience. Now, much history passed since David. Jesus enters the scene and proclaims that we can have that living relationship with our God, where we're promoted, not from shepherd to king, but from an ordinary person to a child of God, where we can call God father.

[16 : 47] Whatever our experiences of human fathers have been, whether it's been magnificent, whether it's been terrible, whatever it may be, we're all different. The point here is that the true experience of fatherhood as it's meant to be is defined in the God who loves you unconditionally.

whatever you might think about yourself, you're given that radically new identity, you're offered that new identity and invited to enjoy that identity and to know that you can dare to call God father, the most personal name that you could possibly be.

Apparently Napoleon was riding his horse one day and a young private just happens to be nearby. the horse went out of control.

This young private ran up to Napoleon, grabbed the horse and brought it under control, preventing Napoleon from being thrown off the horse. Napoleon didn't actually know this young man by name except he knew he was a private who hadn't been in the army long.

In one breath, in one moment, he turned to this young man and said, thank you captain. He promoted him in a heartbeat.

[18 : 11] In just one word. And in just one word, you were not promoted from private to captain. You promoted to child of God.

In that one word, father, that you were invited to address God as. We get so used to doing this in praying the Lord's prayer as a matter of our father in heaven, as though it just trots off the tongue.

What a radical thing. We are called not just to know about God, but to know God. And when we hear that name, we hear God's name as father, the most personal name there can possibly be.

And with it, we hear that new identity, that promotion. You are a child of God.

So let's praise and let's worship him every day, but let's do that right now. Let's pray. Lord, thank you that you call us into that relationship, not just a belief system, but a relationship with you.

[19 : 30] And that it's in that relationship of knowing you and enjoying you that we're invited to praise you, to praise you out of that sense of overflowing enjoyment, of knowing who you are, and of knowing who we are in you.

Lord, we thank you for the way in which you call us, to know that you are always before us, that you go ahead of us, that you lay down bridges that we don't know about.

Help us to trust in you for that. Lord, thank you that you are the God who promises to bear our daily burdens. Help us to trust in you for that.

Help us to cast our burdens, our anxieties onto you in that trust that we can. And whatever we've got going on in our lives right now, help us to do that right now, to cast it onto you, knowing that you carry those burdens and that is your promise.

And Lord, most of all, thank you that when we praise your name, we know that we are not talking about something cold and impersonal, but we are talking about you as the living God, our living Father, who loves us and wants us to know that we are known and loved by you as your children.

[21 : 01] So help us to do that, help us to know that, help us to live by that, now and in the time to come. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.