

Our Hallelujah Chorus
Psalm 145:1-21

Turn with me in your Bibles this morning to the Old Testament book of Psalms. We will be taking a look at Psalm 145. It's a Psalm of praise, the last to be written by David. This is one of nine acrostic Psalms. One or more verses begin with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145

Now if you know about the Hebrew alphabet you know that unlike the English alphabet, which has 26 letters and unlike the Greek alphabet, which has 24 letters, the Hebrew alphabet has only 22 letters. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus writes that according to the 1st and 2nd century Jews, they believed that the number 22 was important. There were 22 generations between Adam and Jacob. There were 22 works done by the Lord in the creation week.

There were 22 books in the Jewish Canon of the Old Testament.

By now you have probably looked to see how many verses Psalm 145 has and discovered that there are only 21 verses. So now you are confirming that Pastor really is off his rocker. To that I say, don't blame me, I learned math at Fairview.

If you are wondering which letter is missing, it is the 'N' or 'nun'. Critics suggest that a scribe copying the text left out that verse. Other scholars believe that the reason this praise Psalm is missing one letter is that our praise will always be incomplete. It will never be enough. It will always be unfinished. I think that makes some sense. We read in Revelation that praise will be ongoing. Whatever the case may be, it is a call to praise God. When we really stop and think, we have a lot to praise God for.

As we come to our text this morning what do you have to give thanks to God for?

As we come to this Psalm we see that David has some reasons to give God praise. Some scholars suggest this Psalm was written by David following a victory on the battlefield.

David opens up the Psalm with *personal* praise. "I will exalt the Lord." It means to raise or lift up on high, to elevate; to raise in status, dignity, power, and honor. It didn't matter if anyone else was going to respond as he did, he was praising God.

Sometimes others can stifle our praise. We want to give a shout to the Lord but are afraid of what others might think; it's not proper or dignified. When I was in college I learned about the Baptist salute. When the song leader announced the song we all stood and the guys immediately put their hands in their pockets because they weren't quite sure what to do with them. They might get carried away. The only one allowed to wave his hands was the song leader. No one else should make a scene.

When you are enraptured by God and who He is or what He has done, give personal praise.

I will never forget an event that happened when I was in 9th grade. During the year when there were no retreats or campers we would attend the local church in town. The pastor would on occasion give the congregation an opportunity to share a word of testimony. On this particular Sunday, a visiting retired black minister rose from his seat and proceeded down to the front and remarked that he wanted to play his testimony on the piano. Now that may not seem unusual to you, but it was for that church because they typically didn't have a piano in the sanctuary. A community choir had been organized to sing a special Easter cantata and this was the largest church. They had to have a special vote of the elders to allow the piano. I'm not sure if this visiting black pastor knew any of that history, but it didn't matter because he wanted to praise the Lord with a song on the piano.

Don't let others squelch your praise. It is personal –

between you and the Lord.

So here is David, caught in a moment of thinking about God or something He had done and he offers up personal praise.

This kind of personal response is given by the 24 elders in Revelation 4:11 as they fall on their knees in worship and exclaim to God “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being.”

For David, his praise is first of all *personal*. He has every reason, rightfully so, to lift up the name of God. But notice something else that is personal in verse 1. He refers to God as his King. “My God the King”

He may have been Israel’s king, but God was his king, God was the rightful king. David had made God the ruler of his life. God is worthy of all praise and honor and glory and deserves to reign in us.

Now here’s the thing, we can’t rightfully praise God if we don’t have a personal relationship with Him. Your words will be a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. But reading through this Psalm you can tell that David loves God and his praise stems from that affection. As David recounts all the things God has done for him, he isn’t going to ask anyone to do his praising for him.

I receive emails about church trends and a troubling one is that some churches are getting away from congregational singing, where everyone is involved in praising God and leaving it up to the “professionals”.

But praising God isn’t just about singing, it’s also about giving a spoken testimony. Phyllis was a Handicap camper during His Ability week a long time ago. Friday night was testimony time and every year Phyllis had something to say. Her

physical condition made it difficult for her to speak and to do many normal activities. But one thing she insisted on was typing out her testimony. Her counselor would take Phyllis to the office where she would literally spend three hours typing out her one sentence testimony. No one could do it for her. That was as much a part of her personally praising God as going before the other campers and reading it.

Our praise must be personal. It must come from hearts that love God. It is something we can’t get someone else to do for us. It is our own unique experience with God out of which the overflow is love for and gratitude to God who has done so much for us as we express to Him our thanks.

David’s prayer was personal.

David’s praise was also *perpetual*. It was every day and it would be forever. For eternity he would praise the name of God. Just thinking about God’s name ushered in praise from David. In Scripture a person’s name spoke of his or her character or attributes. David praised God for His character, His being. His name brought reverence from David and the thought of His name would bring perpetual praise.

Do we revere the name of God to praise Him?

Turn to Exodus 3:13-15.

Moses was taking care of the family flock when he saw something that compelled him to investigate. It was a very strange phenomenon. He saw a bush burning but wasn’t consumed by the fire. As he got closer, the voice of God spoke from the bush and told him to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. God then said He was commissioning Moses to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites from bondage to their inheritance. Moses was a bit skeptical that they would believe him. After all God had been silent for 400 years. How would they know it was God or why should they listen to Him? Should they expect that God would all of a sudden speak to them when He had ignored

their cries for all those years? They might not be convinced it was God. What if they don't believe me? Who should I say sent me?

Exodus 3:13-15

If, in their skepticism, they were to wonder if it was truly God sending Moses, Moses was to respond to in this way: "I AM has sent you." Scholars believe "I AM" in the Hebrew is a play on the word for God. It's similar in construct and means the self-sufficient One. It doesn't mean I was or I will be. "I AM" means He has always existed and speaks of the relationship He has with His people. It is by that name, "I AM" the people of Israel would know Him. It is that name David would exalt forever. His praise is perpetual.

From this Psalm let's consider four reasons for David to give God praise.

God is praised for His greatness

God is praised for His grace

God is praised for His goodness

God is praised for His glory

In verses 1 and 2 David is going to praise God. Beginning in verse 3 we see why.

I. GOD IS PRAISED FOR HIS GREATNESS – vs. 3-7

What is it about the Lord's greatness that makes Him worthy of praise?

A. His Greatness Is Beyond Comprehension – v. 3

We sometimes sing *How Great is Our God*.

How great is our God

Sing with me

How great is our God

And all will see

How great, how great is our God

Name above all names

Worthy of all praise

My heart will sing

How great is our God

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Think of His mighty deeds – parting the Red Sea, Creation, the 10 plagues, providing manna 40 years in the wilderness, etc.

When we speak of greatness we speak of someone being superior, impressive or remarkable.

Romans 11:33-36

The Message says that He is way over our heads. We can't understand His reasoning or His actions. No one can plumb the depths of His wisdom.

Just because we can't know why God allows war or illness or suffering or evil doesn't diminish His greatness. If we know anything about God from what we read about Him in Scripture, we have to believe in His greatness. No, we can't ever know everything there is about God, but that should not be a deterrent to praising Him, in fact it should be all the more reason to glorify Him. Quite frankly what God is worth praising if we can know everything there is to know about Him?

Charles Spurgeon wrote: "Praise should be like its object – great praise for a great God. There is no part of Jehovah's greatness which is not worthy of great praise."

His greatness is beyond our comprehension.

B. His Greatness Is Commendable – vs. 4-7

1. His greatness was to be proclaimed openly – v. 4

Commendable means to put into the trust or care of another; to mention as worthy of attention, to commit to one's charge.

In other words David is saying that all the great and mighty acts of God are to be entrusted to the next generation to pass on to each succeeding generation adding to the list their own observations of God's greatness.

Exodus 15 - song of Moses after Egypt's defeat
Deuteronomy 6:5-9 – use every opportunity
Joshua 4:1-6

Are we passing on to our children and their children God's mighty deeds? Are we passing on to the next generation of the church how great God is?

Here's what happens when we don't pass on the truth about God's greatness.
Judges 2:6-19

I think there is a direct correlation between the prevailing entitlement mentality and ingratitude in our nation today and the lack of passing on God's greatness.

God is great and greatly to be praised and His greatness is unsearchable. Let's pass it on.
Sing it with me:

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

His greatness is to be proclaimed openly from one generation to the next.

2. His greatness was to be pondered thoughtfully –
v. 5

We are told in verse 5 to “meditate” on God's “wonderful works”.

We are told numerous times to meditate on God's Word, but here we are told to meditate on God's wonderful works. Are we in such a rush that we have forgotten what it is to be still and know God? Take time to think about God's wonderful works.
His salvation
His provision
His creation
Psalm 139:14 “I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

Psalm 150:2 “Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness.”

In the wilderness the Israelites had a daily reminder of God's provision in the manna He provided them each day – for 40 years. It was a perfect example of God's promise to take care of them if they obeyed Him. And yet they complained because they didn't have any meat. They complained that they had it better in Egypt eating leeks and onions. When you begin reading in Joshua we find that the very first day they ate from the produce of the Promised Land once they crossed over the Jordan River, that was the last day they ate manna.

Everything we have is a gift from God, so ponder thoughtfully where it came from and offer praise for the greatness of His hand to provide you with things that are both tangible and intangible.

Think about God and who He is.
Think about God and what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.
Think about God and His promises.
Think about God and His provisions.
Reflect on them, think deeply about them, ponder thoughtfully His greatness.

3. His greatness is to be praised publicly –
vs. 6-7

Psalm 149:1-2; 5-6a “Praise the Lord. Sing to

the Lord a new song, His praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.”

“Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths.”

Psalm 34:1-3 “I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together.”

I want to get back to having testimony time during communion. We know it’s coming every first Sunday of the month. All month long we should be rehearsing God’s greatness so share publicly.

God is great and greatly to be praised, His greatness can’t be comprehended, but that shouldn’t keep us from passing what we do know and experience to others so that they can both see and know it first hand as well.

I have friends on Facebook who will post 3 things each day that they are thankful for.

Praise God publicly.

God is to be praised for His greatness.

II. GOD IS PRAISED FOR HIS GRACE – v. 8

Grace is His unmerited favor toward us, giving to us what we don’t deserve. From Ephesians 2:4-5 we come to understand that grace is distinct from mercy and love.

Mercy is God looking at our lost condition and being moved enough to want to do something about it. We need a Savior and He provided one for us. If God’s mercy could have saved us then Christ’s death was unnecessary. Mercy alone can’t save.

Love is the motivation behind God saving us by sending His Son to die on our behalf. But love can’t save either because while as great as love is, it

doesn’t satisfy His own just and righteous demands.

So while God might desire to save us out of His love and mercy, both fall short because He is also both holy and just. A payment was necessary to pay the debt of sin. Salvation was provided for us by grace and grace alone. God acted freely on our behalf by sending His Son as our sacrifice without anything we could offer. For it to be by grace man could do nothing for it, except believe it and receive it by faith. Otherwise it would not be grace.

David pointed to the grace of God, to His compassion, to the slowness of His anger and to His love.

Maybe he thought about God’s grace when as a young man he was anointed to be king.

Maybe he thought about God’s compassion when he remembered the ordeal with his son Absalom.

Maybe he thought about the slowness of God’s anger when he recalled his adultery and murder.

Maybe he thought about the love of God when considered the covenant God made that his kingdom would be unending.

The history of Israel, in fact our own history is filled with evidence of God’s grace, compassion, longsuffering, and love.

God is all those things to the weak, the weary, the worrisome, the wanderer and the wayward.

He is all those things to the suffering, the sorrowful, the sinner, and the saint.

Jeremiah made that clear when he wrote that God’s compassion’s never cease. Lamentations 3:22-23

Peter stated that when it came to salvation that God is slow to anger not wanting anyone to perish.

John reminds us that God is love while in Jeremiah we read that God has loved us with an everlasting love.

Nehemiah 9:16-21

Jonah 4:2

God in His character is unchanging and eternal.
His grace is something to give Him praise for.

III. GOD IS PRAISED FOR HIS GOODNESS – vs. 9, 13b-18

His goodness speaks of His benevolence.

Allen Gardiner was a missionary to Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. Throughout his ministry he experienced many physical infirmities and hardships. He died at the age of 57 of disease and starvation. When they found his body, his diary was next to him. It recounted experiences with hunger, thirst, wounds and loneliness. In spite of the many hardships he experienced his last entry paints a much different picture of his spirit. To many it would be reason to give up hope, but his last entry, written with a shaking hand read: “I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God.”

God is good all the time.
All the time God is good.

Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsie lived in the nightmarish conditions of the Nazi concentration camp. It was in that environment that her sister, Betsie succumbed to starvation. In her post war years when she would travel around sharing her testimony, Corrie ten Boom would speak of folks who would tell her that God was good to them because it didn't rain on their church picnic. She would remind them that even in the horrors of the concentration camp God was no less good. She remembers a time when there was not only darkness in the camp but also in her heart. Betsie reminded her that even there God had not forgotten them and then would quote “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.”

In our passage we read in verses 17-19 “The Lord is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made. The Lord is near to all who call on Him,

to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them.”

Nothing God does is from an evil intent. His actions and attitudes are always with pure or right motives. He is good and loving to His people and He is worthy of our praise.

There is one more reason David gave praise. It's found back in verse 11.

IV. GOD IS PRAISED FOR HIS GLORY – v. 11

The Westminster Catechism begins with an important question. What is the chief end of man? The answer is that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
We are to glorify His name throughout the earth.

Charles Spurgeon says that we shouldn't let our praise be “buried in the cemetery of silence, or in the grave of ingratitude.”

There is so much in which to give glory to God. Revelation 19:1, 6b-7a “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God...Hallelujah! For our God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory!’”

Composed in 1741, the *Messiah* remains the best known and most loved musical composition of George Frideric Handel. Charles Jennens wrote the three part scriptural text in an effort to refute the belief held by Deists regarding divine intervention in human affairs. Essentially they denied the deity of Christ. Jennens wanted to show through Scripture that Christ was the Messiah. The focus of part two is on the Passion of Christ ending with arguably the greatest piece of the entire composition, the *Hallelujah Chorus*.

Jennens gave the text to Handel who wrote the musical score in 24 days.

The repetitive nature of singing the word hallelujah over and over and over is not just to fill space or even to increase the dramatic effect of the score. When you come to the *Hallelujah Chorus* Jennens was so moved by Christ all he could do was sing hallelujah.

The word hallelujah is the highest form of praise that we can use in worshipping God. It's a compound word in Hebrew. Hallelu and Jah. In its root meaning hallelu is the word for praise. Jah is a shortened variation of Jehovah. Taken together the word literally means "praise ye the Lord".

The Old Testament uses three names for God. Elohim is the general term for God. Adonai means Master or Lord. Jehovah was a sacred or precious name used for God among the Jewish people.

When a scribe was copying the text and came to the word Jehovah he would stop and go through a special hand washing ceremony and then get a new quill to write that very sacred name. It was so sacred they would only write down the consonants and never include the vowels for fear that in pronouncing it incorrectly they would blaspheme God in some way. So whenever you are singing or saying that word hallelujah, think about how sacred that word is. In it you are giving God glory.

At the end of his manuscript Handel wrote the letters "SDG"—*Soli Deo Gloria*, "To God alone the glory".

Working on this message I began to hum a little chorus from back in the '70's written by Chuck Girard.

SOMETIMES ALLELUIA,
SOMETIMES PRAISE THE LORD

SOMETIMES GENTLY SINGING,
OUR HEARTS IN ONE ACCORD

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David gives four reasons why he was thankful, why he could praise God.
It is his hallelujah chorus.

Considering his list, what are you thankful for today?

Verse 21