

Psalm 138

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[0 : 00] We're looking at Psalm 138 and David is given credit for 73 of the 150 Psalms. And one thing that we learn about David through the Psalms is that he was a man of praise.

No matter how the Psalms start out, by the end he always reverts to the praise of God. In fact, the whole of the Psalter are ultimately praises to God and Psalm 38 may represent the absolute high point of David's praise.

And even as he shows us how to live in praise of God, Psalm 138 also shows us that David finds himself in trouble once again. I was thinking this last week that we should thank the Lord from time to time for the trouble that he ordained in David's life.

Because without it, we wouldn't have these such vivid, real examples of God's providential care if David had never had the issues that he did. Now Psalm 138 is in three parts.

And at the start, David is singing about his deliverance from trouble. In verses 1 and 3, he's expressing exuberant praise to God. And notice how this is praise in the first person.

[1 : 06] All the times he says, I, me, or my. In the second part, verses 4 to 6, David turns to the nations and says, The kings of the nations will praise God because there's no one like him.

In part 3, verses 7 and 8, David returns to the present. He returns to praise in the first person. And as we noted, David is in trouble again. And we see him calling on his experience.

And his experience tells him that he can count on God and his continuous care for him all the way to the end. And there in verse 8, David expresses confidence that the Lord will not forsake him.

That he is certain that the Lord will fulfill his promises to him because the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Now, many scholars believe that David wrote this psalm in response to the promise that he received from God in 2 Samuel 7.

I'm sure many of you know the story, but God comes to David at the end of his life and he says, David, you have been a supreme failure. And you would be absolutely right to think that nothing good was ever going to come out of your life.

[2 : 16] But, I am going to fulfill the promise that I made to Adam. And I'm going to do it by bringing the Messiah into the world through your line of ancestry. I'm going to bring nations throughout history to myself.

And I'm going to do it all through you. Now, this is the reference to Jesus, the Messiah, called the Son of David in Matthew 21. And David's response to God's promise, this news of the Messiah and his line, is here in Psalm 138.

In C.S. Lewis' book, Reflections on the Psalms, there is a chapter entitled A Word About Praising. And in this chapter, Lewis explains that as he began to draw near to salvation, even for a period of time afterwards, he found the Psalms to actually be a stumbling block for him.

He said he found in the Psalms that God appeared to be a narcissist. For the entire book, it was God who commanded people to worship him. It appears as if God was consumed by the idea of himself.

He writes, And we all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue. And we despise even more the crowd of people around every millionaire or celebrity who gratifies that demand.

[3 : 31] And Lewis thought that the Psalms, from one end to the other, were simply a picture of God demanding that people praise him. He says he even gave him the vocabulary to do it with.

But it wasn't until he began to understand praise from God's point of view that he was able to overcome these thoughts. It wasn't until he realized that true enjoyment spontaneously flows into praise.

The world, actually, he says, really actually is full of praise. It rings with praise. Walkers talking about their favorite countryside. Readers, their favorite poets. Sportsmen, their favorite game. Horses, flowers, wines, food, rare stamps, etc. It doesn't matter. The world loves to praise what it loves and values.

And Lewis realized that true praise occurs when there is an overflowing of joy. And that is what the vocabulary of the Psalter shows us.

[4 : 33] It's not about God asking us to praise him because he's in need of praise. Lewis writes in commanding us to praise him, God is inviting us to enjoy him.

That's the first statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith, isn't it? What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him. I mean, have you ever noticed how men and women praise the things they love?

And we eulogize about our favorite footballer after a scintillating strike at goal. Or when recommending our favorite restaurant or a hotel or a vacation spot.

I mean, how often might someone say to another, isn't that just beautiful? You see, the Psalms tell us that when you derive your joy from God, you will praise him too.

And even more so, it will complete your joy to share that with someone else, as the psalmist do with their readers and their fellow singers, as they delight and they enjoy the glory of God.

[5 : 33] I mean, true praise is the spontaneous expression of love and value. And this is one of the many reasons that we come together in corporate worship.

Part of the enjoyment of worshiping together is that we are effectively saying to one another, look how beautiful he is. Look how wonderful the works of the Lord are.

And I'm sure you understand the frustration of not being able to share special moments with someone. Several years ago, I walked the West Highland Way with a friend of mine, and we found ourselves at the top of a hill overlooking Rannick Moor.

And it was so fantastic, I made a futile attempt at taking a bunch of snapshots so that I could set them side by side to show my wife and Marie when I got home, because I wanted to share it with her too.

You see, that is why corporate worship is so vital for those who truly value and love the Lord. We come to corporate worship for the completion of our joy.

[6 : 35] And as David praises and rejoices, we should also note that we can learn from him how we are to live in praise of the Lord. Verses 1 to 3, he said we are to praise God with our whole hearts.

Verse 1, I give thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart. David is praising God for his love and truth and answered prayer, and he's holding nothing back.

It's from his whole heart. This is sincere worship. His praise comes from the very bottom of his soul. And praise is like that, or at least it should be. We're meant to praise God with all of our hearts.

It's not something shallow or frivolous. Because you see, praise is the deepest expression of a soul in love with God. And notice as David walks in the midst of trouble here, he's not blaming God or asking God to come and save him.

No, David is praising God in the midst of his trouble. David is praising God for who God is and what he's done. If you think about us, if there is one time when few of us actually turn to praise of God, it's in the midst of our troubles.

[7 : 49] Those are the times when we might pray a lot more or make some promises about our future behavior. But are we really likely to do more than make a plea for help and actually turn to the Lord in praise of those moments of impending doom?

But you see, David knows God. And he leaves us in no doubt as to what he is praising God for.

Verse 2, For your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

God has shown covenant love to David as he kept his promises to him, even in situations where he thought his life was over. And you see, that's exactly what is going on when you look at verse 3.

On the day I called you, you answered me. David had a prayer. And in answer to that prayer, God had rescued him. In fact, it appears that he rescued him immediately.

On the day I called, you answered me. It's also interesting, there's a hint in verse 3 that God didn't actually answer his prayer in the way that David had prayed it.

[8 : 53] Just take a look at the end of verse 3 there. My strength of soul you increased. You know, one assumes that David asked to be delivered from the situation, but God's answer was no.

But I am going to make you strong enough to survive it. Sort of reminds me of Paul when he talks about his thorn and his flesh. He prayed three times to have it removed and each time God says no. Instead, the answer to Paul was, my grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in weakness. So the Lord gave Paul the strength to deal with his thorn.

And here, David recognizes that his strength of soul came from the Lord because there was nothing left of him. There was nothing he could do for himself. He was empty.

And it was by God's grace alone that he found the strength to persevere. And you see, it was that recognition that leads David to praise God with his whole heart.

[9 : 52] You know, surely, too, when you think about the promise of the Messiah he received, the promise that David's line would bring the king of kings into the world, it was certainly a greater promise than anything David had been praying for.

I mean, probably even greater than anything he could imagine to pray for. And what an answer. And the promise he received inspires wholehearted thanksgiving for who God is, for his love and his truth, because David's experience testifies to him that God's promises are always going to be fulfilled.

And for those of us here this afternoon, I mean, if you believe in the Lord Jesus, then you will know the reality of the salvation that God has provided for you through his Messiah, through this promise to David.

And David could not have fully understood it as we do, but still his joy was overflowing because he looked forward by faith to the Messiah, to the Redeemer that God had promised.

And now, from our perspective, with all the revelation that God has provided for us that David never, ever had, how much more should we be able to outpace, maybe even overtake David and wholehearted thanksgiving and praise for the love and mercy and the grace that he has shown us in our salvation.

[11 : 19] There's an interesting translation issue here at the end of verse 2. For you have exalted above all things your name and your word. If you have your Bibles up, you'll see a little note at the bottom of your page, which is actually a literal translation.

You have exalted your word above all your name. At first, that kind of seems a strange statement, doesn't it? That's why the translators so often change the words.

Because it reads easier if it says your word and your name. Although that's not exactly what it says. The literal translation seems to say my word is more certain than even my name.

But we know that's not true because we know that his name is as trustworthy as his word. But I don't think this verse means that God's other qualities are inferior or moved into second place.

I think what we're seeing is that David is emphasizing his certain belief that God will not fail in fulfilling his word of promise that he received. And what seems to be happening here is that God is saying that he wants us to trust his word.

[12 : 26] Not just the words. The idea that you must trust my word whether you actually see it fulfilled or not. The basis of your faith must be my promises.

Must be my word to you. In the New Testament, Hebrews 11, the writer makes the same point that you must trust God's promises whether or not you ever see them fulfilled.

Speaking of the Old Testament saints there in verse 13 of chapter 11, he says, These saints died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.

In other words, the Old Testament saints never lived to see the promised Messiah. They only saw the promise and they longed for the Messiah from a distance. These Old Testament people died before Christ was ever born, and yet they gained him and they gained all of his benefits.

Providence had not actually yet brought him into the world, and still it was because of their faith that they were able to lay hold of him because God had promised to them and they believed his word.

[13 : 34] David's belief is so strong that he now turns to exhort others to praise God's unsurpassed glory. David had learned that God doesn't lie and that his actions toward us flow from his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

And we see that he is strengthened by this knowledge. In the second half of verse 1, he says, Before the gods I will sing your praise. That word he uses there for gods is Elohim.

In Genesis, you'll know the word is used for God and it applies power and authority. But it's also used elsewhere to mean people of authority like judges, kings, princes, earthly rulers.

So what David is actually saying here in verses 4 and 5 is, When I sing your praises in front of all the kings, the queens, the princes, the judges of the earth, they too will learn to praise God. See, David looks forward to the day when all the rulers of the earth will recognize Jesus. And they too will bow down before the king of kings and the lord of lords.

[14:39] Paul explains that for us in Philippians 2 when he says that God has highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow.

I think we should also note from David that we are to praise the lord in front of others, even in front of those who might have the power to stop us. Verse 4, For all the kings of the earth shall give you praise when they hear the words of your mouth.

You see, David wants to praise God in front of the powerful people of the world so that they might learn to praise God too. In verse 5, And they shall sing the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

In Isaiah chapter 2, we are told that God will make his people so joyful that all the other nations will see it and they will want the same God. David calls on the rulers of the world to join him in praising God because of his extraordinary promise that God has brought to David in his prayer.

And the main point he wants to highlight for them is there in verse 6. In other words, he says, Kings of the nations, gather round.

[16:03] I want to show you the glory of God. And here it is. Though he is high, he regards the lowly. That is how great the glory of the Lord is.

And nowhere is the glory of the Lord more evident than in his stooping down to care for the humble and the needy. Have you ever wondered about the idea that God is so great or so awesome that he could not possibly think of us individually?

I mean, scientists, philosophers, others have been asking this question for years. In a universe that is as massive as ours is, so huge its size is beyond comprehension.

I mean, is it really possible to believe that a God who created it all could actually be so detailed as to truly care about us? I mean, is it possible to believe in a God that cares about you and about me? I mean, since a human being is not even a tiny microscopic speck in terms of this massive universe, I mean, is it really possible to believe that God cares for you or even knows who you are?

[17:14] And what is the Christian supposed to say and answer that question or even think about that idea? Well, this is a question that's been around. It's not a new one.

It's been around for over 3,000 years. In Psalm 8, the writer asks, O Lord, you have set your glory above the heavens. When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is it that you are mindful of man?

The psalmist is asking, Lord, you are so great. How in the world could you pause for even a split second to think about us, much less about me?

And David says here in Psalm 138, Well, I have the answer. And here it is in verse 6. Although the Lord is high and exalted, he gives careful thought and attention to the low and to the humble.

In fact, he holds them in high esteem. And David says to the kings of the nations, He cares about the humble and the lowly, the haughty and the prideful, the people who think they are a big deal and of great stature.

[18:27] Oh yeah, he keeps an eye on them too. But he does not allow them to enjoy the intimate relationship of his nearer presence. Now you see, it is the humble and the lowly of heart he draws near.

When you think about it, that is a theme throughout the Old Testament, isn't it? And if you apply that theme to the New Testament, you can't help but think of God's plan of salvation for his people as the Lord Jesus drew near to rescue us.

Once again, Paul explains in Philippians 2 that Jesus was in the form of God, but he emptied himself. And he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death on the cross.

You know, when the word became flesh, we see the ultimate reality of God's love for us actually revealed.

When Jesus came to us in the incarnation, he stepped down from heaven. He stooped down and dwelt amongst us. And then lastly, in verses 7 and 8, we see a reminder that our walk with God is not without his trials.

[19 : 37] Verse 7, Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. David is once again speaking in the first person. He says, His walk has its problems.

But it doesn't mean he feels forgotten or deserted. I mean, all of us have tears, regrets, disappointments. All of our lives are marked to some degree by quiet desperation. But the wonderful thing about verse 7 is that we are told that God is able to see through it all. Now, I wouldn't want anybody to leave here thinking this afternoon that trusting God or living for God or even discovering the nature of who Jesus is and what he has done for us removes us from the realities of this life.

That it removes us from our failures, our enemies, our mistakes, our sorrows, because it certainly doesn't. And if anyone ever tells you that it does, go home.

Quickly. Get your Bible. Open it up to Psalm 138. And turn to verse 7 and read it and believe it. Because right here, David, the man, after God's own heart, who has just spent six verses giving wholehearted praise to God, praising Him for His love and His truth and His answered prayer and His glory as He stoops down to take care of the humble and the needy.

[21 : 00] This is the same man who says that he walks in the midst of trouble. And having made known to us his trouble, he continues by telling us that his faith in God still remains undaunted.

You see, if they're in verses 7 to 8, Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will preserve my life. Your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me.

He will not forsake me, because I am the work of His hands. If you believe that as David does, that's a good prayer to go to sleep with every night, isn't it?

Lord, no matter what is going on in my life, I trust you, because you'll preserve me. You will be with me and never forsake me, because I am the work of your hands.

And as a New Testament believer, you should know this with far greater knowledge and understanding than David would have ever been able to enjoy. He had to look forward to this by faith.

[22 : 03] But you have the tangible evidence of the cross. You have been united to Christ by the grace of God through faith. You enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Spirit living in you.

Therefore, you should be even more sure of these things than David himself. See, David only had the promise of the Messiah to come. But you and I have the reality of the promise fulfilled.

So, I mean, how much more should we be certain, you and me, of the promises? The promises that God has given to us through the Lord Jesus. Because you see, through His life and His death and His resurrection, all the promises that God has made to us, all the promises about eternity and heaven and our future reality, all of those promises have been made yea and amen in the Lord Jesus.