

# **CHURCH IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A CHURCH THAT HONORS GOD AND LOVES PEOPLE THROUGH PRAISING GOD TOGETHER**

## **Psalm 145**

### INTRODUCTION

In 1992 I woke up as a man out of a deep sleep. I was 38 years old. I had been a Christian for 17 years and working as a full-time teacher of the gospel to college students for 15 years. My eyes were opened to see and my heart awakened to rejoice in the purpose of everything, especially the purpose for which Jesus Christ came to this earth. “Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God,” the apostle Peter says in his first letter. Christ came and died and rose again and is now living to intercede for every believing sinner for this one purpose: that we might know and see and rejoice in the greatness and the glory of God himself. My sleep had been caused by my pursuing good, but lesser purposes. I had been living as though the purposes of my life were to reach the world for Christ, to be a good Christian husband and to raise Christian children. While these are all important things, Jesus didn’t die because he needed my help. He died because I needed his help. He died so that I would be eternally happy in being loved by and loving the great, Triune God.

One of the effects of my awakening to the glory of God as the goal of my life was that I determined to continually memorize the Bible. I determined to do this because the Bible is supremely the revelation of the glory of God and thus I knew and know that it is only by filling my mind with the knowledge of God revealed in his word that I have any hope of being taken up with the glory of God. You cannot admire an object of art that you have never seen or know nothing about. While it is true that knowledge of the Bible does not automatically produce delight in God, yet it is certain that if you do not have a true and growing knowledge of God from his word then you will never have delight in God. The first passage that I memorized back in 1992 was this psalm, Psalm 145.

The reason I memorized this psalm was because it is one of the highest expressions in the Bible of delight in God. Sixteen times in these 21 verses people are said to praise or thank or joyfully sing to and about God and his glory. That is what praise and worship are: verbal expressions of our joy and delight in God. This Psalm not only is a verbal expression of joy in God but also describes why God is delightful. It is a recounting of God’s character and deeds that arouse admiration in us that results in praise from us. This morning my ambition is to consider from this psalm the truth about God which has given rise to the psalmist’s joy in God and thus his praise of God. We are doing this so that we might be a people whose chief obsession in life is to know and enjoy and thus worship this great God.

### MAIN POINT

**Worthy worship arises when minds meditate on and hearts are aroused by God’s...**

#### **I. Unsearchable greatness (vv. 1-7)**

The first thing to notice is that King David, who writes this psalm, is determined to exalt and bless and praise God every day throughout all of eternity (vv. 1-2). To extol or exalt someone is to think highly of them, to feel enormous admiration for them and to declare what makes them admirable both to them and to others. We all know how to do this in relation to our spouses and children and grandchildren and favorite bands and favorite sports star and favorite actor. Just as you exalt your grandchildren because you are so impressed with them and your heart is so full of love for them, so we exalt God. Normally we think of God blessing us, not our blessing God. God blesses us with his favor and kindness. He wishes us well and so does well for us. When God blesses us he is giving us things we cannot give to ourselves. He is filling our lack with his abundance. For us to bless God means that we wish him well. We want his name and fame and reputation to be magnified in the world. We want him to be treated well, as he deserves. We declare to him and to others our desire for him to be admired and the reasons we think he should be admired.

It is noteworthy that David says that every day he will bless God. That means that God appears glorious to us not only on good days, when good things happen to us, when we are healthy and everything is going our way but also when we have bad days and bad things are happening to us. It is an error of the highest order to only say “God is so good” when good things happen to you. God is great and worthy of our admiration at all times. He never ceases to be our great God and King. While I was meditating upon this passage and then preparing this sermon, my disabled son Jared has not been doing well. We found out on Thursday that for some period of time he has been aspirating small amounts of the food and water we have been giving him, which is probably why he got pneumonia in the first week of January. Thus, this next week he will need to have a feeding tube put back in, which is a great sadness to us. Obviously, my mind has been dwelling on him and I have been anxious for him and I have had to give significant amounts of time and attention to arranging for his care. So while my son suffers and we who love him worry will I yet praise God? Will God still appear to me glorious and admirable and great? God does not change with my son’s changing health or with your changing circumstances. He is as delightful now as he was before Jared’s accident and just as worthy of exaltation.

Thinking about this psalm and especially v. 2 in these days has drawn my attention to four things. First, I have fought in the midst of this trouble to fix my attention on God’s greatness and so still praise him. I have for some moments in these days exalted my God and King. This is the fight of faith. We fight to remain fixed upon the great purpose of life no matter what happens to us. Second, I have not found God to be as delightful as he actually is. I have been overcome by worry and fear and have not found joy in God every day. Thus, I find that I cannot and do not bless God every day. I’m pretty sure that David, the author of this psalm was a man just like me and that he also struggled to do what he said he wants to do. In fact, we know from David’s story that there was at least a two year period where he did not bless God on a single day. Therefore, third, we know that the only person who has ever been able to honestly say this psalm and live it out in this world is Jesus, David’s greater son. He always glorified his Father on every day, never once failing to be delighted in God and thus never failing to worship him, even on the day he was betrayed and tortured and killed. It is because Jesus never failed at this that my failure in doing this will not condemn me to hell. He blessed God every day in my place and died for all the times I fail to do so. Fourth, there is a day of resurrection coming for all who trust in Christ when we will, every day and for all of eternity exalt and bless and praise our God and King.

Notice that at the center of this opening salvo of reasons for why the psalmist delights in God and so blesses God is his “unsearchable greatness (v. 3).” As David considers the various ways in which God has expressed or revealed himself in his world and word he recognizes that the greatness of God is beyond finding out. While we are witnesses to his greatness in both his acts of creation and salvation, yet as we consider these mighty acts we recognize that this God who has made everything and who is working out every action in the whole universe according to the purposes of his will is far beyond our comprehension. We will, for all of eternity be searching out the greatness of God but we will never come to the end of it. That is why eternity will never be boring. There will always be new discoveries of the glory of God.

In v. 4 David tells us that he is not the only one engaged in this joyful work of exalting and blessing and praising God. Indeed, there is a vast company of people who delight in God and who then delight in commending God’s glory to the generation that is behind them. There has been and will be to the end of the world an unbroken chain of human beings who are passing on their knowledge of the glory of God to those human beings who come after them in time. We have received this knowledge of God’s glory from those who have gone before us and we are in the process of passing it on to those who come after us and they in turn will commend the greatness of God to those who come after them. This is not some strange religious phenomena. Every parent in here passes on their delight in persons or things to their children. I love listening to the Brewers on the radio and watching the Green Bay Packers play football and the WI Badgers play basketball because my dad delighted in these things and he passed on his love for them to me. My dad loved the out of doors and hunting and so do I. I have passed on these loves to my children as well. It is natural for parents to commend the greatness of the things that we love to our children and usually children end up loving what their parents love. Therefore, parents, the most important thing you can do is grow in your delight in God and then you will

naturally and honestly commend his greatness to your children. You will declare to them his mighty acts. It is not only parents to children but we all naturally commend, recommend, exalt to others those persons and objects that we admire and love. So, if we are going to be a church that is commending the glory of God in Christ to others and declaring his mighty acts of salvation we each must exalt in God ourselves.

In v. 5 David reveals the means by which his heart is aroused and thus his mouth praises: he meditates on the glorious splendor of God's majesty and on his wondrous works. Our minds are to be filled with thoughts of God's majesty and work so that our hearts will be aroused by his beauty. This is the reason for reading your Bible, aggressively listening to sermons, going to a Bible study, teaching the catechism to your children, memorizing the Bible, coming to Foundations in the Faith, watching nature shows on TV, taking a walk outside in the dark, learning about astronomy and plant physiology and human anatomy and physics and watching the news. The majestic, sovereign king of the universe is at work in every place and at all times so we can meditate upon his wonderful works all the time. I can tell you with absolute certainty that there is a concrete connection between the amount of time you spend meditating on the glory of God in his word and in his world and the joy you will find in God and thus the praise you offer to God.

In v. 6 David says that the older generation declares to the younger generation the might of God's "awesome deeds." Unfortunately for us, the word "awesome" has been trivialized and now means something like "cool", "neat" or "I really like that thing." The Hebrew word translated "awesome deeds" is literally, "the works which are feared" or God's fear producing actions. In the biblical record this would include the worldwide flood in Noah's day, the awful destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham, the plagues God sent upon Egypt and his destruction of their army at the Red Sea, the earth cracking open and swallowing up Dathan and Korah and their families who rebelled against Moses in the desert and so on. However, God's fearsome acts are not limited to those recorded in the Bible but include all the terrifying events in our world from hurricanes and earthquakes to epidemics to ethnic cleansing to oil spills.

I heard last week that Pat Robertson, the well-known founder and host of the "700 Club" and former presidential candidate said that the reason God sent the earthquake to Haiti is because of the wholesale practice of devil worship in the form of voodoo in that nation. What he said is in direct contradiction to what Jesus says we are to think when we observe such horrific events. I want you to turn to Luke 13:1-5 (read it). Jesus says that we must never ask the question: why did God send the earthquake to Haiti? Rather, Jesus says we should ask, why didn't God send an earthquake to Janesville? We are to recognize these horrific acts as God's warnings that judgment is coming and his judgment will be far worse than this earthquake and so each of us should heed the warning and repent of our sins and flee to Christ for salvation. One of the things you should be talking to your children about as you see the reports of what is happening in Haiti is how horrible is the suffering caused by the earthquake and then that hell is way worse than that and if you do not repent of your sins and trust in Jesus, that is where you will end up. There are other things we are to think and feel about disasters like Haiti but we must see them as terrifying acts of God's wrath meant to provoke fear and repentance and praise in us.

Immediately after telling of God's greatness due to his fear inducing actions the psalmist says that the older generation pours forth the fame of God's abundant goodness and joyfully sings of God's righteousness. We rejoice in a good and righteous God. God has good reasons for sending an earthquake to Haiti and his reasons are just reasons. Now he does not tell us what all of those reasons are but because he is full of goodness and righteousness we can be sure that everything he does is good and just and so we can praise him.

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- *Unsearchable greatness*
- *And by God's...*

## **II. Goodness to all and dominion over all (vv. 8-16)**

Verse 8 is virtually a quote of what God told Moses about himself when Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the law of God, following Israel's worshipping the golden calf and God's killing 3000 of the rebellious Israelites at the hand of Moses and the Levites. God told Moses days after that event as recorded in Exodus 34:6, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..." It is very difficult for many people to look at an event like the earthquake in Haiti and then believe that this is true for God. The reason it is so difficult for people to believe that God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and full of steadfast love when things like Haiti happen is because people think of themselves and others as basically good. When God says of himself and the psalmist repeats that God is gracious he means that God is not currently dealing with people as they deserve. Again, every human being deserves to have an earthquake happen in their hometown and to be without food and water. We have not loved God or our neighbor but have used all of the gifts of God to serve ourselves. The question is not why do earthquakes like the one in Haiti happen but why are these things not happening more often and in more places? The fact which the psalmist describes in vv. 9-16 is how the Lord, contrary to what human beings deserve is pouring out his kindness and mercy upon us. You can see this clearly in v. 9 as the psalmist declares that the Lord is good to all and his mercy is over all he has made. God is continually restraining his just anger against human beings for our sin and continually caring for us and not punishing us as our sins deserve. Verses 10-16 describe how it is that this gracious, merciful and loving God displays his mercy and goodness toward all of his creation.

All of creation and all humans who are trusting in Christ thank and bless God because of the glory of his kingdom. In other words what all creation knows and what all who have had their eyes opened know is that God is the king over this entire universe and he is right now powerfully at work exercising his rule over it. He is at work now to subdue rebellious human beings by his grace. One day, as we are told in the book of Revelation, he will finish this work and then the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ by an act of violent aggression. When God, through Christ, brings all things together under his rule then that kingdom will be an eternal kingdom and that dominion will extend over all things perfectly. The evidence that God is king now is to be found in his kind works (v. 13b). The day of violent conquest over all evil is in the future. Now he is exercising his kingly rule in his kind works. He upholds all who are falling and he raises up all who are bowed down (v.14). God is on the side of the oppressed and downtrodden. He is currently exercising his kingly power by stooping down and helping those who are overcome with sin and the miseries of sin. We are to see the relief effort being mounted for Haiti as an expression of his raising up all who are bowed down. In recognizing God's hand in these provisions we see another way we are to look at those who are the victims of God's fearsome deeds. We are to raise up those who are bowed down and to uphold those who are falling, like our Father in heaven. We are not indifferent to the suffering of others, but like our gracious, merciful, slow to anger and loving Father, we also act to care for the oppressed and hurting. This gracious and merciful king provides all creatures with the food they need. He opens his hand each day and gives us and all creatures the sustenance we need to live in this world. While there is suffering in this world due to God's awesome deeds, yet for most humans, most of the time we are the recipients of enormous kindness in God's giving us food and clothing and shelter and family and friends and job and health.

The glorious splendor of God's kingdom and his mighty deeds are to be seen in the many acts of kindness in support of the hurting in the world and to be seen in the fertility of the world and the beauty of creation and in the pleasures of relationships and in the many legitimate creation pleasures that God gives to all human beings. When we see the splendor of his kingdom being manifest in the world through his acts of "common grace" we are full of delight in God and we offer verbal praise to God and declare his greatness to others.

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### **III. Particular love for his people (vv. 17-21)**

You can see in vv. 18-20 that the psalmist is now thinking about how God treats those who call on him who fear him and who love him. In other words, he now gives thought to how God deals with his people, those who have been adopted as his children by his gracious work on their behalf in Christ and through their faith in him. Christians are those who have called upon the name of Christ to come and save them from their sins and God's anger against them for their sins. We are those who fear God, who are full of reverent awe at the greatness and glory of God. Finally, we are those that love God. We are like this because of God's righteous and kind acts, as v. 17 says. In kindness God sent Jesus to live and die and rise for us. According to his righteousness he has made a way to forgive us of our sins and for him to love us while not discrediting his own holiness. He does this by placing our sins on Christ and then killing him for our sins and by placing Christ's righteousness upon us. God is shown to be righteous and cannot be accused of being a corrupt judge because he saves a criminal like me because he has punished my sins in Christ and counted me perfectly righteous in him.

So, God is now near to us who call upon him in truth. The great preacher C.H. Spurgeon says, "To pray in truth we must have a true heart and the truth in our heart." God is not near to those who call on him in falsehood. God only is near to those who have a true faith in the true Christ. He is only near to those who call on him in accordance with his will and way. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him because they desire what God desires for them. Again as Spurgeon says, "a holy heart only wants what a holy God can give." God is near to us and acting on our behalf for our salvation. It is his chief end to preserve us to eternal life. How good it is to know that God is near and acting to fulfill our desires so that we are saved, we are preserved for life with him forever. This is a cause for great celebration. The God whom I have deeply offended by my sins has chosen to love me through Christ and is right now near to me for the purpose of aiding and helping and saving me. It does not matter what goes wrong in my life or what bad things happen to me here because God is always watching over me to preserve me to eternal life. Nothing can ever separate me from the love of God and so I have nothing to fear. Therefore, I can always exalt my God and king and always bless his name.

This tender love and care of God for those who belong to him is set in contrast to the way in which God will deal with the wicked (v. 20b). God is going to, one day, destroy all the wicked. All human beings by nature are wicked, including me and including every other person sitting in this room, even the babies. We all deserve this destruction. Thus the psalmist remembers God's grace at the end of the psalm. The only reason he and we are not among the wicked is because of God's gracious act on our behalf. So the contrast he accentuates between God's guarding and keeping and preserving his people and his destroying of the wicked is to show the ultimate reason for praise, his amazing grace. Our mouths will speak the praise of the Lord every day throughout all of eternity because we will know on every day that we do not deserve to be in heaven but are only there because of God's gracious act to save us through Christ and his being near to us through all the days of our journey while on this earth. So because of this amazing grace we speak God's praise now and we yearn for the day when all flesh will speak his praise with no dissenting voice.

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- *Goodness to all and dominion over all*
- *Particular love for his people*

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