

‘MOST WORTHY OF PRAISE’ PSALM 145

[St Mark’s Northbridge, Sunday, 30 January, 2022 – All Services]

1. A Psalm of Praise.

What is praise? I think these days it has come to be thought of as a pretty religious word, or else a brand of mayo. But I think Christians especially tend to associate the word praise with very spiritual things like worship and prayer. But in its essence, praise is not a particularly religious idea at all. Praise is a young girl telling her friends about the guy she’s just met. Praise is recommending a movie to someone. Praise is someone being very enthusiastic about the restaurant they recently ate at. Praise is a product advertisement on the TV. Praise is what I did yesterday afternoon- standing up to make a speech at one of my best friends’ 50th birthday party and telling all who’d gathered why he means so much to me.

And when people like ancient King David wrote psalms of praise, this is what he was doing as well. Bubbling over with enthusiasm. Telling anyone who will listen about something he loves- someone he loves. God.

And this is what we have in Psalm 145. It’s a song he wrote about his God, and why he loves him so much. Psalm 145 is the speech David would have made if he’d been invited to speak at God’s 50th birthday party.

And I want to reflect on it with you today under two key headings, before drawing a few conclusions for us. I want us to see how this psalm describes the kind of praise God he deserves. And then I want us to appreciate what David says about why God deserves that praise.

2. The Kind of Praise He Deserves.

So, firstly, five observations from the psalm about the kind of praise God deserves.

- universal

Number 1- universal. King David believed that God deserved to be praised not just by him, and not just by all the people he ruled- the Israelites, but by people all over

the world. This is clear throughout the psalm¹, but it's summed up most clearly by the psalm's last line: 'Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.'

- constant

And that concluding line of the psalm also reminds us how long David thought God's praise deserved to go on. For ever and ever. This is number 2. God deserves constant praise.

In fact, David bookends the psalm with this insistence. It starts much like it finishes. Verse 1 and 2.

[Read 145:1-2]

Teachers often seek to praise their students, and parents their children. But I suspect all teachers and parents would agree that praiseworthy moments in children are often followed by very different moments. And the same is true of adults is it not? We are sometimes worthy of praise, but not all the time. But God deserves constant praise because he is constantly worthy of it.

- inter-generational

Number 3- inter-generational. Here I'm thinking especially about verses 4-5².

[Read 145:4-5a]

In our house there are stories that get told by the parents which the children often hear. I think our girls would say that they hear them 'too often' in some cases! They're stories of funny things the children said or did when they were little. They're stories of adventures Tamara and I have had, of fond memories we want to share, or even of mistakes we've made that we hope our children don't repeat. I think it's the same in most families. Stories are naturally passed from one generation to the next. But Psalm 145 reminds us that there is nothing more important to be passed down the generations than the story of God's work in the world- the story which reveals the character of God and which climaxes in the coming of Jesus. That's the story our children most need to know and learn and cherish. That's the story that should be most often on the lips of all who teach our children- and I don't just mean parents, or Scripture teachers, or Kids Church leaders. This is a responsibility we share as a Christian community. Every single one of us has a generation coming up behind us.

¹ See verse 10, and verse 12 especially.

² See also verse 11.

Even our teenagers here today- this is true for you too. And we know, don't we, that we have a wonderful story to tell them. And if we don't teach them to love this story- the story of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit- who will?

- joyful

Number 4. Joyful. Did you notice the words the psalm uses to describe the praise of God- especially in verses 6-7? Proclaim. Celebrate. Joyfully. God's praiseworthiness is not a mere fact. It's truth to be delighted in and rejoiced over. This is the nature of true praise. It's a glad and enthusiastic expression of God's character and worth. And where Christian praise is not like this it can only be because we haven't really grasped how thrillingly wonderful God is.

- thoughtful

But number 5- thoughtful. Because one of the ways that a person moves from simply learning things about God to deeply knowing him and praising him is by meditation. By reflection. By ruminating thought. And King David gently encourages us here to be thoughtful in our praise of God. In verse 5 he says- 'I will meditate on your wonderful works'. Humble meditation on who God is and what he has done is the soil in which praise grows and flourishes.

These are a few things David says here about the nature of praise- things that are instructive for us. The kind of praise God deserves is universal, constant, inter-generational, joyful, and thoughtful.

3. (Some of) The Reasons He Deserves to be Praised.

But I want to turn now to pointing out a few of things David actually says about what God is like. These points are just some of the reasons God deserves to be praised. Of course, I could've easily had 10 other sub-headings here but I've just chosen the 5 things that most jumped out at me. In fact, I think David himself is conscious of the fact that even his psalm doesn't come close to doing God's character justice. You notice what he says in verse 3- that God's greatness is beyond fathoming! And it's with that same posture of humility that I offer you these few reflections now.

- his kingship

And the first thing I want to mention is that David praises God for his kingship. And the reason this jumped out at me is because David is himself a king. And yet, David sees his own rule in the light of God's rule. And he recognises that there is a

kingship far greater than his. His God is 'the king'- verse 1. And there is much about God's kingdom that he delights in. In verse 5 he speaks of the glorious splendour of God's majesty. In verse 11 of the glory of God's kingdom. In verse 13 he reminds us that, unlike his kingdom, and every other kingdom that has come since, God's kingdom is everlasting and his dominion endures forever³.

- his works

The second thing I want to point out is how often David mentions God's works. Because this song of praise is not just a recognition of God's character but also his deeds. Who God is flows out into what he does. And, in fact, we learn things about what he's like by what he does⁴. So David speaks here about God's awesome works⁵- his mighty acts⁶, his great deeds⁷. What God has done in creation, in history, and especially in his salvation of his people, all speak to his power, his love, and his majesty. And as his works reveal him to us, we have more reasons to praise.

- his grace

And as we reflect on his works in salvation, we're reminded especially of God's grace. And this theme in the psalm is the third thing I want to make sure you don't miss. The kindness of God to his creatures is a note struck right through the psalm. But David makes it particularly explicit in verses 8 and 9.

[Read 145:8-9]

Goodness. Grace. Compassion. Slowness to anger. Love. These were not just words for David. They were his personal experience. Through the painful failure of his own sin. And we relate to these words the same way. Because Christians don't just know that these attributes are on God's resume, but we've seen them in our own lives- we've tasted his goodness, experienced his compassion, and felt his love.

The words of verse 8, of course, are drawn from a significant earlier moment in Israel's history when God revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai. From the very beginning this is what God wanted his people to know about him⁸. As John Calvin

³ This is also what King Nebuchadnezzar learnt and expressed in Daniel 4:34.

⁴ See verses 10-11 especially.

⁵ Verse 4, verse 5, verse 6, verse 10.

⁶ Verse 4. Also verse 11 and verse 12.

⁷ Verse 6.

⁸ See Exodus 34:6-7.

once said about verse 8- this is 'as clear and satisfactory a description of the nature of God . . . as can anywhere be found'⁹.

And as we know, God hasn't just left us with this description. But he's given us his Son who embodied these things in the most shining way. Jesus the Good Shepherd. Jesus who poured out divine grace upon sinners. Jesus who was always compassionate. Jesus who most certainly did not get angry quickly. Jesus who loved even unto death.

- his faithfulness

And if you reflect for just a minute on the fact that God revealed himself to Moses in around 1300BC and told him he was a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and rich in love, and that in about 1000BC King David was affirming word for word in this psalm that that was true, and that 1000 years later God's own Son entered the world and put human flesh on divine character, then one other you thing you know about God is that he is unchanging, and he is always true to who he is and what he says. He is faithful. And that's another theme of the psalm I want to make sure we all see.

Again, the faithfulness of God- his trustworthy dependability- is a note that's struck often through David's song. But the clearest expression of it is in the second half of verse 13¹⁰.

[Read 145:13b]

It's a remarkable thing to say isn't it? We don't always keep our promises. We regularly resolve to do things and don't end up doing them. The people who are closest to us would testify that we are not always completely trustworthy. The kinds of things we hear about God in verse 13 would actually be hard for us to imagine if we only had our interaction with other humans to go on. Because in this respect, as in many other respects, he is entirely different to us. But we have his utterly unblemished record to go on to show us that it's true. Has he ever promised something to his people that he hasn't done? Has he ever let us down? No. And no. So can we risk everything to serve Jesus? Is it safe to obey him in every respect? Yes. And yes. He is trustworthy in all his promises. He is faithful in all he does.

- his care

⁹ Quoted in Mays, *Psalms*, p.439.

¹⁰ See also verse 17.

And then finally, his care. What a litany David gives us here of the way in which God's people experience his tender kindness. Especially from verse 14 to the end. He upholds all who fall. He lifts up those who are bowed down. He gives food to every creature on earth from an open hand. He shapes and then satisfies the desires of his people. And he is near when his people call to him- verse 18, and he hears their cries- verse 19. There are a couple of great verses for our church to reflect on during our Week of Prayer and Fasting are they not? Our prayers do not fall on deaf ears. And he listens to our prayers not just because he has great hearing but because he's by our side- he's close to us. How great is that? As verse 20 says: 'he watches over all who love him'.

And at this point we should just pay attention to the fact that the promises of verses 14-20 are not made to all people everywhere. They're promises for those who belong to him, and David is not afraid to remind us that some people don't belong to God, and so they don't experience his care in the same way that his people do. And I hope you noticed how David in these verses distinguishes between those who belong to God and those who do not. His people, says David, are those, verse 18, who call on him in truth. They are those, verse 19, who fear him. And they are those, verse 20, who love him. And if you want to know the Father's care, David gives us this reminder of what it means to be part of the Father's family- to call on him, to fear him, and to love him.

4. A Life of Praise.

It's a great psalm isn't it? And I hope that simply slowing down and thinking about it together today/tonight has stirred up praise in your heart as it has in mine. But just as we finish I want to offer a few thoughts about how we can each take on board the message of this psalm for our lives. Because here we have a resource that is not just a song we can sing, but which sets a pattern for a whole life of praise. So three quick final reflections.

- the knowledge of God

To begin with, this psalm reminds us that you can't praise God if you don't know God. And if you're drawn to the idea that you might live a life of gratitude and joy and praise for God, then this is where to begin. David meditates on God's wonderful works. And so must we. And we can do that in exactly the way we have done this morning/evening- by taking a psalm like this and thinking slowly and carefully about what we see of God here. And the whole Bible serves us in the same way. You can open any page of the Scriptures and see God revealed. And so the joyful life of

praise is a life steeped in God's word as we seek to grow in our knowledge of him. Praise is the natural overflow of knowing God well.

- both discipline and instinct

But I also want to say that a life of praise is a combination of both discipline and instinct. It requires discipline because meditation involves slowing down. It requires discipline because so often in our prayers we rush to making requests of God and we need to be intentional about not just giving God our shopping list but giving him the honour he deserves- hallowing his name. And praise also requires discipline because our conversations with those we know who aren't Christians are often filled with the praise of other things we love and sometimes there's nervousness we need to combat in order to tell people why we love God and his Son our Saviour. But this is what evangelism is- as the apostle Peter says- declaring 'the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light'¹¹. And doing that does require discipline at times- prayerful preparation, and intentional conversation.

But praise is not just something we need to think about before we do. It also ought to be something we don't need to think about at all. It's instinct as well as discipline. When I gave my speech at my mate's 50th yesterday there was discipline involved- I thought before-hand about what to say and wrote it out using words I'd carefully chosen. But it's more than possible on another occasion that you might bump into me after I've spent some time with him and I might just start telling you spontaneously how much I enjoyed his company. Both are praise. And the same is true in our relationship with God.

I read an article in the Eternity newspaper recently which was about a man named Sid who shared with the journalist about how God has changed his life. But of the article's sentences particularly struck me. It said this: 'The very morning of our interview he had chatted for an hour to a woman walking a dog, sharing about the changes that only God could make in his heart and life'¹². Now there's a guy who just can't help talking about Jesus. And may that be true of us as well- instinctive praise.

- the use of the psalms

And the last thing this morning/evening is, I hope, a really obvious thing to say, but preparing this sermon has really reminded me of this. In the book of the psalms itself God has given us incredible help in living a life of praise. So I want to encourage you

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9

¹² *Eternity*, November 2021, p.4.

to use the psalms to help you praise God. I've been doing this again lately and it's been great. Take a psalm, read it aloud, and take the sentiments the psalmist expresses into your own heart and onto your own lips. God has given us the psalms partly for this purpose. And we neglect them to our own detriment. Reading a psalm a day, or even just a couple a week, is a great habit. And I commend it to you.

When we use them we find treasures like the one in front of us today/tonight. And in it, God both reminds us of how and why we might praise him, and at the same time he gives us words to speak with which we can respond to what he reveals.

[Read 145:1-3]