

Psalm 145  
An alphabet of praise

Introduction

This is the last psalm attributed to David, and the last of the eight psalms which are acrostics. The most famous of these is Psalm 119, where each group of eight sentences (now arranged into sets of eight verses) start with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in alphabetical order. In Psalm 145, each sentence (now a verse) begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There should be 22, but we only have 21 verses since the one beginning with “n” was missing, until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947-48. Modern versions now include it as the second half of verse 13.

The last six psalms are great hymns of praise. Praise, adoration and worship have a special place in the lives of those who take the Bible seriously. It is the mark of the Christian that often amid tears and anguish, there is still a triumphant note of praise to the Lord. In the Book of Psalms, even in the most sorrow-laden passages, like a smouldering volcano, praise bursts forth into great flame. In these six psalms this note of praise and adoration reaches its climax. Some have described Psalm 145 as the “Te Deum of the Old Testament”, or the “Crown jewel of praise”.

What should we praise the Lord for?

Here are four great truths about God to form the heart of our praise.

- (a) The greatness of God (Psalm 145:1-6). **Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom... your mighty acts... the glorious splendour of your majesty... you wonderful works.** God is wonderful and marvellous. What else can we do but exalt and praise Him? He is beyond us, beyond our theology, dogmas, and scientific enquiries and certainly beyond our personal experience. We miss His greatness if we spend time looking at ourselves all the time. “Big men have a little God. Little men have a big God” (J.B.Phillips, from “*Your God is too small*”).
- (b) The goodness of God (Psalm 145:7-10). **Your abundant goodness.. gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.** Before God, the nations are a drop in a bucket. We stand against Him in rebellion. Yet the amazing and wonderful thing is that despite our smallness and sin, He is good to all and compassionate to all He has made. He has individual concern for every one of us.
- (c) The glory of God (Psalm 145:11-13). **The glory of your kingdom... your mighty acts... Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving towards all He has made.** All other kingdoms will come and go, but God’s will never fail. Where are the proud empires

of old – the Babylonian, Persian, Roman Empires of the Bible times, or the European empires of the last 4-500 years? Now the countries which created these empires are second-rate powers. Now is the century of the Russians and the Americans – but where will they be in the next 100 or 200 years? They will go the way of the rest.

*“So be it Lord, Thy throne shall never  
Like earth’s proud empires pass away”*

- (d) The grace of God (Psalm 145:14-21). **The Lord upholds all those who fall.** He stoops down, takes them in His arms and steadies them. **He lifts up all who are bowed down.** He raises up those who are overwhelmed with life’s cares. He provides food for all creatures. **The Lord is righteous in all his ways.. The Lord is near to all who call on Him in truth** i.e. sincerely. **He fulfils the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love Him.** N.B. the conditions for blessing – fearing and loving the Lord, calling on Him sincerely. **The wicked He will destroy.**

If we have any experience of God, we can say “amen” to all that. We have these four things for which we can praise the Lord – His greatness which is beyond us, His goodness which surprises us, His glory which dazzles us, and His grace which enriches and cares for us. If the Old Testament psalmist could be so thrilled with God, Christians ought to be more so. We live on the other side of the Cross and Resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. **God made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ** (2 Corinthians 4:6). How much more can we speak of God’s greatness, goodness, glory and grace.

#### When should we praise the Lord?

The Psalmist leaves us in no doubt. **Every day I will praise you and extol your name** (Psalm 145:2). We must praise Him daily, continually, and fervently. We need to follow the psalmist’s example. At every turn of the road, and with every new experience of God, we need to praise the Lord. There should be a note of praise and worship at the start of every service. It is important that worship and hymns are God-centred – too many are man-centred, about me, my needs, my weaknesses, my feelings, and my problems. We need to start by telling the greatness of the Lord, and doing so fervently.

John Wesley’s advice to the first Methodists, “Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you are half dead and half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength.” Professor James Stewart said, “Sometimes to hear us Christians sing you would hardly guess it was the most glorious theme in the world we are celebrating. I cannot understand how Christians do not want to sing hymns about the risen Lord with soul on tip-toe.”

In private, and in family worship, what place has praise and adoration? Too often we present a shopping list, and lament our problems. We need to open our Bible, see who

God is, and what He has done for us, and turn it all into worship. Use a psalm, or a verse of a hymn. It will give us a new dimension to our prayer lives.

But what about the times when problems beset us? It is easy to be downcast. When we look at life, much depends on what we select to focus and concentrate on. We would do well to remember the old refrain:

*“Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”*

Life can throw an awful lot at us in the course of a few years – disappointments, sorrows, opposition, sickness, betrayal and heartbreak. Only a fool would pretend these are not realities. There are no slick and easy answers. But one thing is sure – God has not changed, nothing can separate us from His love. He brings blessings through adversity. His purposes (whose true end will not be revealed till the last days) for my character and the welfare of His church are being worked out. **In all things, God works for the good of those who love Him** (Romans 8:28).

Has Allan Cameron, the Scottish Covenanter, got something to teach us? His enemies caught his son, Richard, cut off his hands and his head, and took them to his father in Edinburgh jail “to add grief to his sorrow”. They asked him, “Do you know these?” He took them on his knee, and kissed them, and said, “I know them, they are my dear son’s” Then weeping and praising, he went on, “It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord who cannot wrong me or mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.”

Can we praise even in death? Of course, because of Christ. Through Him, the enemy, death, has been beaten. Perpetua, 203AD, an early Christian martyr, died with the words, “This is my coronation day”. The Christian funeral is truly a thanksgiving service.

Everyday, and forever, the Psalmist says he will praise the Lord. Is this hard to do? If we find it hard, maybe it is our attitude more than our circumstances that make it difficult. Our attitude, rather than our circumstances, needs to change.

### Why should we praise the Lord?

Firstly, we should praise the Lord because this is the very reason why we were created and brought into the world. We were created to praise and worship. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

Secondly, in the light of the Fall and sin, with God’s answer in Redemption in Christ, we have more reason to praise. The supreme purpose of new birth and recreation in Christ is that we live to praise the glory of His grace. The highest end of our being is to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

We can also praise God for the marvellous effect God has on others. When the late Robert Kennedy was travelling in the interior of Brazil, he met a newly converted Indian. He got his translator to ask him what he enjoyed the most. The reply was

“Being occupied with God”. Kennedy assumed the question had been misunderstood – he was expecting a reply like “fishing or hunting”. But on repeating the question, the convert gave the same reply. When one Christian praises God, it is contagious. It begets praise. On one occasion during the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, missionaries felt forsaken and deserted by God. But when one of them started singing “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds”, there was a dramatic change. They all felt spiritually revived and received fresh courage.

Finally we can praise Him for the blessing He brings to our own souls. When life is sore and wounding, praise and service are great healers. Often we become weighed down, and attend church or prayer meeting out of a sense of duty. But then the opening hymn of praise takes our thoughts away from our troubles. We glimpse the majesty and love of God afresh, we see Christ’s suffering, and all our troubles are seen in the right perspective. We go on our way rejoicing.

### Conclusion

Praise the Lord for His greatness, goodness, glory and grace. When? Every day and forever, regularly and fervently, in all circumstances. Why? Because that is the purpose of our creation and redemption. It will help others to praise too, and be a blessing to our souls.