

Psalm 138

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the first reading we had, Psalm 138. I'm not going to read the whole psalm, but I want us just this morning to look at the psalm in its entirety, just again by way of overview. This is Psalm 138, and this is the last part of the Davidic Psalms in the Psalter that have been compiled. I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart.

Before the gods I sing your praise. I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name. Then down to verse 8. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

As we said, this is the last group of the Davidic Psalms in the Psalter. And like so many of David's Psalms, there is a note of triumph in it, triumph to the Lord and about the Lord and in the Lord. In the previous Psalm, it's not a Davidic Psalm, the question is asked, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land or in a strange land? It's a psalm of great sorrow. It's a psalm of pain. And it's a psalm, when we read it, some of what is said in it, it's very difficult for us to even to get our head round. But the question is asked, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? And the answer to that is very simply by grace. And in many ways, that is how we are or where we are today. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Because as we know, this world is not our home. We're just passing through. If this is all that we had, if this world was all that we had, and there was nothing else other than this, it'd be very difficult for us to sing the song. But we know this is not all that is. We know we're just traveling through.

And in Jesus Christ, we're traveling to a better place. And that's why we're able to sing a song, even in a strange land. Even when we go through difficult times and sad times and sore times, we know, as it says in Scripture, that there are better things. And the Word of God holds out before us so many of these better things. And that's why the Christian is able to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. However, in this psalm, there's no doubt, whatever, that David has his troubles and he has his problems and sorrows because he tells us in verse 7, though I walk in the midst of trouble. That's a hard place to be. If you're walking in the middle of trouble, it means that trouble is everywhere all around you. It's in front of you. It's behind you. It's on either side of you. It's not that there's a kind of trouble ahead of you, or that there's trouble looming or threatening. It means you're bang in the middle of trouble.

And yet, even although David is so conscious of his own difficulties and his own uncertainties, and he's so aware that he is in, sometimes in between a rock and a hard place, yet it tells us here, I give you thanks, O Lord, and typical David, with my whole heart. I think we've often said it.

[3 : 43] There's one thing that we can say about David. He was never half-hearted. He was a very passionate man. That passion became very obvious. When you study the life of David, if you were to sum up his life, it would be a passionate life in every way. Everything he did from a young, from the first time that he, as it were, comes onto the pages of Scripture right through, there's a vibrancy, there's a passion that just seems to ripple through his whole being. The Bible often talks about different things about the heart. It can talk about a proud heart. It talks about a haughty heart.

It talks about a hard heart. It talks about a tender heart. And here we see that it's talking about the whole heart. That simply means the whole of your being, from the very depth of your being.

And so this is the kind of passion that David was. David says, Before God, before the gods, I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart. Before the gods, I sing your praise. Now, different people have interpreted that in different ways. Some people say that that's simply what it says, before the gods, that that actually is before the angels.

Well, I don't think that's what it means. Other people say that the word gods there is in place of kings and judges. Well, I don't think that's what it says. I think very simply, and I think most people would agree that when it says gods, that's exactly what it means. It's gods with a small g before the

idols. So people may say, well, where was David when he was going to sing the praise to God? Before other gods. Because in the time of David, there wasn't any national worship of foreign gods. But we've got to remember that when David, and I think that probably this psalm comes from this time, that when David was being chased by Saul, and Saul was trying to kill David, and remember, Saul was chasing David with thousands of soldiers, with his kind of his elite troops.

[6 : 06] After one man, they were chasing him right throughout the land of Israel. And there came a place and a point in David's life, although he spent a lot of time hiding in the rocks of En Gedi and hiding for his life, there came a point where it became so impossible impossible for David to live in Israel. There was nowhere that he could go, that he actually went down into the land of the Philistines. And of course, we know the Philistines were the sworn enemy of Israel, and David himself had been involved with battles with the Philistines. But it came to the point where Saul and his troops had pushed David out of his own land. And there was an occasion when, remember, when Saul was chasing David, and David saw where Saul was lying. He had come back, and he saw where Saul was lying. And he crept down during the night, and he went right up to where Saul was, and he took away Saul's spear. And in the morning, David, from a distance, from a vantage point, called to Saul. And he challenged Saul, and he said, look, I could have killed you through the night.

I was right down at you. I have your spear here. I am not trying to take you or your kingdom. And of course, it was one of these moments, Saul, of course, there's no question whatever, he was one of these with a split personality. He was somebody who was so mixed up that sometimes he would feel so bad about what he was doing to David, the next moment he was desperate to kill him. But one of the things that David said at that moment, and he said about Saul and the soldiers, for you had driven me out this day, that I should have no share, he said, in the heritage of the Lord, saying, go serve other gods. That's what they had done. Because they had so hounded David, they had so chased him, that he could no longer have any heritage in the land that the Lord said, this is my land, this is my place. And he had to go down into the enemy land where they served other gods, so that although they weren't actually saying it with their mouth, that was the result of it. That they were really saying to David, you go and serve other gods. But of course, David wasn't going to serve other gods. And that's where he was going to praise the Lord, even in foreign land, even in the presence of other gods.

David was always going to lift aloft the living and the true God. So basically, that's what we have here. And so David was the kind of person who was always consistent, didn't matter where he was.

[8 : 54] He was going to live his life worshiping the living and true God. You know, it can be very easy sometimes to stand up for the Lord when everybody around you is either a Christian or is sympathetic to the Christian faith.

Very easy to nail your colors to the mast at that point and to say, oh, I am a Christian. It's altogether another thing when you are faced with people who have no love and no thought and no desire. In fact, it goes beyond that, who are actually opposed, bitterly opposed to the Christian faith. It's tough to be consistent as a Christian, to live as a Christian, and to confess that you are a Christian. To confess that you worship and you love the living and true God. But that's what David did. Didn't matter where he was. Didn't matter what his company was.

Everybody knew where David stood and that his heart and his soul was in the worship of the living and the true God. So David says, before the gods I sing your praise. I bow down towards your holy temple.

[10 : 08] Now, this is something that the Jews always did when they were, take for instance Daniel. Remember when Daniel was, who was in captivity in Babylon, that he always faced Jerusalem when he prayed.

It was, we know of course that Daniel did that even under the very threat of death. Daniel says, he went into his house and his windows being opened in his room, toured Jerusalem, kneeled and prayed and gave thanks before God.

He just did what he always did. And this is what the Jew always did, turned towards Jerusalem when they were away from it. Towards the tabernacle, towards the temple.

And even, even if they couldn't physically do it, they did it still with their heart. That's really what it's saying with their heart and their mind. A typical example of that is Jonah. Jonah, when he was in the belly of the fish, underwater, he tells us that he turned towards the temple.

Now, physically he couldn't. He had no idea when he was down in the ocean which direction Jerusalem was. But basically, remember what Jonah says. He said, I am cast out of your sight, yet I will look again toward your holy temple.

[11 : 32] Why? Because when he was looking there, he was looking towards the mercy seat. This was what was in their heart. Where God's presence was.

Where God's forgiveness was shown. And that's where you and I are to look today. To the one who is mercy. To our great high priest.

Who is our altar. Who is our sacrifice. Who is the mercy seat. Jesus Christ. Wherever we are. It doesn't matter where we are in the world. Day or night. It doesn't matter what hour.

It doesn't matter what condition we're in. It doesn't matter what situation we are in. He is the one we turn to. It doesn't mean we turn physically.

We turn in our heart. Turn in our soul. Turn with our brokenness. Again, when I mentioned the different kind of hearts. That's one of them.

[12 : 27] The broken heart. And we turn to the Lord. And that's really what we find David is saying here. That's basically what he's saying. I bow down toward your holy temple.

And give thanks to your name. For your steadfast love. And faithfulness. And so we see that he's praising God.

Praising God. You see, that's one of the things that we're told to do all the time. To praise the Lord. To praise and give thanks to God. It's not something that's optional for the Christian.

It tells us in the scripture, let us offer the sacrifice of praise. How often? Continually. In other words, it should be an ever-present part of our life.

And why is praise so important? Because praise glorifies God. We've said it often enough before. But the psalm tells us, Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.

[13 : 38] What's our chief purpose in this life? Man's chief end is to glorify God. So if we are people of praise.

Praising and thanking God. Praising him for who he is. Then we are glorifying God. And we are fulfilling the duty for which we were put upon this world.

And that is why praise is so important. I remember reading, and I think I've said this on various occasions, reading a title of a chapter in a book. Praise changes things.

And I believe that that is true. It's one of the old, I think it was John Livingstone. I'm not sure it's one of the men long ago. Who said that an hour of praise can sometimes be of more value than a day of fasting and prayer.

Where we are lost in the praise of God. For his greatness and his glory. For his majesty. For his sovereignty. For his salvation.

[14 : 45] For his power. For his love. For his mercy. There is no end of reasons for us to praise God. That's one of the reasons why David was termed a man after God's own heart.

Because when you go through his life, it's a life of praise. Yeah, David had hard things. When you look at David's history. And you look at David's family history.

And he had so many sorrows and pains. And yet, right throughout his life, there is this great sense of praise. And David is thanking the Lord.

Give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness. This is his covenant love. This is his love that will not let go.

That's wonderful, that. A love that will not let go. That's what David based his prayer on in Psalm 51. After he had sinned. And where he had gone in with Bathsheba.

[15 : 47] And where he had killed Bathsheba's husband to cover his own sin. Well, that dark period in David's life. And then David is so convicted. And the arrow of conviction went right into his heart.

It must have been an awful moment. This realization of just what he did. Of how he kind of messed up and destroyed a family.

And of what he had done. But he was seeing it even beyond that. And he was seeing what he had done before the Lord. And he bases his return to the Lord. Not upon anything that he could do.

Or anything that he had ever done. David didn't come to the Lord and say, Oh, do you remember these beautiful psalms I wrote? Remember when I wrote Psalm 23? I know, Lord, you helped me to write it.

But wasn't it a great psalm? Won't you forgive me because I wrote that? Lord, won't you forgive me because I didn't lift up my hand against Saul? Saul was your anointed.

[16:49] I could have killed him on occasions. But I didn't. Didn't I do well, Lord? No. David never thought like that. There was nothing he could bring. But all he could do was to cling to God's covenant love.

A love that would not let go. After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me. And that's the same for you and for me. That's where we are.

And that's what we cling to. A love that will never, ever, ever let go. Most wonderful, wonderful thing. And that's what God is.

He is utterly and altogether faithful to us. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful thought. And then David says, For you have exalted above all things your name and word.

See, God's name and his word, And they are, what you would say, inseparably tied. The glory of his name is tied into his word.

[17:55] The honor of his name is tied into his word. You see, it's a word that cannot change. It's a word that cannot be altered. So we're looking at his purposes and promises on Wednesday night.

And that's how he is. His purposes and his promises are yea and amen. The God whose glory is made great by his word.

And the God whose word is altogether glorious. And we've got to remember that the word, what the word tells us, the word of God, the word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.

And of course, God is known. God is known in his creation. God is known in his providence. But he is known most of all in his word. His creation is wonderful.

When we look around and we marvel and we think, you go to, we've said it often enough before, but you look up at a clear night and you look at all the stars and you, oh, it's wonderful.

[18:56] Some of them are just, you can barely make out and others are brighter. And when you think that he brought all these, and we're only seeing a fraction. And there are all these massive millions of years, all these, the dis millions and millions of miles away from us.

And the Lord, the Lord has made, made all this. And it tells us, he counts the number of the stars and he names them one by one. Every one has its place. And of course, his creation is glorious. So is his providence. But above all is his word. This is his special revelation. And that is why his word and his name are exalted above all. It's by his word he sustains and everything.

We'll have to move on. The time is going. Verse three, On that day I called, you answered me. My strength of soul you increased. Basically, very simply, what we'd say here is, God will not answer every prayer that we ask.

Ask. Some people say he will answer one way or another. He'll either say no or wait, or he will, or he'll give us what we ask for. There are things that sometimes we've prayed to the Lord for.

[20:13] I've done that, and I'm sure we all have. We've prayed to the Lord for things that we want, and we've never got them. Sometimes as time goes on, we're still sorry that we never got them.

And other times we're really glad, really, really glad that the Lord didn't answer exactly the prayer that we offered. The Lord knows best. But there are certain prayers he will always answer.

And whenever we go to the Lord for strength, or for help, or for grace, or for a sense of his love, whenever we go to the Lord for any of these spiritual blessings, he delights to answer them.

These are prayers that are in keeping with his word. And so when David goes and he asks that his soul would be strengthened, this is a prayer that the Lord will delight in answering.

And he did, and he will, and he'll do the very same for us as well. All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

[21:22] And I suppose in a sense here, very simply here is something of the universal, the day of the universal spread of the gospel. Because the kings here, because when you think about it, when the time that David wrote that, that was not the case.

But the day is coming when all the kings of the earth will give you thanks, O Lord. And then it says, And they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

They shall sing of the ways of the Lord. The ways of the Lord are the ways in which the Lord works, both by his providence and by his word.

We sang that in Psalm 25, about the ways, all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth. And all the ways of the Lord are good, even if at times we can't understand it, and even if at times we can't bear it.

And I believe both are true. There are sometimes the ways of the Lord are so mysterious that A, we can't understand it, and at a particular time we can't even bear it.

[22 : 37] It's too sore for us almost to bear. And yet, the thing is that everything, everything is under the control and the hand of God.

And how thankful we are that that is so. Think of the alternative. You might be here today saying, I have gone through so much pain. My life has taken turns that have brought so much pain into my life.

And you may be questioning God's dealings with you. But you think of the alternative, that everything is just chance and random.

I would hate to live in a world. Imagine if the Lord created this world and then just left everything to chance. It would be a fearful world to live in.

God exercises authority and control over everything. And even although we might not understand, you know it says in the word, as for God, perfect is His way.

[23 : 53] Because God has a picture. He sees the end. We don't. It's always the end God sees. And He's working towards a particular end.

We are caught up in the here and the now and the moment. And our life is made up of moments. We cannot see the end result. We cannot see the final picture.

God does. And that is why it says God's way is perfect. And that is where we have to rest our case and to understand that God is working things in a way that at the very end you will look and you'll be able to say, maybe not in this world, but in the world to come and you will say, oh my word, now I see where we are given to understand something of the mystery of providence, where it will be unraveled before us.

And we will say, now I see the way that God worked. As for God, perfect is His way. So the Word tells us.

And so we find that that David here, though, even although he's going through these difficult times, he is still able to sing to the Lord.

[25 : 11] Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. And so on. And then finally, as the time is going, it says in verse 8, the Lord will fulfill His purpose for me.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, endure forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands. And that's a tremendous comfort to us that the Lord is going to fulfill every purpose for us.

He's not going to abandon anything that He has started. He's never going to give up. But the Lord doesn't begin something. We're bad for that, beginning things and maybe not able to finish them. It's maybe become too complicated for us. Or maybe we take ill, or we change our mind. It's not working out the way we thought. And I'm sure our life is full of things that we started with good intentions and just never worked for us.

That has never, ever happened with the Lord. He doesn't say, oh, you know, I am dealing with this person. And then find that we're too problematic.

[26 : 18] The Lord doesn't come to us and say, and draw us to Himself. And then the Lord would say, after two or three years, this person is causing me too many problems.

I'm going to give up. I'm going to start with somebody else. The Lord doesn't operate like that. He doesn't think like that. There is no challenge within our life that is too great for Him.

He will never forsake the work of His hand. He will fulfill His purposes for us. The translation in the AV and the RV is one that I really love.

And it's kind of brought out in the Scottish Psalter. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. That's how it's put for this particular translation.

The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. And I'm sure that all of us here, first and foremost, we're thinking of great concernness or salvation.

[27 : 21] And we're thinking to ourselves, you know, there are times you look at yourself and you say, what if, what if, what if, what if I come short?

What if as I look at my life? The Lord will perfect. It's His business. He's not going to forsake the work of His own hands. He's not going to abandon and forsake and give up and walk away.

Or maybe it's concerning you and saying, well, I've gone so far as a Christian. I know that I should try and get to another level. I would love to be able to consecrate my life.

There are areas of my life I want to hold on to. And I'm somehow, I'm not ready to give all this to the Lord.

You're a Christian. You belong to the Lord. And yet, you're holding back. There are things in your life you're holding back. And you're saying, how do I get from here to there?

[28 : 24] Well, the Lord who has begun that work will complete it. And He will make it perfect. Perfection does not belong to this world.

It belongs to the world to come. And that is why, even at the moment of death, the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in an instant. Made perfect in holiness.

And do immediately pass into glory. And their bodies being still united to Christ to rest in the grave to the resurrection. When we think of this salvation, here we are in this particular point.

Here you are. But you're only at a tiny little point in the whole eternity of it. Because your salvation was purposed and planned from all eternity.

Involved in your salvation was Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, taking human nature, being born of the Virgin. Involved in your salvation was in walking through this world, fulfilling the law.

[29 : 31] Involved in your salvation was in going to Calvary and making sacrifice for sin. Involved in your salvation was in being placed in the tomb and rising again from the dead and ascending up into heaven.

Involved in your salvation will come the day of your death when your soul will pass into glory and your body will be put into the dust. But that's not the entirety of your salvation because your body will rise again to be re...

It'll be a beautiful body, renewed, but it will rejoin with your soul. And throughout an endless eternity in the new heavens and the new earth you will give praise to God forever and ever.

That's a salvation. That's the entirety of the salvation. We're here at this little point right here, right now. But when you think of the enormity of it, the fullness of it, and I believe that that is all caught up in these words, the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands. No, he won't. He never will. Are you today united to this Lord?

[30 : 54] Because if not, I cannot imagine a more empty place to be. You know, this is a cruel world. It's an empty world. You know, the world will promise you everything.

And do you know what it does? It gobbles you up and spits you back out. And it's happened to so many people. Because the world cannot satisfy your soul.

The world cannot give you anything for longer than you live in it. And however long it's not long, the Lord alone will give you.

He gives you not only something, he gives you himself. And then he'll take you home to be with himself. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks that we are before the living and through God.

The Lord who will fulfill all his purposes for us. The Lord who will perfect that which concerns us. And today there are many people with concerns in here.

[32 : 00] Concerns of heart and soul. Concerns of life. We ask, Lord, to help each one. And to give as each one needs.

We give thanks for the abundance of grace. For all your goodness to us. Bless us then, we pray. And part us with thy blessing. Do us good and forgive us our sin.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Our concluding psalm is this very...