

I Give Thanks To You, O Lord, For Your Glory is Great

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Psalm 138. This is God's word.

1 Of David. I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; 2 I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. 3 On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased. 4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth, 5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. 6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar. 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you and praise you for this, your word, and we ask that as we come to this Psalm, we pray that you would open our hearts and our minds to the truth of your word, that you would apply it to each one of us as we have need. We thank you that you brought us here and that we can come, and so we come to be taught by you. Teach us by your Spirit, search our hearts and know us, work in our lives for your glory and for our good we ask in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

It goes without saying the banner behind me is probably helpful as well, Thanksgiving is on its way. For many people, Thanksgiving is a great day. For hosts or hostesses, it can be a stressful day as food is prepared and as anticipation of family and friends come, and sometimes people don't get along as well as we want them to. It can be stressful. It can be difficult. It can be a time where there's tension as well as joy, so kind of a joyful tension, perhaps.

It's an interesting time but it forces us to have to be able to think about our own hearts, our own attitudes. Sometimes we just push that away, we just sort of deal with things and try to get through the day and get through the time and have as much enjoyment as we can and then we move on, and we think about being thankful, we think about the things we're thankful for. As we get older, we are thankful for our health which is really a significant thing, but so often things that we are thankful for, they often seem to be kind of shallow. I want us to see David's heart as he pours his heart out through this Psalm. Part of the time I'll quote from the ESV and part of the time I'll quote from my own translation of this Psalm so you'll pick up on some nuances and some differences, but I want you to think about your own heart attitude as we go into this season, and we often think Thanksgiving kind of begins the season of moving into Advent and then we just kind of go through the motions of all kinds of things, it's good for us to be reminded of where we are personally and spiritually, what's really going on in our lives and our attitudes toward the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Here David in this Psalm really begins a section and Derek Kidner points this out for us, that this begins a group of eight Psalms of David bringing to its conclusion his share in the Psalter. Although nearly half of the collection, we are again aware of the presence of enemies and of the special gratitude of one who has been much threatened but much protected on David as the author, that here the Psalmist, David, points us to the reality of his life, the struggles that he had, but also the joys that he brings to his life.

Here you notice as he begins, verse 1, "Of David. I praise you with all my heart; before the gods I sing to you." Here David acknowledges that he is in a world where there are many other gods that are worshiped. He begins with humility, of praising the Lord, and it is with his whole heart that he offers praise to the Lord, and it's before all the other gods that are worshiped by nations around him. He knows that there is only one true God but yet he also recognizes that there are spiritual forces that are at work around him, people who want to destroy him, circumstances in which he finds himself, knowing that God is good, God is present, God is at work.

He begins the Psalm with boldness, really with no fear and here the ESV translates, "I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart." Did you notice I translated a little differently, "I praise you with all my heart," because in reality it's better to translate that word as "praise," but with a nuance. Listen to the theological wordbook of the Old Testament. The primary meaning of this root, this verb, "to praise or to thank," is to acknowledge or confess sin actually. That's the primary use of this verb so "to confess sin or to confess God's character and works or man's character." So at the root of this word is the concept of confession. It is to declare something. So if we just go through life without really declaring the greatness of God in our own hearts or out loud, we know that we believe it but here there's an emphasis on the declaration, the confession of praise to God.

This is one of the uses, the second concept of the use of this verb was predominantly employed to express one's public proclamation or declaration, confession of God's attributes and his works. The concept is at the heart of meaning of praise. Praise is a confession or declaration of who God is and what he does. The term is most often

translated "to thank" in English, but is not really a proper rendering according to Vesterman. He would suggest that in the Old Testament there is no real verb that is "to thank" in the way that we employ the word. We say thanks to people, we say thanks to God. We just say, "Thank you," and for us it's something that's really natural for us, perhaps some of us hard to say, but it's something natural that we understand. In Hebrew, in reference to God, there is no word just to thank, it employs the concept of praise. So it's worship. It is the worship or praise of a thankful heart. That's a better way to understand what's really going on in this Psalm, a better way to understand what is really being said here. So it's unique. It's praising the Lord with a thankful heart and draws David, the Psalmist, and us into a sense of worship. He's pouring out his heart.

Now I want you to consider as you think about that, notice in the first three verses really, David focuses on saying, in effect, "I praise the Lord because he has changed me." Look at verse 3, again, my translation, I think I bring it out just a little bit more of what's really here. "On the day I called and you answered me, you caused to embolden me with strength in my soul." That's a literal translation. God caused to embolden David with strength in his soul. That's why David is praising him. He has been strengthened in the very core of his being in a unique way.

When you think about salvation and conversion, we think about what really happens. If we go to Acts 2, we recognize that those who had followed Christ were gathered together in the Upper Room and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them with tongues of fire and they go out and they speak in different languages to all the people that can hear them. They have been emboldened because they have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They have been made alive in a unique and a powerful way in the very core of their being. Their hearts have been changed.

If you think of Acts 4 after Peter and John have been arrested and beaten and released, when the disciples pray together, they pray, chapter 4, verses 23 through 31, with boldness and for boldness. Verse 31, "when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." Their hearts were changed. They were transformed. That's what genuine salvation does for us, it transforms us. It changes us.

2 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul talks about how he preaches the Gospel and thinks in terms I think, of in synagogues and reflects back on the fact that when Moses went into the very presence of God and came away from that, his face shone and so they put a veil over his face and he talks about the fact that people that don't have the Holy Spirit still have a veil. They don't see clearly. They don't really fully understand.

David thinks about how God's faithfulness to him has emboldened him. God has worked in his life. When he went before the armies of the Philistines and the Israelites encamped against each other and their great warrior, Goliath, came out to provoke the armies of the living God, David was emboldened by God's Spirit and recognized that Goliath was attacking God himself. David was a man after God's own heart.

Augustine of Hippo, grew up with a Christian mother and a pagan father, and as a young man, he was engaged in loose living. I'll let you fill in the blanks. Very loose living. At one point, he had gone to Milan to hear Ambrose speak and as he listened to him, he was intrigued and would even say that his heart was somehow warmed, but still didn't really understand the Gospel. But as he sat out in a garden, he heard over the wall a child's voice crying out, "Take up and read! Take up and read!" And recognizing this is not a children's rhyme he was familiar with, and so he thought, "Perhaps God is calling to me." So he took up the Bible and he turned to the first place that he opened was Romans 13:11-14 and challenged from those words to wake up from his sleep, spiritual sleep, and he would say later it was as though a light shone inside of him.

D. L. Moody was a shoe salesman in the back of the store wrapping up shoes when a Sunday School teacher came to the store burdened that D. L. Moody didn't understand the Gospel and wanting to tell him the truth of God. So the shoe salesman, D. L. Moody, was confronted with the Gospel and put his faith in Christ and his life was transformed as well as the lives of many others.

Verses 1 and 2 here are really the voice of a converted man. "I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." Verse 3 gives us that sense of his being emboldened, empowered by the work of God's Spirit; that God had taken his heart of stone and given him a heart of flesh.

So I want you to stop for a moment and think how has the Gospel changed you? What are the changes that you've seen in your life? And it's hard because we often will be really hard on ourselves, we'll focus more on what we need to do. That's not all bad but we need to not forget what God has done; how he has changed us; how he has worked in our lives; how he has influenced us. And maybe there are those times, as well, when we think, "Well, you know, I really ought to do this but..." If we have the Holy Spirit, why would we say "but"? Maybe rather to pray, "Lord, give me strength to do what I know is right. Continue to embolden me, strengthen me, empower me to serve you."

Think of Philippians 2:12 and 13. We are told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. It is not work out your conversion, it's your growth in grace. We are to be people that apply our hearts and lives to continued spiritual growth; to know that God's Spirit is at work in the lives of all of us who trust in him as our Lord and Savior; to know that he is emboldening us, if that's a word. He is giving us strength and that as we work our salvation out, he's at work in us to will and to work his good pleasure.

Notice he goes on, "I praise the Lord because he is changing the world around me." I want you to consider David recognizes that he's been changed in the first three verses, in verses 4 to 6, he recognizes that God is changing the world. Notice what he says, "All the kings of the earth shall give you praise, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth, and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD."

God is at work powerfully. David was able as a king to have an impact on surrounding nations. Solomon, his son, even more so. So many kings and queens came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, to recognize that there truly is a God in Israel. And the Egyptians when the Israelites were being freed by the Lord through Moses, they saw the power of the living God. Then as the exodus continued and as they went into the Promised Land, how all the nations trembled recognizing the power that God was exerting through his people. We see that all throughout the Old Testament and here David acknowledges and recognizes that there will be a time when all the kings of the earth, all the nations of the earth will be powerfully changed by the word of God.

God is working in the world around us. Sometimes we look at the things that are going on in our nation or the things that are going on in the world, and we become discouraged, we become overwhelmed. We may not know what God is doing but David reminds us, "God is working. We need not be afraid." We trust him. We pray. God is at work and we can rejoice that he is.

But notice too, verse 6, "For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar." The Lord sees all of us. He knows every one of us. He knows our hearts. He knows where we are. Notice where Psalm 138 sits. Psalm 137 would have been written many years after David's death and so David didn't arrange the order of the Psalms, but Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon, we laid down our hearts and we wept when they asked for us songs of Zion." And Psalm 139, "You knit me together in my mother's womb." Again, a Psalm of David.

The Lord knows us. He sees us. He sees what we deal with. He sees what we endure. He sees the prayers of our hearts. He sees our hurts, our brokenness, our needs. He knows us and for we who trust in him, we have nothing to be ultimately worried about. We know he will get us through these difficult days. But it also says that he sees those that are haughty; those that are proud in their own eyes; those that are arrogant. He sees them from afar. He is not close to them and so he sees those who would rise up against his people, those who are out to do for themselves. God is not unaware and so we need not be afraid.

God's at work in this constantly changing world that we live in and so we continue to pray, asking him to work, asking him for the work of his kingdom. This second section gives us the idea of the call to pray for God's kingdom to come, for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven because we know that he's at work. He has transformed us and even as we look at our own lives and think, "Yeah, but there's so much more that needs to be done in my life," there's a lot that needs to be done in the world too, but we know that God is working.

Then notice the Lord says, or David really says, "I praise the Lord because he will fulfill his purpose for me," verses 7 and 8. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble," or distress, "you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands." Doesn't that

remind you, in a sense, of the 23rd Psalm? The words are a little different. The idea here is, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even though I walk in the midst of trouble, distress, difficulty, you preserve my life." We can make this our Psalm as well. This can be our prayer, that we, with David, can declare the knowledge of our own struggles, our own difficulties, the troubles that we have but also the knowledge that the Lord will preserve our lives. He will sustain us. He will take care of us. He will deliver us.

This idea for "preserve my life" is "revive my life; make it live again; that you are the one who revives me." Do you ever feel worn out? Overwhelmed? So tired you just want to give up? The Lord is the one who will revive you. Imagine what it would be like for David looking back on his life if this is after he's king, and remembering the days when he fled from Saul, running in the desert for his life. There had to be times he was worn out but the knowledge that the Lord would revive him and give him strength.

You see throughout this Psalm there's a re-occurrence of the idea of "your steadfast love." That's the Hebrew word "chesed; lovingkindness; steadfast love; covenant love." It's a unique word of God's unfailing love that he gives to his people. "The LORD," verse 8, "will fulfill his purpose for me; your covenant love, O LORD, endures forever." For those who trust in the Lord, we know his love will never end.

As David praises the Lord in this Psalm, he recognizes God's love will never fail him; it will never end; it will be forever. But I want you to notice he also sees that God's covenant love changes things. It transforms reality. That's what this Psalm is about. David is saying, "Lord, you've changed me. You emboldened me. You made me strong. You give me strength in my soul that wasn't there before. You change the kings of the earth, therefore, you change the nations of the earth, therefore, you change the earth. And what your purpose for me is, it will be accomplished. I don't need to be afraid. Lord, you've got this. You know what you're doing. I can trust you at all times, in all things, in every area of my life. I don't need to be afraid." Did things go exactly the way David wanted them to? No. Do things go exactly the way you want them to? I don't think so. Me either. But we can know that the Lord will get us through the difficult times of our lives; that he will continue to be at work; that we can trust him at all times; that we can rest in him and know his grace and mercy; to know that he is the one who empowers our souls. Even as we go to Thanksgiving with relatives that don't always get along, we can know that he's with us.

That Sunday School teacher of D. L. Moody as he walked to the shoe store, he had doubts. "Maybe I shouldn't do this now. Maybe now is not the right time. Maybe I'll embarrass him in front of all his coworkers and they'll make fun of him and it will have a worse effect. Maybe I shouldn't say anything to him about faith in Christ now. Maybe I should do this later." And he hesitated. I think he even turned back a little bit and then decided, "No, I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna do this now."

As believers, our souls have been emboldened by the work of God's Spirit. We are different than before we came to faith in Christ. When you look at verse 8, verses 7 and

8, "Though I walk in the midst of distress, you will revive me; against the wrath of my enemies, you will stretch out your hand and you will save me with your right hand. Yahweh will bring to an end what concerns me. Yahweh, your lovingkindness, your steadfast love is forever. From the doing or the performing of your hand, do not cease." The Lord has stretched out his hand. He stretches out his hand with power to work and to answer. The Lord Jesus stretched out his hands and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin and it's his death on the cross and his payment for our sin that sets us free from the bondage of sin and death and that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' death, he sends the Spirit to come to us to make us alive, to embolden us. So now as God's people, we, with the believers in the early church, should pray that the Lord would make us bold to proclaim his truth, to live for him and to recognize that he's the one who has transformed us so that now by his grace we could live for him.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you and praise you for your great love that you have transformed us, all of us who trust in you as Lord and Savior. Father, we thank you that you extend salvation to all who will call upon you, that we can confess our sin and ask for your forgiveness and know that you will take us as your own. Father, we pray for friends who are here who don't know you as Lord and Savior, work in their hearts, draw them to yourself. And Father, for us who know you as Lord and Savior, embolden us to declare with David this praise of a thankful heart, and to live for you that you might be honored and glorified in all that we do and say. Use us for your glory, we ask, for we pray in Jesus' holy name. Amen.