

Psalms of praise

St Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor
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Psalm 145; Joshua 3-4

Today I am going to talk about psalms and we will look together at the beginning of Psalm 145.

I remember when I first gave my life to God; I've not always been a Christian, not always believed in Jesus and not always believed in the Bible. I remember not long after I began to believe that Jesus was my saviour and lord: I was lying in bed praying and asking the question to God how do I get to know you more? How do I understand the Bible in a deeper way and how do I know more about this Jesus character. I remember praying so deeply and asking God's Spirit to guide me, to help me understand. I eventually fell asleep with no real answers but a sense God's presence and peace.

In the morning I woke up and thought, "Yes, I am going to look at the Bible today and learn more about this God, learn more about Jesus. Well, I picked up the Bible and opened it; it fell open at Psalm 119.

Look at Psalm 119, what do you notice about it? Yes, it's the longest chapter in the whole of the Bible. I started to read it and I suddenly felt, "This God is so boring, I don't think I want to learn any more." So I put my Bible down. I might have even put it under my bed. I thought, "Maybe another time."

A few days later I met an old teacher, who asked me how was I going. We had a conversation and then she asked me how church was going. So I shared my Bible experience with her. I was honest about my boring experience of Psalm 119, how it wasn't appropriate in my life at this time, so I was putting it to rest for a while. This beautiful teacher whom I still and admire now, asked if I wanted to go to a concert with her. Out of politeness I went. She took me to see a band called Eden's Bridge.

They sang Celtic psalms. These psalms were different from what I had read; they were alive and the words were real. Where were these psalms really different from what I had read? I went home and looked at the Bible. The words were the same. Suddenly the Bible became alive. It lit up other parts of the Bible for me. I began a relationship with Jesus.

The words of the psalms became songs, they became prayers; they became a way to express feelings in hymns, pleadings, sorrows, penitence, petition and thanksgiving.

Most people, regular Bible readers or not, are familiar with a few of the psalms. Chances are you've heard parts of Psalm 23!

However you choose to read the psalms, it's a deeply worthwhile experience. They cover the entire range of human experience and emotion, and they ask important questions about God, humanity, and the purpose of life. And once you've read a few of them, you'll see many of us incorporate them into worship services, daily devotions, and personal prayer.

Now today I am going to look at Psalm 145 with the help of the children. As we read the first three verses, look for a word that's repeated in every verse—it gives you a good idea of what this psalm is all about.

1. I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.
2. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.
3. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

Do you hear the word, “praise”? This is, a psalm of praise, but these first verses have some unusual words in them: I have got four them here.

Exalt: to lift someone up high.

Extol: another word for praise.

Worthy: well deserved.

Fathom: what someone is doing when they’re trying very hard to understand something.

So ... “I will lift you up high, my God and King. I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and I will praise your name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord. He deserves lots of praise; he is so great that no one can understand how great he is.”

Have you ever enjoyed something so much that you kept talking about it? Maybe it was a really good movie or a baseball or soccer game. Maybe you had lots of fun with a friend. If you kept talking about it over and over again, your friends or family might say, “OK, we get it—it was great! You can stop talking about it now!” Do you think that is what’s happening in the first three verses of this psalm? The writer keeps talking about how great God is and how much praise he wants to give to God. He keeps going on and on about it. He doesn’t praise God for doing anything specific—he does that in later verses. In these three verses he just praises God for who God is.

I’ve challenge for you. This week I want you stop for a few minutes twice every day to praise God. Don’t think about specific things that God has done. Just praise God for being a great, awesome God. If you repeat some words in your praise, that’s OK! Maybe you know some songs that you could sing to praise God too.

Psalm 145 is a psalm of praise. It’s an acrostic, for each verse from verse three onwards begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Maybe the writer decided to write an acrostic to make it easy to remember. The person who wrote this took delight in the language and spelled out the ways to praise God from A to Z. Using all the letters in the alphabet is another way to show that we praise God completely, from beginning to the end.

Psalm 145 has a two-verse introduction and a one-verse conclusion that frames the acrostic, which begins with verse 3. The author uses the first two verses to set up what the psalm was about—praising God—and then he begins his work, using the alphabet as a guide. There’s a thematic structure as well. Verses 3-7 extol the greatness, majesty, and works of the Lord. In verses 8-13a we hear about God’s characteristics: his grace, his compassion, and the everlasting nature of his kingdom. Verses 13b-16 refer to God’s faithfulness, while verses 17-20 reflect on God’s righteousness.

In Joshua 3 and 4 we read about how the Israelites were ready to enter the promised land after forty years of wandering in the wilderness. During that time, almost all of the people who left Egypt had died, even their leader, Moses. Only two remained from the original group: Joshua (who was their new leader), and Caleb. There was no one else living who had been a slave in Egypt, who had experienced the plagues or who had witnessed God parting the Red Sea. This new group of people needed to be reminded that God was present with them and with Joshua, just as he had been with Moses.

As they traveled, the people stood on the banks of the Jordan River, wondering how they were going to get across. The Jordan River was in flood; to across was not like putting your toes in a puddle. It was huge; the water would have been running very quickly and would have been very deep.

Joshua told the priests to pick up the Ark of the Covenant and step into the river. The Ark is a chest described in the Book of Exodus that held the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed.

The priests and the ark were going to get wet unless something remarkable happened. And it did! When the priests took a step into the river, God stopped the water. The priests with the ark stood in the middle of the riverbed while the people crossed on dry ground.

After everyone had crossed, God told Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, to gather stones from the riverbed and place them in the middle of their camp to make a monument. So they did what God said. When the feet of the priests with the ark touched the ground of the riverbank, the waters of the river returned.

Can you think of another time when the water stopped to let the people cross? Yes, when Moses took his staff and put it over the water and it parted. It was important for the people of Israel to remember the stories of what God had done for their parents and grandparents. God also knew that sometimes they would need to be reminded to tell those stories. Later—maybe many years later—when Israelite children would see the twelve stones, they would ask, “What happened here?” Then their parents or other adults would tell the story of how God parted the Jordan River so the people could walk on dry ground into the promised land.

Just like the stones that were set up in Joshua’s time, Psalm 145 reminds us to tell each other about the great things God has done.

Psalm 145: 4-7:

4 One generation commends your works to another: they tell of your mighty acts.

5 They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty: and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

6 They tell of the power of your awesome works: and I will proclaim your great deeds.

7 They celebrate your abundant goodness: and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

Just like the twelve tribes had stones to remind them. I have given you a stone each. I am going to play psalm 23 on the CD: Take a few minutes to think about what great things has God done, in your family, done in your own life. Write or draw something on they stone that will help you remember them. Place the stone next to your Bible or your bed to remind you about the great things God does in your life.

I hope you enjoy praising God this week; take your stone and remember the special things God has done for you. Amen.