

Commentary on Psalm 136-150

by Chuck Smith

The sermons focus on the importance of giving thanks, the psalms of captivity, the magnification of God's Word, and God's omniscience and omnipresence.

Scripture: Psalm 136:1, Psalm 137:1, Psalm 138:1-2, Psalm 139:1-2, Psalm 140:1-2, Psalm 141:1-2, Psalm 142:1, Psalm 143:1, Psalm 144:1, Psalm 145:1-3

Topics: "God's Mercy", "Praise and Worship"

Description

Chuck Smith delivers a profound commentary on Psalms 136-150, emphasizing the enduring mercy of God as a central theme throughout the psalms. He highlights the importance of gratitude and praise, as seen in Psalm 136, where the refrain 'For His mercy endureth forever' is repeated, reminding the congregation of God's goodness and creative power. Smith also reflects on the emotional depth of the psalms, particularly in Psalm 137, where the sorrow of the Israelites in Babylonian captivity is palpable. He encourages believers to recognize God's omnipresence and mercy, urging them to seek a deeper relationship with Him through prayer and worship. Ultimately, Smith calls for a more uninhibited expression of praise, aligning with the psalmist's exhortation to worship God in various forms.

Transcript

Shall we turn now our Bibles to Psalm 136. Throughout the one-hundred-and-thirty-sixth psalm, we have the repeated phrase, "For His mercy endureth forever." And this is repeated in each of the verses throughout the entire psalm. And so he begins the psalm by an exhortation of giving thanks.

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever (Psa 136:1).

Over and over in the psalms, this is a repeated kind of a refrain. Remember this is their songbook, and so one of the things of which they were constantly singing was the goodness of God and the mercies of God.

O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever (Psa 136:2-4).

And now he goes on to exhort praise and thanksgiving for God's creative acts. And he starts out in the general act of creation. And then he lists many of the creative acts of God.

To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The moon and stars to rule by night (Psa 136:5-9):

And now he commands the praise and thanksgiving to God for His special blessings upon the nation Israel and for the creation of that nation.

To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: And brought Israel from among them: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea. To him that led his people through the wilderness. To him which smote great kings: And slew famous kings: Sihon the king of the Amorites: Og the king of Bashan: And gave their land for a heritage: Even a heritage unto Israel. Who remembered us in our low estate: And hath redeemed us from our enemies. Who giveth food to all flesh. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever (Psa 136:10-26).

And now in order that you might get sort of an idea of how many of these songs were sung, in a song such as this, quite often the men would take the first part and the women would answer in the refrain, "For His mercy endureth forever." And so, much as we think some of the psalms where the women have sort of an after part, these particular psalms were written, designed for this after-part effect. So, in order that we might get sort of the idea of it, how about the fellows reading together the first part and the women answering each time, "For His mercy endureth forever." And you'll get the idea of how these songs were actually sung, as this is actually a songbook of the Hebrew people. Okay, fellows?

"O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever: And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever: And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever (Psa 136:1-26).

Now the purpose of the psalm was to impress upon you a certain thought or idea. And I think you get the idea. By the time you've sung this through, you get the impression that God's mercy endureth forever. And in all situations, under all circumstances, God's mercy endureth forever. And it's something that comes across as you go through the psalm; it's something that's impressed then upon your heart. And that was

the purpose, to impress truth upon the hearts of the people.

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 is a psalm of captivity written many years after David's time, written by one of those who were captive in Babylon.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For they that carried us away captive required us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. But how shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall be he, that rewards thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones (Psa 137:1-9).

So the psalm reflecting the Babylonian captivity where the Babylonians required them to, "Sing some of your songs." Now singing is a very important part of Jewish life. One thing I like about the Israelis even today is their music. It has such life to it. And they have big music festivals over there all the time. We always try to purchase the records from these music festivals, even though I don't understand Hebrew; I enjoy listening to the music. There's such life to it. Quite often our bus drivers and guides will get together in the evening and they'll have a time of singing. And it's always exciting, these evenings of song. Their songs are exciting songs. There's just a lot of action, a lot of rhythm, a lot of exuberance in their song. You know, they, "Hava nagila, Hava nagila," you know, and they really get into it. You can feel it, and these guys just really love to sing. It's a beautiful experience.

But as in Ecclesiastes, there's a time to sing. And there are times when you don't feel like singing. And while they were captives in Babylon and they were thinking of the desolation of Jerusalem, it was hard to sing of the joys of the land, of the blessings, of the prosperity, of the goodness of God. And so while in Babylon, the songs were silent. "We hung our harps on the willow trees. We just sat down by the river and wept when we would think of Jerusalem." Their last memories of Jerusalem was the smoldering smoke ascending from a city that had been devastated. Looking back they could see Solomon's once glorious temple flattened. And as they saw the desolation, and it was implanted in their minds, now remembering it, hard to sing.

Now the psalmist, first of all, takes off against the Edomites. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau. They were sort of perennial enemies of the Jews. Many battles against them and they would often join with anybody who would attack Israel. They would attack, too. Anytime Israel would be attacked by any of the aggressors from the north, they'd always attack from the south. And when the Babylonians were attacking, they came from Edom and they were encouraging the Babylonians in the destruction of Jerusalem. "Raze it, raze it to its foundation. Wipe it out!" "And God, you reward them. Take care of them for that." And then, because God's Word had predicted the fall of Babylon, the psalmist, because of all of the injuries suffered by the people at the hands of the Babylonians, the psalmist with glee actually looked forward to the destruction of Babylon, the enemy of God.

Now in the New Testament, we are taught to love our enemies. These expressions of the psalmist really are not expressions of God in the sense that God never delights in judgment. God never delights in

bringing His judgment upon a people or upon a nation. And yet, we so often want to see the judgment of God fall upon the head of the wicked. We can hardly wait for the day of God's judgment. But God is not anxious to judge at all. God would much rather show mercy, for His mercy endureth forever. And God delights in mercy.

You remember when God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn that city, the Assyrian capital, of the impending doom, the judgment of God that was coming. Jonah didn't want to go. Why? He was afraid if he went, they might repent and God wouldn't judge them. He wanted to see God's judgment on Assyria. He wanted to see Nineveh wiped out. And so to help ensure God's judgment against them, he tried to take off for England so he could escape the call of God. And later on, when under pressure and duress, he went to Nineveh and they did repent in sackcloth and ashes before the Lord, and God's mercy was extended to them, he got angry with God. Went out and sat under a tree and said, "Okay, God, just wipe me out." And God said, "What's the matter? Is it right for you to be so angry?" "You bet you are. I knew that You were merciful. I knew. I was afraid this was going to happen. They were going to repent and then You weren't going to wipe them out." And he was angry because God's judgment didn't fall. But God isn't anxious to judge.

I think that we oftentimes have a false concept in our mind concerning God, that He is just sort of standing over us with a club, waiting to bash us for the first wrong move. Not so. God is desiring to show His mercy unto you and He's just looking for an excuse. He's just looking for you to give Him an excuse to say, "Well, that's all right. I forgive you." Just looking for you to say, "Oh God, I'm sorry." For His mercy endureth forever.

So the psalmist expresses, actually, a glee in the destruction that is to come upon Babylon, but it is not really the expression of God's heart when the judgment will fall. I'm sure that God always weeps over judgment. We find Jesus looking over the city of Jerusalem and weeping. Why? Because of the judgment that was going to come upon the city. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if you'd only known the things that belong to your peace at least in this thy day. And now they are hid from your eyes, and your little children are going to dashed in the streets" (Luke 19:42, 44). And He's weeping as He speaks of the judgment that is going to. It's not a gleeful thing, "All right, you know, we'll get even with you. You reject Me, you crucify Me. We'll take care of you, you know. We'll put you up on a Roman giblet and see how you like it." Not at all. It's weeping. Weeping because their actions necessitate the judgment of God. But weeping over the judgment. And I'm certain that whenever God is forced to judge that there's always a great sorrow in the heart of God.

Psalm 138

Psalm 138:

I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee. I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name (Psa 138:1-2).

Here David is expressing his praise unto the Lord. Praising God with a whole heart, praising God for His loving-kindness, His truth, and for His Word, that God has magnified His Word above His name. Now, in all the earth there is no name like the name of God.

In the Old Testament times, the Jews held this name in such high esteem that they would never pronounce the name of God. They felt that no human lips were worthy to pronounce His name. And it came to pass that as they would copy the scriptures, when they came to the name of God, they would only copy the consonants, leaving out the vowels, so that a person would not even pronounce the name in his mind as he was reading because just the consonants were unpronounceable. And so in reading of the scriptures, when they would come to this name of God, they would just bow their head and worship. Now as we've gone through the Psalms, you've noticed how often it says, "Thy name, O Lord, is above all the earth." "Thy name, O Lord, is to be magnified. Thy name." And all of the emphasis that was put upon the name of God. "The name of the Lord is a high tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

And so they would just put consonants, Y-H-V-H. Try and pronounce it. It's impossible to pronounce. They left out the vowels deliberately so that people would not be tempted to pronounce the name. This was never required of God. This was just sort of something that man by religious tradition picked up on. There are a lot of things that God does not require. Men have just made them religious traditions. And so we follow in the religious traditions of man things that are not necessarily commands or even desires or wishes of God. Man always has to make some kind of religious hocus-pocus out of things, rather than just taking it straight as God dished it out.

And so we do not know for sure the exact pronunciation, but it is thought to be Yahweh. There are some who say Yahovah. And there is theological debate on what is the correct pronunciation, whether it be Yahovah or Yahweh. It seems that Yahovah is more recent type of a pronunciation dating from maybe the sixteenth century and that Yahweh is indeed the correct pronunciation for the name of God. We don't know, but Yah is the contracted form. They would refer to as Yah. And thus, there were many names that had this Yah in it. Yahosaphat, Joshua, Yashua, actually, our Yashua. And this Yashua, the contracted form of Yahweh is salvation, is the name Jesus in Greek. So He was given one of the names of God, Yashua, Jehovah is become our salvation.

Now in the New Testament, we read that, "God has given to Him," that is, Jesus Christ, "the name that is above all names. That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). A name above all names.

Yet, as important as is the name of Jesus, as glorious as is the name of Jesus, yet God has honored His Word. "Thou has magnified Thy Word above even Thy name." Now, as I say, there's nothing more important than the name of God, and yet, He has put His Word even above the name, as far as magnifying His Word. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall never pass away" (Luke 21:33). We need also to honor the Word of God, even as He has honored it.

In the day [the psalmist said] when I cried you answered me, and you strengthened me with strength in my soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth (Psa 138:3-4).

And so referring to the Word of God.

Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD: for great is the glory of the LORD. Though the LORD be high, yet he has respect to the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off (Psa 138:5-6).

Here is, again, a good example of Hebrew poetry. The contrast, "The Lord is high, yet He has great respect to the lowly. But the proud," so you have the contrast here, "He knoweth afar off."

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me: you shall stretch forth your hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endures for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands (Psa 138:7-8).

I love this verse. "The Lord will perfect that," and the word perfect is to complete. God's going to complete that which concerns me. Those things that are of concern to you in your relationship with God, God's going to take care of it. The Lord is going to perfect that which concerns me. For His mercy endures forever. And then the prayer, "Lord, don't forsake." I'm the work of His hands. "God, don't forsake the work of Your own hands."

Psalm 139

Psalm 139, another psalm of David to the chief musician. As David offers this prayer really unto God, declaring, first of all,

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me (Psa 139:1).

Recognizing that God knows me completely and fully.

You know my downsittings and my uprisings (Psa 139:2),

Or you know my ups and my downs.

you understand my thoughts afar off (Psa 139:2).

The Hebrew is, "You understand my thoughts in their origins." Before I even think them, You know them. You know the processes by which they are formed.

You compassed my path and my lying down, you're acquainted with all my ways (Psa 139:3).

"When I'm walking, I'm encircled by You. When I'm lying down, I'm encircled by You. I'm encompassed by You in everything." Paul the apostle said, "For in Him we live, we move, we have our being" (Acts 17:28). The all-prevailing presence of God surrounding my life, God's omnipresence.

There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, you know it altogether (Psa 139:4).

So God knows me so completely.

Thou hast beset me behind and before, and you've laid your hand upon me (Psa 139:5).

I look back and I see the hand of God on my life. I look ahead and I see God's plan. And right now I feel the hand of God upon me. You see, I'm surrounded. My past, present, and my future is all wrapped up with God. "You've beset me behind and before, and Your hand is upon me." The psalmist declared,

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it (Psa 139:6).

What knowledge? Self-knowledge. Very few people really know their selves. We have hidden the truth about ourselves so long that we don't even know the truth about our own self. "The heart is deceitful

above all things, desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Yet God said, "I do search the hearts of man." But who really knows the motive, the true motive behind our actions? And yet, it is God who weighs the motives. We put so much emphasis upon a person's actions. God puts the emphasis upon the attitudes, the motives from which the actions spring. And it is possible, very possible for people to have right actions with wrong motives. And God's looking at the motive.

"Take heed to yourself," Jesus said, "that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of men" (Matthew 6:1). In other words, that should not be your motive, to be recognized by men. That's why I'm doing my righteous thing, so people can see me. You've got to be careful that that isn't your motive. For Jesus said, "I say unto you, you have your reward" (Matthew 6:2).

Now he tells about people who were doing the right thing. They were giving to God. They were praying. They were fasting. But yet, they were doing it always with the wrong motive, and thus, no reward from God. No recognition from God for what they were doing. For God weighs the heart. God is checking the attitude, the motives by which I do things. And the Bible says that one day, "we are all to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things that we've done in our body, whether they be good or evil" (II Corinthians 5:10). And our works are all going to be tried by fire, of what manner or sort they are. So all of the works that a person has done for God. "Oh Lord, weren't we doing this? Weren't we doing that? Weren't we big stars and we were on TV and we were doing all these wonderful things for You." And Jesus said, "Hey, I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity." The whole motive was wrong. The motive was to receive the recognition and the glory, the applause, the praise of man. "So take heed to yourself," Jesus said, "how you do your righteousness, that you don't do it with the motive of being seen of men."

So here the psalmist declares, "Such knowledge too much for me; I cannot attain it."

Now whither shall I go from thy presence or from thy Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there: but if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there (Psa 139:7-8).

The omnipresence of God filling the universe. There is no place that you can go and escape the presence of God. "In Him we live, we move, we have our being" (Acts 17:28).

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night will be light about me. Yea, the darkness does not hide from you; but the night shines as the day: and the darkness and the light are both alike unto thee (Psa 139:9-12).

In other words, with God there is no darkness. There is no hiding in darkness. It makes no difference to God. He can see just as well at night as He can during the day. Turn the lights out and hide from God. No, it doesn't make any difference. God can see us. Light and darkness are the same to Him.

For you have possessed my reins: you cover me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: and marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well (Psa 139:13-14).

Fearfully and wonderfully made. More and more we're discovering how wonderfully made we are made. The human body. There's a new book entitled, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made. I recommend the book. It's just excellent reading for you. Written by a doctor who spent many years as a missionary doctor in a leprosarium and has done his most recent work back at Carville, Louisiana in the leprosarium there, which

they no longer call leprosarium. It's an institute for the study of Hansen's disease. And it's an excellent book. I think you'll enjoy it as he, from a medical standpoint, delves into the marvels of the human body. I'm fearfully and wonderfully made, and the title of the book is Fearfully and Wonderfully Made.

My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them (Psa 139:15-16).

In other words, God knew me completely before I was ever born. When I was still just chemicals. God knew me completely.

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you (Psa 139:17-18).

God's thoughts for me, how precious they are. How great is the sum. If I should number them, more than the sand. I love to go down to the beach and just take and get a handful of sand and just open up the bottom of my hand and let it just drop on down and form a pile. And watch those grains of sand fall. I think there's something therapeutic about it. Just feels good. But also as the grains of sand are falling, I think, "Wow, God's thoughts concerning me, if I could number them, are more than the sand of the sea." Each one of those little grains of sand represent one of God's thoughts concerning me. God's thinking about me all the time. And then God said, "My thoughts towards you are good, not evil" (Jeremiah 29:11). And so I drop a few little piles of sand on the beach and then I just look up at the beach and see all the grains of sand and think, "Oh my, how wonderful, Lord. How precious are Thy thoughts of me."

The psalmist then speaks of the wicked. God is going to destroy the wicked. Therefore I want to depart from wicked men. I don't want to keep company with evil men.

For they speak against God wickedly, they take his name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you? am I not grieved with those that rise up against you? I hate them with a perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies (Psa 139:20-22).

The psalmist said. And then his prayer, that is, his petition. The whole thing is prayer. This is now the petition:

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts (Psa 139:23):

Who is the man who prays, "Search me, O God?" He's the man who understands and knows that he doesn't know himself. The man who recognizes that he really doesn't know himself is the man who prays, "Search me, O God, and know my thoughts. And know my heart. Try me. My heart is deceitful. My heart is desperately wicked. Lord, know my heart. Try me. Know my thoughts."

And see if there be some wicked way in me (Psa 139:24),

Because You're going to destroy the wicked. I don't want to be wicked. See if there is something there, Lord, that is displeasing to You.

Now the work of the Holy Spirit is not only revealing Christ to us, but revealing ourselves to us. How often the Holy Spirit reveals to me the truth about myself. My reaction, my response to a situation. The Holy Spirit will say, "All right, Chuck, now that was wrong. That wasn't Christ-like. That wasn't a Christ-like spirit.

You weren't responding in love. You were angry with them." And I usually say, "Yes I am, and I have a right to be." Then He starts dealing with me as He reveals these areas of my life that are not yet brought to the cross. Not yet brought into conformity to Jesus Christ. Those areas of self that are still there that He is desiring to give me victory over. The Holy Spirit's work is that of revealing to us those areas of our lives that are displeasing to God. And then the prayer ends.

lead me in the way everlasting (Psa 139:24).

Lead me in the path of life. Lead me in the way of everlasting life. There's one thing I don't want to be deceived about, and that is my eternal destiny. How many, many people are deceived concerning their eternal destiny because they're trusting in the word of some man. They're trusting in the word of some religious leader. Some maybe charismatic leader who has a lot of charisma, personal charisma, and personal magnetism and whatever these things are. And they are encouraging people to follow after them, engaging in brainwashing techniques. Making zombies out of their followers. And how many people are blindly following them today thinking, being assured that this is the path of life.

"Everybody else is wrong. We're the only ones who have the truth. We're the only ones walking in the light. All of the churches are wrong. They're all lying to you. None of them are telling you the truth. We're the only ones who have discovered the truth." And people blindly following them. And even within the churches, how many people have come to just trust in the church, church membership, or infant baptism. And they're deceived as to their eternal destiny. "Lead me in the way everlasting." I don't want to be fooled on this. I don't want my heart to be deceived on this issue. I want to make sure that I'm in the way everlasting. "For there is a way that seems right unto man, but the end of it is death" (Proverbs 14:12). I don't want to be in that way, thinking that I'm right and landing up in the pit.

Psalms 140

Psalms 140, another psalm of David.

Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man; preserve me from the violent man; Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings. The proud have hid a snare for me, the cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set traps for me (Psa 140:1-5).

Gins is traps.

I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle. Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves. As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him. I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor (Psa 140:6-12).

I'm glad I'm not David's enemy. He really asks God to take care of them. But it is so typical of so many of the psalms of David where his concern is about those who have conspired against him. David is the type of man that you either loved very much or hated very much. It was hard to just have a passive attitude

towards David. He had many deep, loyal friends, but he also had many avowed enemies that were seeking to destroy him. And so he seems to be constantly asking God for help against his enemy and then asking God's judgment really to fall upon the head of his enemies.

Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence (Psa 140:13).

Psalm 141

Psalm 141 is another psalm of David.

LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice (Psa 141:1-2).

Now here David actually begins to spiritualize the offerings of the Old Testament. As he asks the Lord, "And let my prayer be set before Thee as incense." Now incense being offered in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, were actually symbols of prayer. The smoke of the incense, the sweet odor arising symbolized the prayers of the saints coming before God as a sweet smelling incense. In other words, God loving and enjoying the prayers of the saints.

In the New Testament, the book of Revelation, chapter 5, when Jesus takes the scroll out of the right hand of the Father who sits upon the throne, the twenty-four elders come forth with little golden vials, bowls, that are filled with odors, the scriptures said, which are the prayers of the saints and they offer them before the throne of God. So much as you have in the Old Testament the priest offering the incense in these little bowls swinging from the chain before the altar, so we have it happening in heaven, which, of course, is correct because the earthly tabernacle was a model of the heavenly scene.

God over and over said to Moses, "Now be sure you make it exactly according to the specifications that I gave you because," the Lord declared, "this is a model of heaven." So the priest offering the little golden bowl with the incense and the smoke before the altar of the Lord, the mercy seat there, is symbolic of what happens in heaven as the twenty-four elders offer their incense before the throne. So David is saying now, "Let my prayer, Lord, just be as incense unto Thee. And the lifting up of my hands, let it be just like an evening sacrifice." It's just the lifting up of my hands in worship unto the Lord.

Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; and keep the door of my lips (Psa 141:3).

Oh, yes, Lord, please. How many things I've said that I'd have like to have taken them back before they were even completely out of my mouth. But once spoken, there's no retracting. "God, set a watch before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties. Let the righteous smite me; it will be kindness: let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities (Psa 141:4-5).

"Let the righteous smite me, Lord." That's good for me. That's a kindness. The Bible says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6). Sometimes it's necessary to talk to our friends about personal issues that are hurting. And they hurt when you talk about, but it's faithful as the wounds of a friend. That's kindness.

When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet. Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cuts and splits wood upon the earth. But my eyes are upon thee, O GOD the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute. Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and from the traps of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while that I entirely escape (Psa 141:6-10).

Psalm 142

Psalm 142. This is a prayer of David when he was in the cave. No doubt the cave of Adullam when he was hiding from Saul.

I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my prayer. I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then you knew my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privately laid a trap for me. I looked upon my right hand, and I beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me (Psa 142:1-7).

So the psalm begins so typical of David in a very mournful state, a melancholy depression, but it ends with a note of confidence. "The righteous shall compass me about; Thou shalt deal bountifully with me."

Psalm 143

Psalm 143, another psalm of David.

Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in your faithfulness answer me, and in your righteousness. And enter not into judgment with your servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified (Psa 143:1-2).

God, I don't want justice for me, only for my enemies. For me I want mercy. No one living can be justified before God. Impossible! "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). God said, "I looked over the earth and there is none that doeth good. None that seeketh after God." You say, "That's pretty general." Yes, it is. Encompasses all.

For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has smitten my life down to the ground; he has made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands (Psa 143:3-5).

I remember, I meditate, I muse.

I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsts after thee, as a thirsty land (Psa 143:6).

Here is one of the reasons why David was referred as a man after God's own heart. Because he was thirsting always after God. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Here David describes it. "My soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land."

Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee (Psa 143:7-8).

And now the prayer: deliver me, teach me, lead me, quicken me.

Deliver me from my enemies: I flee unto thee to hide. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me in the land of uprightness. And quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble (Psa 143:9-11).

And so the prayer. How important. "God, deliver me. And then teach me to do Thy will. Lead me in the right way and quicken me."

And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant (Psa 143:12).

Chapter 144

Blessed be the LORD my strength, which (Psa 144:1)

Now this is a psalm of David, and of course, some people get upset with this psalm because David thanks God for making him such a tough fighter.

Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teaches my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: my goodness, my fortress; my high tower, my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdues my people under me. LORD, what is man, that you take knowledge of him! or the son of man, that you take him into account! (Psa 144:1-3)

Interesting question. "What is man, that God should take knowledge of him?" This carries us back to an earlier psalm when David said, "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man?" (Psalm 8:3,4) Looking at the universe and in light of the universe and the vastness of the universe, what is man? This little speck of dust walking around on this little planet Earth. Way off in this corner of the solar system, or way off in this corner of the Milky Way galaxy; in one of the billions of galaxies in the universe. And here I am. And yet, the God who created the entire universe is mindful of me. But not in the general sense, in a very particular sense.

Jesus said that God is so mindful of His creation that there is not a sparrow that falls to the ground but what God is not mindful of it. How much more you, His children? Jesus said He knows the very number of hairs of your head. God is mindful of intricate details about your life. Nothing escapes His attention. What is man? Who am I that God should be mindful of me? The son of man that God should take me into account? Man is nothing.

Man is like to [nothing,] vanity [or nothing, emptiness]: his days are as a shadow that passes away (Psa 144:4).

Like the sundial that has gone down. Life is so short. I'm here for such a short time. Living a life of vanity. And yet, God is mindful of me. I'm important to Him.

Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out your arrows, and destroy them. Send your hand from above; rid me,

and deliver me out of the great waters, and from the hand of strange children; Whose mouth speak emptiness, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee. It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivered David his servant from the hurtful sword. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaks emptiness, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of the palace: That our garners may be full (Psa 144:5-13),

Now asking God to deliver from the hand of the enemy. To place His hand of blessing upon us that our sons might have the opportunity to grow up, that our daughters might be like polished corner stones, that our garners (shelves) might be full.

affording all manner of food; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to pull the plow; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; and there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, who are in such a case: yes, happy is that people, whose God is Yahweh (Psa 144:13-15).

Chapter 145

I will extol thee, my God, O King; I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable (Psa 145:1-3).

Oh, the riches of His mercy and grace unto us! The greatness of God unsearchable.

One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty, and of your wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy awesome acts (Psa 145:4-6):

The word terrible is an old English word, and it's our present usage of it doesn't do justice to the translation. Awesome is a word that we would use more accurately to describe the Hebrew word. "That Thy awesome acts."

and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. For the LORD (Psa 145:6-8)

This is an Old Testament revelation.

is gracious, and full of compassion (Psa 145:8);

That's not the God of the New Testament. That's the God of the Old Testament. The same God. There aren't two Gods.

slow to anger, great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. For thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The LORD upholds all that fall, and raises up all those that be bowed down (Psa 145:8-14).

"Humble thyself in the eyes of the Lord, He will lift you up" (James 4:10). Here is the same idea here. The Lord raises up all of those that are bowed down. God withstands the proud. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). The Lord will uphold those that fall.

Paul said, "Who are you who judges another man's servant? Before his own master he either stands or falls. Yea, God is able to make him to stand" (Romans 14:4). It's so comforting to me to know that in my weakness, God will hold me when I fall. He'll hold me up lest I fall.

The eyes of all wait upon thee; you give them their meat in due season. You open your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all of his ways (Psa 145:15-17),

He's gracious. He's full of compassion. He's slow to anger. He's of great mercy. He's good to all. His tender mercies are over all of His works. And now, "The LORD is righteous in all of His ways."

and holy in all of his works (Psa 145:17).

Satan is constantly challenging the righteousness of God. How can a God of love allow children to be born blind? How can a God of love send men to hell? And all of these concepts that challenge the righteousness of God.

The LORD is near to all of those that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of those that reverence him (Psa 145:18-19):

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; He'll give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). He will fulfill the desire of those that reverence Him.

he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserves all of them that love him: but all of the wicked he'll destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever (Psa 145:19-21).

Psalm 146

Now the final psalms or the Hallel psalms. They begin with hallelujah and end with hallelujah in the Hebrew.

Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live I will praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto God while I have any being. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God: Which made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that is therein: which keeps truth for ever: Who executes judgment for the oppressed: who gives food to the hungry. The LORD frees the prisoners: The LORD opens the eyes of the blind: the LORD raises them that are bowed down: the LORD loves the righteous: The LORD preserves the strangers; he relieves the fatherless and the widow: but the way of the wicked he turns upside down. The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Hallelujah (Psa 146:1-10).

And so these things that he declares concerning the Lord, "Happy is the man who has the God of Jacob as his help, who has put his hope and trust in God. For God made the heaven and the earth. He keeps truth forever. He executes judgment for those that are oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. He frees

the prisoners. Opens the eyes of the blind. Raises those that are bowed down." Of course, these things are making reference to the Kingdom Age. "For He shall reign forever and ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations."

Psalm 147

Psalm 147:

Praise ye the LORD [or hallelujah]: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; it's pleasant; praise is comely [or desirable, beautiful]. The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the broken in heart, he binds up their wounds. He tells the number of the stars; he calls them all by their names (Psa 147:1-4).

That to me is just fabulous. I love it! I've been sort of an amateur astronomer from my youth. Always been very interested in the heavens. From the time I was going through college I went out to the Griffith Observatory every month when they have a change of program and look at the programs that they offer there at the Griffith Observatory. Always fascinated with the vastness of this universe, because it just spoke to me of the greatness of the God that I serve.

And to learn of the number of stars. It is estimated that there are perhaps as many stars in the heavens as there are grains of sand upon the earth. Some have estimated there to be ten to the twenty-fifth power number of stars. Or ten with twenty-five zeroes tacked on behind. The Milky Way galaxy which our solar system is a part is just one of the many galaxies. Outside of us, the next one is the Andromeda galaxy and they're discovering new galaxies all the time. And the galaxies, each of them contain billions of stars. If you look at the Milky Way on a summer evening out on the desert or up in the mountains, that glow that is in the sky comes from the billions of stars that are in our Milky Way galaxy.

Now, "He tells the number of the stars." Now, we guessed at the number of the stars. It's interesting that when the science of astronomy was first developed in the early stages, some of the early scientists stayed up at night counting stars. And some of the earlier astronomers declare with scientific accuracy that there were 6,126 stars in the sky. And then later another astronomer who did much the same kind of a thing revised and said, "No, he was wrong. There's 6,232." And so the estimates of the number of the stars was always very low. In other words, something under 10,000 stars. Until, of course, the ability to magnify with a telescope, and we discovered that the stars are innumerable.

Well, actually, the Bible said that all along. God said to Abraham. He said, "Look up into the heavens." He said, "Can you number the stars? So shall thy seed be." You can't number them. You won't be able to number them. And God declared that the stars were innumerable. And yet, God has numbered the stars. As far as man is concerned, we don't know. We guessed at a number, ten to the twenty-fifth power. Who knows, it may be ten to the fiftieth power. But it's a guess. It's an estimate. But God knows the number of the stars. But more than that, He calls them all by their names.

Now the stars that He has called by name is not like stars like, Hey Joe and Jim and Jeff, you know. God said to Job, "Can you find the sweet influence of the Pleiades? What about Arcturus? How would you like to guide us through the sky?" And He speaks about the bands of Orion and so forth. And so God is calling them by these fancy, technical names. All of the billions of them. The next verse says,

Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite (Psa 147:5).

It would have to be just to know all the names of all the stars.

The LORD lifts up the meek: and casts the wicked down to the ground (Psa 147:6).

Again, the idea of exalting the meek.

Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares the rain for the earth, who makes the grass to grow upon the mountains. He gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delights not in the strength of the horse: he takes not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD takes pleasure in those that reverence him, in those that hope in his mercy. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He makes peace in thy borders, he fills you with the finest of the wheat. He sends forth his commandment upon the earth: his word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool: he scatters the hoar frost like ashes. He casts forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them: he causes his wind to blow, and the waters flow. He shows his word unto Jacob, his statutes, his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD (Psa 147:7-20).

For God's special work for His people.

Psalms 148

Psalms 148:

Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him from the heights. Praise him, all ye his angels: praise him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun, moon: stars of light. The heavens of heavens, the waters that are above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created (Psa 148:1-5).

So, first of all, the calling forth for praise unto God by all of His created hosts: the angels, the hosts, the stars, and planets, and the universe.

He also has established them for ever and ever: and he has made a decree which shall not pass. Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, vapors; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, hills; fruitful trees, and cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: Kings of the earth, and all the people; princes, and all the judges of the earth: Both young men, maidens; old men, children: Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalts the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD (Psa 148:6-14).

Psalms 149

Praise the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and the harp. For the LORD takes pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: and let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute the vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honor have

all his saints. Praise ye the LORD (Psa 149:1-9).

Now here he mentions of the praising of the Lord in song, in dance, with the timbrel and the harp.

I think that many times our forms of worship get rather stilted and stereotyped. I think that it would be fine to have variety in our worship and praise. The Jewish people, again, are very exuberant people. It's such a thrill to go down on Friday evening and watch the young men come down from the upper part of the city from their school. And come down in their dances before the Western Wall on the beginning of the Sabbath as they hail the coming in of the Sabbath day. To see them in their worship and their praise, to hear their songs, their chants. And to see them as they praise the Lord in the song and as they praise the Lord in the dance.

Now, I am not really advocating some things that I have seen passed off as praise unto the Lord. I do not feel that our praise of the Lord should ever be such that it draws attention unto ourselves. And I have seen many people supposedly praising the Lord, but really they were putting on quite an exhibition that drew a lot of attention to them. And to that I am unalterably opposed. I do not feel that we should ever draw attention to ourselves in our worship and praise of God. I don't think that we should sing in a weird way that causes people to turn, "Who's singing that obbligato?" or whatever, you know. Because it takes the attention off the music and onto a person who may have a great operatic voice and something. And you may be a frustrated opera star, but when you're singing with the congregation, you ought to seek to have your voice blend with that of the congregation rather than drawing attention to yourself.

And in our praises unto the Lord, we should take care that our praises are such that they do not draw attention to me, because then what value... then people are looking at me. "Oh, you see how he can dance? Oh, look how he plays the tambourine, you know. Oh, you know, isn't he clever?" And the attention then is drawn to the person and not to God. So then the whole effect is negated if I'm really seeking to bring people into a praise and worship of God. And yet, I think that there, you know... I think that we... I think that there's a balance and we need to find this beautiful balance somewhere. I think there is a place for the dance. I think there's a place for the expression of praise to God with timbrels and tambourines and all. I love the Jewish folk dances, and I think that they can be very expressive in their praises unto the Lord. I love the exuberance of them and all. But yet, again, maintaining that balance so that as I am praising the Lord, I don't do it in such a way that it draws a lot of attention to me. That I just sort of blend in harmony my praises as those of God's people. And there's probably, I don't think that we are in the middle. I think that we are probably a little on the stilted side, and we could perhaps move a little bit more towards a more meaningful kind of a praise. I'm open to the worship of God in other than just sitting and singing choruses or in the forms that we've followed. And yet, as I say, I surely don't... I'd rather be on this side than on the other side of the balance. And that's probably my problem.

Psalms 150

Now, again, the final psalm is an exhortation of praise and to praise the Lord in unusual ways, as far as we firstly perhaps are concerned.

Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. [And then] Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and the dance: praise him with the stringed instruments and the organs. Praise him on the loud cymbals: praise him on the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD (Psa 150:1-6).

I love these young men, uninhibited, as they are who have gone out from Calvary and established many different related works around the area. I love the beautiful simplicity of their heart towards God. They're not all complex and bound up in a lot of theology that has had an effect of stultifying our worship in many cases. I'm thinking of Mike Macintosh, who pastors the Calvary Chapel in San Diego. And he said, "Now on Wednesday night we're just going to have a praise night. And if any of you play any instruments, bring your instruments. Everybody bring your instruments. Whatever it is that you might play. And we're just going to worship the Lord. If your thing is cymbals, or your thing is drums, or if your thing's a harmonica, whatever, you know, just bring it and we're just going to have a praise service on Wednesday night." And they had quite a praise service with everybody just bringing whatever they could play or tambourines or whatever, bells, cymbals, triangles, whatever. And just had a time of sort of uninhibited kind of praising of the Lord. I love that... for them.

I think I would love it for us as long as we understood, hey, we're just going to praise the Lord and that's the purpose. So just come and worship the Lord with your little finger cymbals or whatever it is that you're adept at. Just bring it and just have a time of praising the Lord. And I think that we need to become a little freer in our praise of the Lord. Not quite as inhibited as we usually are. We even, if we lift our hands to praise the Lord, begin to feel awkward and think, you know. And we are so inhibited in our expressions unto the Lord. And I think that we could be less inhibited and find a great blessing. And yet, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). And so as I say, there's a balance. I'm sure there is, and I recognize where I am, and the Lord is dealing with me. You just keep praying.

Father, we do offer our praise unto You. How grateful we are, Lord, for Your Word. How sad it is that we have to be exhorted to praise Thee, that which should just be spontaneous from our heart as we think of Thy goodness and Thy mercy which endures forever. Thy mercy that we have received, Lord, daily. Oh, how we praise and give thanks unto You for all of Your blessings and all of Your benefits that You have given unto us, especially Father, for sending Your only begotten Son, that through Him we might have life and that more abundantly. Now Lord, just bless Your people. May they go forth with praises upon their hearts and upon their lips. We thank You that we are Your people, the sheep of Your pasture, and that we, Lord, have been called to serve You. Guide us, Lord, in that which You would have us to do as servants of the King. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

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