

A Benevolent King and His Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Friends, let's pray together. Father, thank you so much for this psalm. Thank you for your word to us. Thank you that you are the reigning king.

We pray today that you would enlighten us as we study this passage together, that you'd draw us closer to yourself, and that you'd help us to live rightly in response to your word.

This we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Well, by his own confession, Augustine had lived a life of sin.

He tells us in his confessions about his growth to manhood, of how he was inflamed with desire, with a surfeit, he says, of hell's pleasures. He ran through youth with a lust that was manifold and rank.

He was foul to the core, and yet he was pleased with his own condition. He cared for nothing but to love and be loved. But for him, love meant lust. However, Augustine had a godly and prayerful mother.

[1 : 01] A dangerous thing, really. She pleaded with God, with sighs and with tears for her son. And God was at work.

For God turned him to the scriptures. And through the scriptures, God turned him to God. And Augustine felt his heart flooded with light. He turned from his life of sin, and he turned to God. And later, he wrote down his story in his confessions. And the first paragraph of those confessions contains perhaps one of the most famous statements of Augustine. He reflects on humanity. He finds in humans a creaturely instinct to praise. He speaks of humans who cannot be content unless they can praise the one who created them. And then it is that he's spurred to go on. And he says, humans cannot help but praise. Because you made us for yourself. And our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.

[2 : 02] Friends, this wonderful thought is found at the end of the first paragraph of Augustine's confessions. But let me tell you what is found at the beginning of the first paragraph. Let me tell you the very first words that are found in the confessions of Augustine.

Augustine starts his confession with these words. Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? Now, that is a paraphrase of Psalm 145, verse 3.

You see, Augustine knew where to go if you wanted to talk about God. He knew where to go if you wanted to find some words that would enable you to praise God.

He knew the place to turn to if you wanted to exalt in God in whom he had found contentment, rescue and peace. And he knew that that place was Psalm 145.

And Augustine stands in very great shoes, you see. After all, the Jewish manual for synagogue worship says this about Psalm 145. It says, Whoever repeats it three times a day may be sure that he is a child of the world to come.

[3 : 12] Jews also recite Psalm 145 during the special prayer service held on the Day of Atonement. In Jewish praise or in Jewish faith, there is no psalm that is better known or more publicly frequently recited than Psalm 145.

Now, in his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin says that the description of God given in this Psalm, and particularly in Psalm 8, is as clear and satisfactory a statement about God as can be found anywhere in Scripture.

Friends, this Psalm that we're going to look at today is a wonderful treasure. It is a gem among a host of gems in the Psalms. It is an amazing presentation of God.

It is a very, very special Psalm. And if you hear and imbibe the words within it, then you too may be at the door of becoming a child of the world to come.

Psalm 145.

[4 : 38] This is it, the last one that has a declaration in front of it. Second, I want you to notice the very first word in the heading. The heading simply says, praise.

That word is only used once as a heading of a psalm anywhere in the Psalter. This is it, praise. So this marks this psalm as being special yet again.

Third, I want you to notice who is said to be the author of this psalm. The heading says, this is a psalm of David. Now we know, don't we, that there are lots of psalms that are ascribed to David within the Psalter.

But I want to tell you, this is the last one. This is the last one that is a psalm of David. The great psalm writer. This is his last psalm.

In other words, this is his last word. This is, as it were, David's swan song as he signs off or as the compilers of the Psalter have him signing off. This is it, the last thing he wants to say.

[5 : 40] And it is all not about David, but all about God. Now let me show you a fourth thing about this psalm. This psalm is what's called an acrostic psalm. In other words, if you were to know the original language and you were to read down it, you would see that every line, every major line begins with a new letter of the alphabet.

So A, B, C and so on. Aleph, Bet, Gimel and so on. All the way down to Tab, which is the equivalent of our T right at the end. So as you work all the way down, how many letters do you think there are in the Hebrew alphabet?

There are 22. So how many verses would you think you should have in this psalm? 22. And how many do you have? 21.

There's one letter of the alphabet missing somewhere. Now let me tell you what it is. The letter that is missing, if you go down, it occurs round about the middle and it's the equivalent of our letter N. It's a nun. Now, in my view, if you're an ancient reader and you're reading through, you know, a good Hebrew person, you're reading through and you read down Aleph, Bet, Gimel, Dalet and all the way down and you got to nun, you'd think there's something missing.

[6 : 50] Where has it gone? And here's a remarkable thing. If you read back, you'd notice that there are three letters that precede. And if you read them backward, they would go M, L, K or the equivalent.

And if you spell them out, those initials can do, those three letters can do two things. They can spell out the noun for king and they can spell out the verb for rain.

Can you see what is happening here? And then have a look at the content of them. Have a look at verses 11 to 13. These are the verses that come right before that missing nun. Have a look at them. They say this. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power to make known to all people your mighty deeds and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion or your reign endures throughout all generations. Can you see what the writer is doing? He's saying, God, at the center of this psalm is God, the king who reigns.

[7 : 58] Friends, this is a very special psalm. It is wonderfully crafted by David. Now, some of our English translations don't like the fact that that little letter is missing. So they add the little bit in tucked in the end at verse 13 there.

It's not actually probably there in most of the best Hebrew texts. So can you see what is being said here? The writer is saying, praise God with everything that you have.

This is a sort of A to Z of the praise of God. But there's even more that's special about this psalm. This psalm, for example, the word bless or extol is found both at the middle in the sorry, at the beginning, at the end and in the middle.

In verse one, the psalmist extols or blesses God. In verse 10, he talks about the faithful blessing God. In verse 21, all flesh will bless God's holy name forever and ever.

You see, he's gone from his own personal blessing of God to the blessing of God by all faithful to the blessing of God's holy name. The last thing to say about this psalm is that there are some other special markers.

[9 : 04] The titles for God in this psalm are overwhelming. He's called so many great names. But more than that, the word for all or every is repeated some 17 times in this psalm.

God's kingship, this psalm says, is overwhelming. It affects all. It takes in everything. It takes in all time, all people, all creation, all ages.

It is all encompassing. It affects the all embracing reach of God's great goodness. Friends, this psalm is incredibly potent.

No wonder Jews cherish it so much. No wonder that Christians such as Augustine and Calvin rejoice in it. It is a wonderful psalm. It's currently my favorite, if you can't tell that already.

So there are some of the special characteristics about this psalm. Now, in a moment, I want to give you some details. But before I do that, I want to tell you just the context for this psalm. You see, in order to understand it, you need to understand the context in which it is set.

[10:15] You see, as you read through the whole of the 150 psalms, you will notice that there's a distinct trend. And that trend is tied up with the notion of the kings of Israel.

After you've had the introductory psalm, Psalm 1, and you get into Psalm 2, you're introduced to God's king, whom God puts on his holy mountain. And he says of him, you are my son, Psalm 2. But then as the psalms go on, gradually you are shown that the kings of Israel fail. They act independently. They act autonomously. They sin.

And God punishes them with the rods of men, as he promised he would in 2 Samuel 7. He overturns the kings of Israel. And toward the end of the psalms, we find them in exile. And the message of this psalm is clear.

Here we end right at the end of the book of psalms, almost at the end. And what this psalm is saying is the kings of Israel may fail. But God the king will not fail.

[11:16] He is a true king. However, the context of this psalm is not just the book of psalms as a whole. It's the whole of scripture. You see, how does scripture start? Genesis 1 tells us God creates the world good.

Genesis 2 says he puts humans in it. Or Genesis 1 and 2 says he puts humans in it. And what do humans do? They fail too. Humans fail to live under God's rule.

You see, he makes them rulers over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, every creature that moves over the surface of the earth. And they fail just as the kings of Israel will fail after them. That is the largest story of this psalm.

The message of this psalm is clear. The kings of Israel may fail. Humans may fail. But God the king will not fail. Here is a true king.

With that in mind, let's have a look at the detail of it. So friends, have a look there at the content.

Look at verses 1 to 2, which operates as a sort of prelude.

[12:15] David commits himself to praise. He says, I will extol you, my God and king, and bless your name forever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

Friends, can you hear this? Praise is not just something we do on a Sunday. It's not a sort of one-hour event that occurs one day of the week, every week. No, praise is an attitude of life for this, for David.

It means, its intention is that it informs and shapes our life. Friends, as Augustine noted, we are made for praise of God. And praise is not something you just say and then forget.

Praise is by nature even somewhat redundant. That is, it's something you repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat again. Sometimes you use new words. Sometimes you use different words. Sometimes you use the same words you used yesterday.

We were made for this. We were made to praise God. There is a deep narcissism within our age, you see. We are so focused on ourselves. If you don't believe me, who was it that you were thinking about as you came to church this morning?

[13:21] Or when you last took the dogs for a walk or whatever you do to relax? Who was it that you thought so much about? We think about ourselves so much.

Our brains think of ourselves constantly. Our hearts dwell upon ourselves. We are preoccupied with self. And praise is the great antidote to this melody.

You see, praise turns our attention away from ourselves to the unsearchable greatness of the one who created us. It recognises we are creatures. God is our creator, the sustainer, the author and the giver of life.

Praise liberates us from our bondage to self. It frees us up. It drives us out of our own selves. And we can simply stand in awe and with deep appreciation, simply behold he who is the source of all life.

Friends, those of us who bear the name of Christ must relearn the discipline of praise. You see, we are rebuked by this psalmist and his focus. God has made us for him.

[14:30] As Paul says in Ephesians, we were made to live for the praise of his glory. That's what God made us for. As Peter says, we were chosen by God in order that we might proclaim the great praises or the great deeds of him who's called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Our vocation in this world is the adoration and service of God the Father. It is mediated through the Son. It has its focus in God's great works through Jesus.

It is prompted by and infused with God's spirit. We are people of praise. Let's join with David, therefore, as God's redeemed people and say with him, I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. But let's look at verses 3 to 6. In these verses, David gives his reasons for praise.

And the reasons he gives are very clear. They are twofold. God's greatness and God's abundant goodness. God's great greatness, his abundant goodness.

[15:42] Look at verses 3 to 7. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall lord your works to another, shall declare your mighty acts.

Of the glorious splendor of your majesty and on your wondrous works I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed and I will declare your greatness.

They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all and his compassion is over all that he has made. Verse 3, can you see, begins with a declaration of God's greatness and he carries it through to verse 6.

And then he turns and as it were, focuses in on God's goodness. And then in verse 9, he proclaims that he's good to all. The psalmist has captured two facets of God's character and he's entwined them together, twisted them into this great truth.

[16:44] These two great truths have been entwined. God is great and God is good. Friends, one of the great risks I think as God's people is to render asunder those two things.

You see, we can emphasise the greatness of God. We can say he is a God who does what he likes, when he likes, how he likes, where he likes. But the risk with this is that God can be seen to be capricious.

He is great, but maybe not necessarily so good. But this psalm rebukes us. God is simply not great. He is great in his greatness, but he's abundant in his goodness.

Of course, the other side of it is, isn't it, that we could emphasise God's goodness at the cost of his greatness. What sort of God would that leave you with? It would leave us with a God who's abundantly good, but constrained, because he's not great.

He really would like to help us if he could. He'd like to be good to us, but he's not great, and so he's constrained or restrained.

[17:47] Now, the psalm is clear. God is both. The Bible is clear. God is both good and great. He is great in his greatness, and he's abundant in his goodness.

He loves people, and he is able to rescue people. And we Christians know that this is true, don't we? For we were faced with an overwhelmingly impossible situation.

We were faced with something that would require something incredibly great. Our nature separated us from God, and if God was holy, then he'd have to look upon us. He could not look upon us in our iniquity.

He would have to... He would not be able to have us in his presence. But God is good, and God is great.

And so through his Son, he does the impossible. He who is holy and righteous punishes sin, and yet he who is abundant in goodness and love brings us to himself.

[18:47] This is our God. His goodness is abundant, and his greatness is unsearchable. So let's proclaim his awesome deeds in Jesus. Celebrate the fame of his abundant goodness.

Sing aloud of his righteousness. Friends, this is the sort of king our God is. He is good. And he is great. And that means that his kingdom is to be embraced and declared.

And so verses 11 to 13 do this. The centre of this psalm, that is what they do. They burst into song about this king's kingdom. Look at it in verse 10. All of your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power and make known to all people your mighty deeds and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom, it is an everlasting

kingdom.

Your dominion endures throughout all generations. These first 13 verses have declared the great truths of this psalm. God is a great king. His kingdom is backed by greatness.

[19 : 54] It's endorsed by goodness. And then in the second half, he sort of opens it all up and he reflects on that goodness and that greatness in action. Friends, look at it. I want you to not look at your Bibles at this point, but just listen to what it has to say.

Allow these words of the good and great God to warm your hearts, to soak into your brains and to sink deep into your psyche.

Just let them flow over you, for this is our God. The Lord, Yahweh, upholds all who are falling and raises up those who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desires of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all his ways and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

[20 : 58] He fulfills the desires of all who fear him and he also hears their cry and he saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

Can you see the psalmist working up? Can you see him developing his thought? Did you notice the shift he engages in toward the end? He's reflected on God's greatness and God's goodness. Then he's gradually shifted toward our response and our response can be twofold.

You see, one, we can line ourselves up with this God and say, we love you. And if we do that, we will experience his goodness and love and he will watch over those who love him.

But if we continue to act independently, autonomously, then what will he do? He'll give us what we've asked for. He will bar us from his goodness. He will act in such a way as to give us what we want. Our autonomy will cause our ruin and his greatness will cause him to destroy the wicked.

So that's the detail of the psalm. Now, I wonder if you can see and hear its central message. If you haven't yet, I've been terribly unclear. Can you hear its message? It is, God is a great and good king.

[22 : 11] He is generous. He is benevolent. He is able. Can you hear the subtext of the psalm, though? If that is who God is, then who did he make us to be?

We were made for dependence, weren't we? We were made to have this God as our king. He made us to depend upon him. He made us to look to him as the open-handed God.

He made us to call upon him. He made us to love him. And where such an attitude exists, he will be found to be the God of the open hand.

He will raise up the fallen. He will give them their food in due season. He will satisfy their desire. Do kindness.

Be near. Fulfill their desire. Hear their cry. Watch over them. And save them. He is God the king.

[23 : 19] We were made to depend upon him. And in him true life is found. And in him fullness of life is found. Friends, I wonder if you could do some imagining with me.

This psalm has been about God the king. I want you to imagine what you think his throne might look like. What might the throne of such a king be like?

What would it be shaped like? What adornment would it have? Where would you put it? Well, the Old Testament gives us a few glimpses of this, but the New Testament gives us a magnificent glimpse of this throne.

For in the New Testament, in John's Gospel, there's language constantly about Jesus being lifted up, which has echoes of two things. He is lifted up in terms of being enthroned.

But where is Jesus lifted up to in John's Gospel? He's lifted up to the cross, isn't he? He is lifted up to the cross where he is exalted.

[24 : 26] Friends, Jesus is God's king. And his throne, in some senses, is the cross. Because in the cross, he exercises the kingship of God that Psalm 145 speaks about.

Can you see what he does? In the cross, what is Jesus doing? What is Jesus, God's king, doing? He is raising up the fallen. He is doing kindness.

He is showing steadfast love. He is opening his hand and satisfying our greatest desire and need.

He is hearing our cry. He is saving us.

You see, in Jesus, the king on the cross, we see God, the king at work. Great in his greatness.

Abundant in his goodness. Gracious and merciful.

Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love. So what does it mean to live under the truths of this psalm? If you've taken it on. If you've imbibed it.

[25 : 31] What impact will its message have? Well, I want to give you three hints by asking you a series of three questions. Or me too. First question is this. If you believe the message of this psalm, then what will you say?

If you believe the message of this psalm, what will you say? Well, the psalm itself tells you what you'll say. If you believe that God is a good and great king, then you will tell of this to the world. You see, if you really believe that this is the king of all creation, you will proclaim his abundant goodness and his great greatness. Look at the last verse of Psalm 145. Look at it and see what it says.

Can you see what David says? Having glorified God, the king, he says, my mouth will speak of the praise of Yahweh and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

Now look at Psalm 146. Tell me, what is it about? It is about praise, isn't it? It is full of praise. Then look at Psalm 147. So is it.

[26 : 30] So is Psalm 148. So is Psalm 149. So is Psalm 150. All creation bound together praises this king.

Friends, if God is really the good and great king, if his kingdom is really all that David says it is, there can be only one response in one sense or at least an overriding response.

And it's the response of Psalm 146 to 150, which is why you go from 145 to 146 to 150, because you say, let's do it.

If God is this great king, if everyone should praise him like you have at the end of Psalm 145, let's do it. Let's praise him. It is the response of praise.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. So that's the end. That's our first question. What should I do in the light of God, the king? I should praise him. Now let's move to our second question.

[27 : 28] If God is the sort of king that we've seen in this psalm, if he's the sort of king that we've seen in Jesus, then what sort of things would you pray if you believed in a king like this? Well, let me give you some suggestions.

We'd pray the sorts of things that this psalm urges us to pray for. We'll exalt in God, the generous and benevolent king. We'll pray that this God's kingdom will be exalted and his reign acknowledged. We'll yearn for his will to be done. We'll request that he be generous and kind as he promises he will be. We'll ask him, satisfy our needs.

Be the God of an open hand for us. We'll particularly say to him, satisfy our greatest need. Please, the need for forgiveness of sins. Knowing that good is found only in him.

We will ask him to rescue us from wickedness and evil. In other words, we may very well pray like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[28 : 27] Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

So there's our second question. How will you pray in the light of Psalm 145? Will you pray just as the Lord Jesus himself taught us to pray, who we know is educated on the Psalms? It is the most frequently quoted book by him.

The third question is this. How will you then live in the light of Psalm 145? Friends, our nature, our culture promotes autonomy.

It promotes self-sufficiency. It endorses human kingdoms and human reigns. But this psalm heads off in an entirely different direction. This psalm promotes God and God's kingdom.

[29 : 35] To sing and to read Psalm 145 is to confess our own insufficiency and the total sufficiency of God the King.

It promotes the sovereignty of God and the end of human autonomy. It invites us to live in a world not determined by self, but determined by God, the loving, great and benevolent King.

It tells us that life is not determined by self. But by a far more fundamental and eternal reality, the pervasive reality of the eternal loving rule of God the King.

Friends, will you live like this? Will you abandon autonomy? Will you cling to God the King? Will you trust in his goodness displayed on the cross?

Will you exalt in his Son? Will you live a life of praise of him? But friends, this is the life that God ordained you for.

[30 : 44] It is what he made you for. It is what he created you for. That your life might speak of the praise of this God.

And that all flesh might bless his holy name forever and ever. Father, let's pray. Father, we come before you this morning aware of our deep, deep desire for autonomy.

And yet we come to this psalm and we see something far better than our autonomy. We see your sovereignty. Father, please, that we recognize your sovereignty seen in your Son.

Father, please help us to cling to you, our King. To trust your goodness displayed on the cross. To exalt in your Son.

To live a life of praise of him. Father, we know that this is what you ordained us for. What you created us for. Father, we pray that in our congregational life this is what we might live for.

[31 : 58] That we might declare the great deeds, the praises of him who has brought us out of darkness. Into his wonderful light. May our life speak of your praise.

That all flesh might bless your holy name forever and ever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.