

Great is our Lord!

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Date: 01 March 2020

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 0 0] to the first reading we had in Psalm 147, a psalm that you find in your church Bibles on page 525, the psalm that begins in the Hebrew, Hallelujah.

You all know the word in our English versions, Praise the Lord. And those of you who were here last Lord's Day morning, remember we were focusing on the whole matter of encouragement, the encouragement that the Lord's people derive from the Lord in waiting upon Him and renewing our strength in Him, that encouragement that we derive from the word of the Lord, the promises of God, that encouragement to be courageous, to be strong and courageous in the battle and the fight that the Lord's people are given, that spiritual warfare, that fight against sin and self, that work that God gives His people to do, that you need encouragement in the Lord to accomplish.

And if you remember last Lord's Day morning, we were looking at one particular episode in the history of the people of Judah. The king of Assyria, Sinachrib, and his vast army were besieging Jerusalem.

The people of Jerusalem were behind the city walls. They were in fear of that king. The king had already captured so many cities in Judah. And King Hezekiah, the king of Judah, the man of faith, a king of faith, called on the people to be strong and courageous because in contrast to the arm of flesh, the weakness of the king of Assyria, that on the side of God's people was God, but God Himself, God, the God of power, the God of might.

And as we learn from that episode, the people, when they heard these words, they took confidence. They were confident in God.

[2 : 0 9] They knew that they had the support of God to achieve the victory. And as you read in that episode, God did prevail over that arm of flesh, over that king of Assyria and his army.

And that, if you like, that movement from fear, the fear of the people to faith in Almighty God, that was seen, that was expressed in that story. And that's really what we want to continue to consider again this morning, again to reflect on the encouragement that God gives to His people from His Word.

And we're going to return back to the Old Testament and particularly this first section in Psalm 147 that I pray will give you that encouragement as you are nourished by God's Word, as you dwell in what God gives through His Word.

That these will be means. You'll see they are means to encourage, to give you strength, to give you courage, to enable you to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

And, well, we're just going to look at the first six verses of this psalm. You'll see the headings that we've selected. Verse 1 in itself, as we said, the opening was just one word in the original language, Hallelujah.

[3 : 3 3] So we want to look at what we might call the Hallelujah Chorus, because, as you notice, praise the Lord is mentioned at the beginning. It's also mentioned at the end of the psalm.

So we want to see what we're to understand in these words. And then certainly verse 2 and 5, where we see the greatness of God, the high and mighty God expressed here and what God gives to His people to encourage you in faith.

And then the last little section, verse 6, where we read of the humble, or maybe even the meek. We were singing there in Psalm 103 of the meek, God raising the meek.

Well, the Lord lifts up the humble, He lifts up the meek, but casts the wicked to the ground. And, you know, as we see these words, as we're strengthened by these words of power, as we pray that God's Spirit will so use these words to strengthen your heart, then to have that desire to live a life of thankfulness to God, thanking Him for all that He is, for all that He's done, for all that He continues to do for His people.

But remember this also, and so often we forget this. The book of Psalms, as someone once said, the book of Psalms is the prayer book of Christ. Jesus prayed this psalm.

[5 : 03] Jesus sang this psalm. In fact, as we'll see, Jesus is seen within this psalm. And so we join with our Saviour in singing this psalm. We join with the Lord's people through the centuries, through the ages, and in singing praise to God, even as God has given us cause to praise Him.

Well, let's consider that praise then, as we see in verse 1. Praise the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God, for it's pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.

And as I mentioned a little while ago, the last five psalms, the last five psalms, 1 for 6, 1 for 7, 1 for 8, 1 for 9, 150, they all begin with the word Hallelujah.

They all begin with praise the Lord, and they all end with praise the Lord. There's this comprehensive expression of that praise that God's people are to give to God.

And that Hallelujah, it's that let us praise God. So there's that call one to another, praise Him. In fact, it's a command, praise the Lord.

[6 : 15] And the fact that the words begin with praise the Lord, end with praise the Lord, surely teaches us that the whole of life is to be a life that's lived to the praise of God.

Just as from the beginning to end of each of these psalms, praise the Lord, so surely in the life of a Christian, the life of a believer, from beginning to end, surely for us to praise the Lord.

It's a command. But it's not a forced command. It is a command. But we're given here reasons to praise God.

If you like, there are general reasons, certainly here in verse 1. And there are particular reasons, certainly from verse 2 down to verse 6.

And we want to look at the general reasons, first of all, why it is the case that we are to praise the Lord. And three things, three general reasons are given here in verse 1, why we are to praise the Lord.

[7 : 18] See them? For it's good, for it's pleasant, because it's fitting. And let's look at each of these three reasons. First of all, it's good.

It's good to praise the Lord. Why is it good to praise the Lord? Well, it's good to praise God because God is good. It's good to sing praises to God because God alone is worthy of all praise.

Because He is good. And you know, when you think of God, when you think, as you should, as I should, when you think of God as you ought, then, you know, when we're commanded to praise Him for who He is, then remember He is good.

In other words, there's nothing false in God. There's nothing unreliable. There's nothing deceitful. You know, think of the children there, but God who keeps His promises.

He makes the promises. He keeps His promises. He's a God who is faithful and just. He's good. There's nothing malicious in God. God is God.

[8 : 24] And all that God does is good. You know, from the very first act of creation. Remember, even the very first act of creation when God created light, what did He say? He saw that the light was good.

And think of all the actions that God does towards His people. even the very promise of a Savior, even the very provision of the Lord Jesus.

And all that God has done for His people, all that He continues to do, all that God does for you, for me, all that He does is good. And therefore, He is worthy of our hallelujahs.

He's worthy of your praise to Him. And so it is a good thing when you praise the Lord. It's good when we join our voices together, when we praise His name.

And so God the Lord is calling you and calling you to call on one another to praise Him, to join your voices together as that expression of harmony and unity in approaching God.

[9 : 28] And yes, it's good to praise Him. It's a good act. Yes, we're sinful people. But it's a good act from sinful people that we rejoice in all that God is and His grace and His love and His mercy.

And we want to express our thanks to God. He's the God of all grace. And that's good to do. Good, with good motives, with good purpose, from a people who are blessed and God the God who is good.

So it's good to praise Him. But then secondly, we're told here, for it is pleasant because it's pleasant. I mean, generally speaking, you know, not always of course, but generally speaking, you know, think of songs, think of all the very genre of song.

You know, certainly songs, not always, but when songs are sung in harmony, it's a pleasant sound. You know, it's pleasant to the ear. You know, when we sing in three or four part harmony, it's very pleasant.

It's lovely. It raises the spirits. Then if you've been to a Welsh rugby match and you've heard the Welsh national anthem, it really does create really quite an amazing, amazing feeling.

[10 : 42] You know, there's this rousing singing of the anthem. It's sung with passion and unity and it honours these 15 heroes in the pitch and it really does stir, even if you're not supporting that team, it really does, you know, it's a very pleasant sound.

Well, what about the praise that we offer to the Lord? Is it pleasant? Is it a pleasant thing when we join our hearts and voices together when you honour Him as you ought with that harmony and that rejoicing before God?

Is there that true desire to, with that passion of heart, to express your praise to God even as we sing before Him? Or are we just going through the motions?

I forbid that it's any time that we sing praise to God that it's simply going through the motions because that's anything but pleasant. That is so unpleasant.

Where there's that praise that's by word only without the involvement of the heart towards God, without that true passion to express praise to God, without that zeal to praise Him, then, what's to say, we're just going through the motions which is utterly dishonouring to God.

[12 : 03] But it is good to praise Him. It's good. It's pleasant when we do offer up our praises to God. And the third general reason for praising God, it's fitting.

It's fitting. It's appropriate. Yes, and even, even in the darkness of times, the times when we don't always understand God's ways with us, when God's hand is heavy on you, it's still fitting, still fitting to praise the Lord.

Just a few days ago at the funeral service of David Ford, David's widow's heart was breaking, the children, the grandchildren, the relatives there, the congregation, we were in grief.

We were in mourning. But we could still sing. This was the first singing item. We could still sing the words that we sang even this morning from Psalm 103.

We're reminded of them. Praise God, my soul, with all my heart. These were the first words that were sung at that funeral. This praise my soul in song proclaimed. And these weren't empty words.

[13 : 18] They weren't, you know, just somehow plucked out of a hat on a particular occasion. They were chosen. They were chosen. They were deliberately chosen to thank God.

To thank the God who gave and, yes, the God who took away. The God who blessed, yes, blessed his church with his servant. And the God who took away his servant to be in the glory of heaven.

It was fitting at that funeral service to praise the Lord for the life of a humble servant who served the Lord and who heard the moment when he passed into glory.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joy of the Lord. That was heard even last week. So if we do, it is fitting in all occasions surely to praise the Lord.

But not just for these general reasons that we see here in verse 1, but there are particular reasons that the psalm writer outlines in verse, certainly verse 2 and 5.

[14 : 25] We're going to look at them in sort of, well, there are six reasons, six particular reasons verses 2 to 5. We'll look at them two at a time. But let's read them again. The Lord builds up Jerusalem.

He gathers the outcasts of Israel. Well, there's the first set of reasons. The second set, He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. There's the second set of reasons.

And in the third set, He determines the number of the stars. He gives to them all their names. The third set of reasons and then the rejoicing great is our Lord, abundant in power, His understanding beyond measure.

Well, we're going to look at them, as I say, in three parts. And so let's look at the first part together. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

And, you know, as we're reading these words, as we sing these words, remember, as the Lord's worshipping people, we worship the Father through the Son, through the Lord Jesus.

[15 : 25] And as we'll see these words, the Lord Jesus is present, even, yes, in these words. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

Well, you've got to think of the immediate context when these words were written. And certainly, in all likelihood, looking at the words, the psalm was written to give praise to God after the Jewish exiles returned home to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon.

And when you read the Old Testament books, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, you know it was a three-phased return. And you certainly know the last phase of return under Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were being built, and they were built despite the opposition of the enemies of God's people.

And, you know, in the wording of this psalm, the wording literally is the Lord is building. We've got here the Lord builds, but the actual original language tells us the Lord is building up Jerusalem.

In other words, you know, to emphasize the ongoing work of the building of the city, the building up of the walls. And as we know from Scripture, God was protecting his people, protecting his people within the walls.

[16 : 46] God provided for them. God prevented his enemies from achieving the victory over the people there in Jerusalem. God had blessed his people in returning back to Jerusalem.

They'd been outcasts in Babylon, and then they were back home in the city of God. And, you know, for that, for these particular reasons, the psalm of praise was written, written so that the Lord's people could express their thanksgiving to God for his rescuing them and for his delivering them from exile.

And we can certainly appropriate all these reasons for ourselves, even today, you, me. You know, we can sing this praise, this psalm of praise to God, to him who, yes, who's in this continual act, this process of building, who's building his church, who's bringing, who's bringing, who's brought and is bringing his people home from the exile of sin.

Remember what Jesus promised? Matthew chapter 16 verse 18, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. We can use this psalm to praise, praise our saviour, you know, for that, we might say, that construction work, that work that keeps on adding, even adding to his church, the work, the ongoing work that strengthens his church, that protects his people, that delivers his people from the evil one, that work of building the church that provides for you and your spiritual nourishment so that you're built up in your faith and you're strengthened to serve him so that you're enabled to point others to the saviour in his perfect provision of salvation.

And, you know, that building, that ongoing work of the building of the church, well, remember, that work is ongoing and you who know him are part of that building process.

[18 : 57] You are being strengthened to serve God in that work of building. You who've been called from exile, from the exile of sin. One time you were apart from him, but now you're in Christ by faith.

At one time you were an outcast, you were an outcast of grace, but now you're within, as it were, the walls of his safety. You have that eternal protection and you're looking forward to your heavenly home where you'll be with him in eternity.

And remember when that time comes, when Jesus returns, when the Lord's people rise to be with him, when the Lord's people will be gathered, not into the Jerusalem made of physical walls, but the new Jerusalem and to reign forever with Jesus.

So we pray the Lord for that promise that will be fulfilled in God's perfect time. But then there are two other particular causes we can cause us for praise to the Lord.

We can see there in verses 3 and 4. He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds. You know, one of the great themes of Scripture is the Lord who heals, the Lord who restores to health, the Lord who gives you that spiritual nourishment, that spiritual health, the Lord, the Lord who heals the hearts of a people.

[20 : 29] Yes, even the Lord who heals the hearts of a nation. The Lord who heals, the Lord who enables by His power, by His grace, who enables you to be freed from the overpowering, the overpowering sickness of sin.

And His healing is all that you need, all that you need in that process of healing. And yet even the healing of pain, the pain of unconfessed sin.

You know, when David, the Psalm writer, when he wrote Psalm 32, he wrote that after he'd confessed his sins to God, he knew healing. He knew healing, yes, healing in body and soul, because God had given him that recovery, that spiritual recovery, after he'd confessed his sins.

And you know that truth, I know that truth. you who follow the Lord Jesus, well, you're following the Savior who echoed the words that tell of the Lord who heals.

He echoed the words of Isaiah 61 verse 1, the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.

[21 : 45] And you see the echo of these words there in Psalm 147, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. And you all, each and every one of us here, we all have many wounds in our hearts.

Some of you have the wounds of grief. Some of you have the wounds of unfulfilled hope. Some of you have the wounds of disappointment. We all have the wounds of sin.

These wounds, wounds that cause pain, maybe wounds that others have afflicted us with, maybe wounds that you've caused, I've caused by my own doing.

Where do you turn to for the healing of these wounds? Surely you turn to the great physician. Surely you return to the Lord who heals the Lord.

We might put it like this, I hope it's not a false analogy, but the Lord who causes the bandages of his grace to cover your wounds, to bring healing to your troubled heart.

[22 : 50] And you know, when you read the many miracles of Jesus, the healing miracles, Jesus came and he healed others. What do these miracles point to?

Surely they pointed to the Lord who brings that healing to the spiritually sick. The Lord who brings that greater healing, healing that reveals the compassion of our Saviour, the compassion of Jesus to bind up the brokenhearted, to make you well, to make you fully well, to restore you to that spiritual health that truly serves God and acknowledges that God is the one who's healed you.

And certainly any of you who've gone through any kind of physical illness, you know, you know what happens when you know the joy of healing. And that healing, you know, it doesn't happen immediately, it happens over a period of time.

And you know that it happens through the skill and the compassion of those who have cared for you. And you give thanks to them. Well, think of God and his skill and his compassion and his care of you.

Well, you know, give him thanks, praise him. He's shown the compassion of God to heal your wounds. However many wounds you've had, whatever these wounds have been, he's the God who promises to heal you.

[24 : 23] And the sorrowing widow will know that healing. And the healing that will be the hope of salvation that gives comfort to all who know that a loved one is in glory.

And God will bring healing to the believer maybe who's been disappointed or hasn't received from God what he expected from God, but he knows the healing of the word of God that tells him that God, that all things work together for good for those who are called by God.

And yes, the sinner who's indwelling sins have caused so much pain, so much pain in his heart because he's not confessed these sins.

He'll know healing, she'll know healing when these sins have been confessed. And so we do sing our hallelujahs to the Lord for his wonderful grace, his love and that healing that renews and revives and restores the weary believer.

And that healing may well take time in the fullness of the recovery process as it were. But remember that healing comes from a loving God, God whose timing is perfect in that work of healing.

[25 : 42] His love is sure, his love is steadfast towards all who are his, so he praised the Lord, the God who heals. angels.

But then the third batch of causes for praising God, he determined the number of the stars he gives to all of them, their names.

None of us know how many stars there are in the galaxies of the universe. Just reading the other day, one estimation that astronomers can say that there are in the observable universe, 70 billion trillion stars.

I mean, that's just beyond our comprehension. That's just the number that can be seen. It's beyond our counting, it's beyond our understanding, but God knows the one who created the stars, the one that we read in Genesis 1, said it was good.

And you know, when you grasp the fact that even in the physical creation of God, God has created every star, that he names every star, tells us of his infinite power, it tells us of his greatness, and that alone is worthy of praise to God.

[26 : 59] But of course, apply that truth to yourselves. Because the God who counts the stars, the God who names every single one of them, these billion, trillion, however other trillion stars there are, God the Lord cares for you, individual you.

You know, God's power is infinite, his wisdom is infinite, that power and wisdom that created the stars, well, he's the God whose power and infinite love is directed towards you.

I mean, you know, every time you've just stood under the night sky, and you've looked up to the stars, you know, you've done this on a clear night, don't the words of Sam 8 come to your mind? When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you've set in place, what is man that you're mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

So, when you do, there are times, when you do doubt God's love for you, when you doubt his full provision for all your needs, well, come to the psalm, read verses 4 and 5, and be done with that sinful doubt and that doubting the love of a loving God and Saviour, and trust him for all things.

He's not going to forget you, the God who created the stars. You're far more precious to him than even the vast array of the universe in which the stars are created.

[28 : 29] It's that precious love of God that Jesus spoke of that we were reading in Matthew 10. You are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father, but even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Fear not, you're of more value than many sparrows. And surely that has to be at the core of our encouragement from God.

You know, when we do at times, you know, even have that hint of questioning his care for you, but if you're his, if you trust in him, then you're numbered, you're numbered amongst his precious church.

And it's that church that's going to be gathered together from every tribe and nation and language and people. It's a number so great that you read in Revelation 7, it's a great multitude that no one can number, no one, but God can and God does.

Every one of his people, of his children, are numbered and are precious in his sight. That's God enough to praise him. He truly is the high and mighty Lord God who's great, whose power is abundant and he's not going to forget one of his precious flock.

[29 : 48] So you've got absolute confidence. You know, there's this argument that goes around that, you know, in such a vast universe that, you know, you or I are just inconsequential to God, you know, too little for God.

Absolutely not. He knows you. He loves you. He loved you so much that he sent his son to die for you. So truly we praise the Lord who is great, who's worthy of all praise.

But one more point before we finish in verse 6 where we read of the humble raised and the wicked cast down. The Lord lifts up the humble and cast the wicked to the ground.

And what are we seeing here? It's the reverse of all that the world values in terms of status and human power. We live in a world that sort of venerates almost, certainly honours the politically powerful, the financially powerful, the so-called social influencers, the celebrities with their millions of followers.

But it's not the humble, it's not the meek that are given the accolade. But praise be to God that God blesses the humble, you who know that you can't save yourselves, you who have no pride in self, you who have no self-centered seeking of self-glory, but you who truly wait on the Lord.

[31 : 20] It's that attitude of heart that remember Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus had when she heard the news that she was going to bear the Son of God. She sang words of praise.

My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he's looked on the humble state of his servant. He's looked on the humble state of his servant.

And that attitude of heart that Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount, remember when he said blessed are the meek, blessed are the humble, for they shall inherit the earth.

And you who do wait humbly on the Lord, you're not seeking any glory for yourself. You're serving him and you know that he has raised you up.

Not in the status that the world gives in that sense of raising, but you know you've been made into and brought into that kingdom of God. You've been made into that royal priesthood and you serve him and you glorify him.

[32 : 23] And that's cause to praise the Lord. But that's not the only thing we see there in verse 6, because this is a psalm of praise and we see the last line of verse 6, he casts the wicked to the ground.

He casts the wicked to the ground. Now, there's no sense of any kind of self-righteous attitude against those who refuse to bow the knee to the Lord.

But what there is, surely there's a rejoicing that God's holiness, his justice is upheld. that all who will not bow the knee to King Jesus, we're told here, will be cast to the ground.

And what does this speak of? It speaks of God's righteous punishment, God's righteous justice. And so, we do praise the Lord. It is good to sing praises to the Lord.

But do you? But do you? You see, if you don't yet know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, well, you're still praising, but you're praising something or something else.

[33 : 28] But that something or someone else, that can't heal the brokenhearted, your broken heart. That can't bind up your wounds. That thing or that person you're praising, she doesn't have the greatness to count the number of the stars and to name each and every one of them.

A person, that thing can't give what the Lord Jesus promises and gives. Salvation in Him through faith, through faith in the Lord Jesus.

So the call is given to come to Him, to surrender your life to Him. And so that you might join with the Lord's people over the ages of time, over the whole world, that you might join with God's people to praise Him.

And yes, to offer your hallelujahs to God, the Lord, who's worthy of all praise. Amen. Let us pray.

Lord, we give you thanks, even for that call that you give to your people to praise you. May that praise be in our hearts. May it be expressed through our lives.

[34 : 39] May our lives truly be a life of thanks given to you, that we truly will praise you in all things. So Lord, bless your people, we pray.

Bless even those this morning who as yet cannot and will not praise you. Lord, draw them to yourself by your Spirit, that they will join hearts and minds and lives one with another to praise your name.

So Lord, continue to bless us, we pray, even as we sing from that psalm. Go before us, Lord, in all things we ask. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, let's sing now from the psalm we were, part of the psalm we were considering, Psalm 147. We find that in page 192 and we'll sing these verses, verse 1 to verse 6 and the tune is credited.

Oh, praise the Lord, how good it is to sing him songs of praise, how pleasant to give thanks to him for all his gracious ways. 1 to 6, Psalm 147 to God's praise.

[35 : 48] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

And now may grace, mercy and peace from God.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with you both now and forevermore.
Amen.