

High Praise for a God Who Saves

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn back with me to Psalm 108, page 605. We've started last week, but we're going to be working through book 5 of the Psalms, and we're on to the second one in that book.

And there should be a handout too to help you follow along. Well, life is full of highs and lows. Many of you would know that.

But so often, the lows follow very soon after the highs, don't they? So, for example, when you first become a Christian, there's such a great high with just realizing that your eternity is secure, that you're going to be with God forever, even after death.

But then soon after, you realize that you still have to live this life on earth. And try as you might, and despite you being a Christian, you're not an immediately perfect and sinless saint.

That this Christian life is going to be a long, hard slog. Or what about the excitement of getting married? The bliss of the wedding night? The honeymoon afterwards?

[1 : 13] I know you've only got one couple in mind at the moment. And then you think, oh, if only life could stay like that. Carefree on a beach, you know, maybe not on a beach or wherever, cabin somewhere.

Sipping a cocktail? Not if you're in the cabin, but, you know. Instead, when you come back from the honeymoon, reality hits, doesn't it? It hits with that first load of dirty laundry you have to do.

Or the realization that actually, there's no one to clear your dishes or wash them up. No waiters, no kitchen hand. You've got to start doing it yourself. No mom and dad either.

So, in fact, if you think about any highlight in life, whether it's getting into the uni course of your first preference or your first ever full-time job or the birth of your first child, whatever the highlight, it's not long after when reality hits.

And you experience some of the lowlights, some of the grind of reality that goes with whatever the highlight was. Now, remember last week when we started looking at Book 5 of the Psalms, I suggested that this volume, Book 5, was situated at the time of the return of the exile.

[2 : 25] And so, if ever there was going to be a high for the people, this was it. After 70 years in the exile, all of a sudden, as Jeremiah promised, and you can read the last few verses in his prophecy, King Cyrus of Persia issues a decree allowing for their return.

And what's more, the decree says, that their neighbors would have to help them along the way if they needed it by providing gold or silver to rebuild the temple.

That's pretty good, isn't it? An expense-paid return trip. So, imagine the excitement as they embark on this trip and then the building anticipation as they draw closer and closer to Jerusalem.

But then soon after, reality hits. Why? Because they're confronted with a city in ruins. The rebuilding work would be hard.

And even as they began, enemies around them would be opposing their efforts. And without a fortified city, remember the walls were all sort of in disrepair, they were vulnerable.

[3 : 33] They were defenseless. Now, if you read Ezra and Nehemiah, you'll see that all this really did happen. But I give you this quick history because this is the context for our psalm today, Psalm 108.

Psalm 108 speaks to the people in this situation where they were in the midst of their vulnerability. Now, most of you would probably be thankful that Psalm 108 is much shorter than last week's.

But it's actually an intriguing psalm because it's not original. Yes, it's a psalm of David because it says so in the title. And so I take it that it's come from his hand.

But Psalm 108 is actually a composite psalm. That is, it's been put together by joining two other psalms. So if you look at the handout, verses 1 to 5 is the same as verses 7 to 11 of Psalm 57.

And then verses 6 to 13 matches verses 5 to 12 of Psalm 60. If you don't believe me, you can quickly flip to 57 and 60 to check. But barring one or two words, Psalm 108 has been written before.

[4 : 37] There's nothing new in it. Now, how this came about, we don't know. We can only guess. But what we should note is that Psalm 57 and Psalm 60 belong to a group of five psalms, 56 to 60, called miktams.

All right? And I've written that word there in the outline, miktams of David. Again, if you look at those psalms, they are described as such in the titles. Now, again, no one knows what a miktam is.

All right? Sounds like a Cantonese word. But anyway, perhaps it's a special kind of song or the name of an instrument. But we don't know. What it does, though, is that because of the use of this term, these five psalms have been grouped together.

We know that they've been grouped together because except for one other psalm, there's no other psalm that is called a miktam. There are only six, and five of them are here. So they're here because they've been grouped together deliberately.

The other fact that we know, the other reason we know that they have been grouped together is because they all share common settings. So each of the psalms, if you go back to the headings, you'll see describe an occasion when enemies are faced.

[5 : 49] And except for Psalm 59, which we gather from reading the psalm itself, there are actually descriptions of the occasion in each of those psalms, in the titles.

So Psalm 57 was written, in the title it says, when David had fled from Saul into the cave. He was running away from King Saul. Psalm 60 was written, when he fought Aram Naharam and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

Again, another battle scene. So imagine the people of Israel returning from exile, and they would have been reading their psalms week in, week out, and they would have come across these miktams, and they would have started comparing their situation with those of the psalms.

And so I think someone must have then put two sections of the psalms, of these earlier psalms together, to give us Psalm 108. It's just a guess, but I think it's sort of reasonable. Now why it's just these two sections and no other, again, we don't know.

But as we look at the content of this psalm tonight, we'll soon see that there are three universal truths, which given their situation, would have been really helpful for them.

[7 : 03] And maybe that's why they drew those two sections together, because it really ministered to them. So what are these three truths? Well, excuse me. I've written them down on the outline itself.

But let's start with the first. The first is found in verses 1 to 6. Firstly, they wanted to remind themselves of God's steadfast love.

Remember from last week, his chesed. That word is found in verse 4. For great is your chesed, love, higher than the heavens.

So in many ways, I suppose this psalm is a continuation in theme from last week's psalm. But I want to draw out three differences with this psalm. First, I think what's going on is that there's a bit of self-talk happening here.

The psalmist is actually not on a high, like everything's gone well and he's praising God. Rather, I think he's praising God in the midst of a challenge. So he's sort of reassuring himself, even as he begins addressing God.

[8 : 06] He says, his heart is steadfast. Steady on, my heart, he says. My heart, oh God, is steady or steadfast. That is, he's telling himself not to waver in trust, even in the midst of his challenge.

Rather, I will sing and make music with all my soul. Now, music, as we know, is a way of arousing the feelings and passions. And here, it's helping him to praise God, even though he may not feel like it.

I guess it's the same with us at church. Sometimes we come and we are uplifted, even though we don't feel like it, as we sing together. Although, for some of us, it depends on having the right type of music before that works.

But here, what happens, I think, is that he's awakened before sunrise. Maybe he's troubled. And so, you know, with the first strum of the strings, yeah, he's talking to his harp and lyre.

He says, awake, harp and lyre. And he does, and the harp and the lyre sort of wakes up. And he loves his instruments, okay? You know, people, some of you band members would know that.

[9 : 12] And together, with the instruments, they usher in the day. They awake. I will awake the dawn by praising God with my instruments.

I think that's what's happening here. And then second, as we see him sing, we see that the audience he's addressing is much bigger than the audience being addressed last week. So instead of just giving thanks among God's people, as we saw last week, here in verse 3, the praise is among the nations.

And his singing among the peoples, plural. And what the nations hear is high praise for God's hesed. And that's the third difference, I think.

For this week, the language of praise is more expansive and grand. There are superlatives that he uses to express that praise. There was one last week, forever, endures forever.

But here, there's just more of it. So verse 4, For great is your love, higher than the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

[10 : 15] Let your glory be over all the earth. Can you see how he's just so expansive? Now, I don't know about you, but for me, the only time, the only other time I use such superlative language is when I'm in love.

I mean, I'm still in love, but it's a long time ago now since I've written love letters. But if you got a listener to pull out some of those love letters, you'll be able to see the kind of language I mean.

It's probably too mushy for general consumption anyway, so I'm glad she's not here. But of course, it's not just me. I mean, you guys, you're more proficient than I am.

If any of you have pursued a guy or girl or been pursued, then you may well hear similar language. You know, like things like, I don't know, people say, I've never found, I will never find anyone like you to complete me as a person.

Maybe from Mills and Boone's story romance. Or something like, No one else in the universe but you shares the exact same likes and dislikes as me. I mean, of course, all this is pure exaggeration, right?

[11 : 23] Because no one can possibly meet everyone in the universe to make such or prove such a claim. But we know why people do such things, right? It's not meant to be literal, but to convey the strength of our feelings.

Now, this is different with God, of course, because with God, the language can be taken literally. Not only is it meant to convey the strength of our feelings, it actually speaks truth.

God's love is indeed higher than the heavens. He's literally that great. And His faithfulness does reach to the skies because it really is limitless. That is who God really is.

And because it's literally true, God can be trusted no matter how big or how challenging the opposition. I want you to notice then how He moves from this universal truth that God's love and faithfulness is immense or boundless to a personal application and prayer, right?

So if you read on, verse 6, He says, Save us and help us with your right hand that those you love may be delivered. And I think this is a helpful pattern for us too, where we move from a universal truth, who God is, what He's done, to a personal and subjective application, what it means for me.

[12 : 42] I think it's a good way to encourage ourselves whenever we're in difficulty or we're feeling down. As we saw last week, God says, because of who He is, not because of who we are. But our habit often is the other way around, isn't it?

We often look at our own subjective situation, like, my problems are so enormous, I feel so lonely and unloved. And then we extrapolate to a universal truth, therefore God doesn't love me or therefore God's not fair.

That's having things back to front, isn't it? It's not true. So the first universal truth, that God's love is boundless for His people, ought to encourage us in our personal application.

And it did encourage the psalmist. Now the psalmist moves on to the second truth, that not only is God's love boundless, that God's power is boundless too.

Therefore God is always in charge, not just over Israel, but over all the nations, because He's a universal ruler. So beginning in verse 7, the psalmist quotes some words from God.

[13 : 52] He says, God has spoken from His sanctuary. So it's a declaration. And the words from His sanctuary indicates two things, I think. One, it indicates the solemnness of this declaration.

But second, it's a reference to the temple in Jerusalem, where the people in times past would have heard God speak. And now this is the returnee's hope as well, that as they rebuild the temple, a symbol of God's dwelling with them and ruling over them, they might again hear God's word.

And so God's promise encouraged them that He was not just the ruler over Judah, but over all the nations as well.

And as He speaks, what God does is He takes us on a tour of Israel and of the neighboring lands. He says, in triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the valley of Sukkot.

Now these are acts like of a king dividing his kingdom, allocating or allotting the inheritance. Gilead is mine. Manasseh is mine. Ephraim is my helmet. It's mine again.

[14 : 59] Judah is my scepter from where I rule. Moab is my wash basin, you know. So imagine someone's room and this is what is going to throw his towel on it. So that's mine. On Edom, I toss my sandals.

So this is my shoebox. One of the things that one of my daughters hates is to have the other daughter's shoes lying in her area of the bed.

So it's the same thing. You put your shoe there that's taking ownership. And then over Philistia, I shout in triumph. Moab, Edom and Philistia, none of these are part of Israel proper. But God still has ownership over them.

Now I say rather these places may not mean much to you, but they're actually significant. And then have I got the map on the next slide to show you where they are? It may not be very clear. Yeah, so you see the names anyway.

But Shechem, the valley of Sukkoth, Manasseh, Gilead and Ephraim. These are places or territories that are in the northern kingdom. You can see sort of upper half. And many of you would know that Israel was actually divided as a kingdom after King Solomon into two kingdoms.

[16 : 04] Two tribes, Judah being one of them, remained with the Davidic king in the south. That is the son of David. But the other ten became part of the northern kingdom. So the city Shechem was once the capital city of the north.

And Ephraim was one of its larger tribes. So much so that if you read some of the prophecies, sometimes Hosea, I think is one of them. It's sometimes used to refer to the north as a whole.

Ephraim being the northern kingdom. The valley of Sukkoth is actually on the east side of the Jordan. So imagine the Jordan sort of somewhere down between the circles. The valley of Sukkoth is actually in the middle going horizontally.

And what it does is it divides the area of Manasseh from the area of Gilead. And that's on the east side is where the two and a half tribes of Israel were allotted their land, if you remember.

They were still part of the northern kingdom. Now the thing about this, I'm going to go into a bit of history, so bear with me. But what the Bible tells us is that when David initially became king, it was only over Judah, one tribe.

[17 : 06] All the other tribes still followed Saul's son. So in chapter 2 of 2 Samuel, verse 8 to 11, we read this. Meanwhile, Abner, son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, has taken Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, and brought him over to Manahem.

He made him king over Gilead, Esheri, Jezreel, and also Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel. Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, was 40 years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years.

The tribe of Judah, however, remained loyal to David. The length of time David was king in Hebron over Judah was seven years and six months. But then what happened eventually was that God gave victory to David over all Israel.

So when we move on to chapter 5 of 2 Samuel, verse 1, we read this. All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns.

And the Lord said to you, You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler. When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David over Israel, that is, all Israel.

[18 : 18] So David reigned in Judah for seven years, and then a further 30 over all Israel. But what also happened then is God gave him victory as well over the nations.

Some of them are mentioned in our Psalms. So flip a few more pages to 2 Samuel chapter 8 and verse 11, and we read this. And there's Zobah, the reference in Psalm 60.

This promise then had been fulfilled in David's time in Psalm 60. And God ruled over them, all the nations, through his anointed king David.

And the fact that he ruled over nations outside the promised land was a tangible symbol of God's rule over all the nations, not just Israel. So now as the people returned from exile, they would be, I think, reading this Psalm and being very conscious that actually Israel was no longer a kingdom.

They were ruled by the Persians still. And actually, in their region, the king of Persia had installed a governor over them. But as they read this Psalm, they would have taken encouragement from David's own experience that he too started just in Judah.

[19 : 56] But God eventually gave him the entire region to rule over. They took comfort from this Psalm that despite how things were looking for them, you know, the city was in ruin, God was still in charge.

That God was the real ruler in the land, not just in Jerusalem or Judah, but over all the nations. And as a consequence, they would have told themselves that whatever the opposition, whatever their enemies, it was not their fight to win.

Not their fight to win alone. That this was ultimately God's battle. It was his plan. It was his plan to bring them back, to rebuild his temple, to rebuild the city, to restore the kingdom.

It was not their battle to win. It was God's battle. To win. And friends, I think often we are sort of very much in the same situation. Whatever we are doing for the Lord in ministry, however we are serving him at our places of work or school, it is God's plan and God's purpose that we're called to serve.

It's his mission. It's not our mission. And so while the opposition we face may be overwhelming, we need to remember that God will bring his plans to fruition.

[21 : 21] And what we need to do is to continue to trust him, to be faithful, and not think that we are by ourselves going to conquer and overcome our difficulty. It's such an encouragement, isn't it?

To know that God is in charge. It is his plan. It is his mission, not ours. Now, of course, this assurance didn't release the people from having to face the opposition head on.

And so they look to one more universal truth, and that's our third and final one in verses 10 and 12. Now, imagine for a moment that you're one of these returnees, right?

You're coming back to Jerusalem, the city exposed, as I said, without fortifications to defend itself. And then imagine as you start rebuilding, that the surrounding nations, they come, and they try and dissuade you from your task.

And they do that in two ways. The first, the obvious way, is by threats. But then the second way is that they come with enticements. And so they would say things like this, you know, there's no need to build the wall, really.

[22 : 25] If you join forces with us, you know, it will go well with you. You don't need that protection. We'll protect you. Come with us. Don't do it. Don't. It's hard work. Don't rebuild it.

If you have us on your side, that's fine. You don't have to protect yourself. Now, I'm not making this up, because if you read Ezra and Nehemiah, that's exactly what happened. All sorts of schemes were devised to entice the Jews from obeying God.

And so, with that situation in mind, as you read the final verses, read it in that light. For the third truth they hung on to was that only God saves and that they shouldn't be relying on humans as saviors.

So, verse 10, they say, who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not you, God? You who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies.

Give us aid against the enemy, for human help is worthless. With God, we will gain the victory and he will trample down our enemies. Now, just a bit of context there.

[23 : 36] I think, particularly the words, is it not you, God, who has rejected us? That may seem a bit out of place. But the last time God's people actually trusted in humans, what they did was form an alliance with Egypt.

They disobeyed God. God told them not to do it. And where it landed them was in exile, incurring God's judgment. And so I think those words are recalling those exact events when they knew God rejected them, no longer went out with their armies because they set up human alliances.

And so fast forward to the return to the exile, and I think the people were now faced with the same choices and they were asking themselves the same question. Will they give in to these enticements?

Who can they trust to bring them to safety, to this fortified city that they're building? Who will lead them out in victory? Just as when God led David to Edom.

That's the reference there to leading to Edom. And the answer would have been only God. That's what the last verse says. Only with God will they gain the victory. For God is the one who will trample the enemies.

[24 : 48] Human help, they conclude, is worthless. Now, I want to make just two qualifications with these last verses. First, as we read these verses, I don't think it means that we cannot trust humans at all.

That we should not accept human help. I don't think that's what the psalm is teaching. Rather, what it teaches is that no human is to take the place of God as Savior. So, if you think about it, people we rely on, our best friends, our family, our husbands, our wives, the most reliable people in our lives, even these will fail us.

Why? Because they're human. There is no guarantee, too, that they will be with us forever. That's just reality. And to the extent that they, as humans, are a help, then it's only because God has provided them to us.

And so it is God that we should thank. But they can never take God's place. Only God can promise and deliver what He's promised.

Only He is in charge over all the world. And only He has the character, the has it, to save us completely and fully. And He's done just that, hasn't He?

[26 : 10] And He's shown that by giving His Son, Jesus, to us. The one He loves, and yet He gives to save us from sin and death. And so very often, as we go out again to the world, to work or school, there will be many false messiahs, wouldn't there?

People who offer protection. Maybe they have riches, that they can pass on to you, or connections, or power. And it is tempting to want to look to these human substitutes for our salvation.

But the psalmist is saying, don't be tempted by them because human help is worthless. Now, as for the second qualification, I guess I want to make a note of caution that we shouldn't apply these verses recklessly.

I know, probably not in this audience, but sometimes people read these verses and then want to just name and claim it. They think that anyone who opposes them is their enemy, and therefore they will pray that God will trample them.

But I want us to realize that the enemies in this psalm are not just simply those people who oppose us, but they are people who oppose God's plan. And in fact, in light of our New Testament reading tonight, Ephesians chapter 6, our struggle is no longer against flesh and blood.

[27 : 34] So our real enemies are not the humans that may be opposing us, our nasty boss, or that atheist who keeps ridiculing us, or the bully at school. No. Our real enemy is the evil one, the one who opposes God's plan, and who opposes God's Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so to the extent that humans do oppose God's plan, I think they are unwitting pawns of the evil one. They are culpable, yes, because Satan is using their selfish desires, but they are unwitting in fulfilling their rebellion against God.

And so if anything, rather than the desire for God to trample on them, we should be seeking for God to rescue them from Satan's clutches, to have them follow Jesus, who by his death trampled on the real foe, the evil one.

We don't have time to look into it, but if you look at Romans chapter 16 at the end, verses 18 to 20, you'll see exactly Paul talking about that. Human enemies, and yet the real enemy being trampled on by God is Satan.

All right, so with those two caveats, let me just conclude. Three truths from this psalm to encourage us. First, that God's love is boundless, and so motivates him to rescue us, his people.

[28 : 50] Second, the fact that God's in charge, not only is he motivated to save us, he has the power to do so. And then thirdly, and finally, because of his love and his power, it is only he, through his son Jesus, that is able to save us.

There is no other savior in the world. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.