

Psalms 135-139

Psalm 135

This is an exuberant call to praise God.

It begins with the universal word – “Hallelujah!” = Praise to Yah; the shortened form of Yahweh.

¹ Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord; Praise *Him*, O you servants of the Lord!

Following the **general** call to praise God is an urging to **specifically** praise His name.

Using the name of God would remind them that He isn't just God in the generic sense; He is THEIR God.

He's entered into covenant with them. They know His name & are privileged to call upon Him.

The 'servants' who are encouraged to praise the Lord in v. 1 are the priests -

² You who stand in the house of the Lord, In the courts of the house of our God,

³ Praise the Lord, for the Lord *is* good; Sing praises to His name, for *it is* pleasant.

⁴ For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure.

⁵ For I know that the Lord *is* great, And our Lord *is* above all gods.

⁶ Whatever the Lord pleases He does,

He is sovereign!

In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places.

⁷ He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries.

God is Master over the weather.

⁸ He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, Both of man and beast.

⁹ He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt, Upon Pharaoh and all his servants.

God showed His direct intervention in history in the plagues that came on Egypt when He delivered Israel from bondage.

¹⁰ He defeated many nations And slew mighty kings—

¹¹ Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, And all the kingdoms of Canaan—

¹² And gave their land *as* a heritage, A heritage to Israel His people.

God's power was as evident in Israel's conquest of Canaan as it had been in Egypt's plagues.

¹³ Your name, O Lord, *endures* forever, Your fame, O Lord, throughout all generations.

While this has become a frequent line in modern praise & worship songs, do we realize how true it is?

The **name** of the Lord refers to all He is; His attributes, His character, His purposes.

The **fame** of the Lord refers to the expression of His name; it's when people awaken to the reality of Who & What He is.

So think about what this is saying to us –

God's name endures forever God hasn't changed!

He's the same God who spoke & creation stood forth.

He's the same God who called out Abraham and promised to bless Him – then to bless those who blessed his descendants and curse those who cursed them.

He's the same God who broke Egypt's arrogance in the plagues.

Who led Israel by a pillar of fire.

Who fed them with manna & miracle water for 40 years.

Who gave a rag-tag army victory over kingdoms much more advanced than they.

This is the God who stopped the sun in the sky.

This is the same one who turned water to wine and fed thousands from one boy's lunch.

His fame is to be in every generation!

All God is looking for are people like Abraham, like Moses, like Joshua, David, & Elijah, who will **believe** in His name & want to spread His fame.

He's doing that in places like Iraq & Afghanistan.

He's showing Himself mighty in Africa & Asia & India.

God – do it **HERE!** Do it in **this** generation & nation.

14 For the Lord will judge His people, And He will have compassion on His servants.

The word '**judge**' here means to '**plead a case**.'

While God is certainly the Heavenly Judge, what's being referred to here is that God will **vindicate** His people.

15 The idols of the nations *are* silver and gold, The work of men's hands.

16 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see;

17 They have ears, but they do not hear; Nor is there *any* breath in their mouths.

18 Those who make them are like them; *So is* everyone who trusts in them.

These verses are quoted from an earlier psalm – 115.

Contrasted with the true & living God Who will take care of His people are the senseless idols unbelievers worship.

Man is incurably religious.

Created to worship, he can't help but make up a god to bow down to.

Even atheists have an idol, some supreme idea they exalt above all others.

They're no less **devoted** to it than the most pious theist.

The thing is, **we become like** the god we worship.

Those who worship idols which can neither see nor hear, become increasingly blind & deaf to truth.

And since idols are merely **exalted & sanctified** versions of human desires, the more a person devotes him/herself to it, the more that desire grows.

So instead of finding **satisfaction**, they only increase their **frustration**.

This is why the idols like **greed & lust** are **never** satisfied.

It's a spiritual rule – we become like the god we worship.

While the idolater becomes blind, deaf & frustrated, -

Those who love, worship & serve Jesus, become more like Him.

19 Bless the Lord, O house of Israel! Bless the Lord, O house of Aaron!

20 Bless the Lord, O house of Levi! You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord!

21 Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the Lord!

Hallelujah!

[Ancient Hebrew for Yahweh.]

Psalm 136

All 26 verses of this psalm repeat the refrain – "For His mercy endures forever."

'Mercy' isn't a good translation of the Hebrew word **hesed**.

A better translation is 'steadfast loving-kindness.'

There's a strong flavor of **loyalty** in **hesed**.

Psalm 136 repeats many of the same things as Psalm 135.

There's celebration of God as Creator, as Savior, as Liberator, Provider & Protector.

But all of it is linked back to the primary motivating cause of God's steadfast, loyal love for His people.

This Psalm was meant to settle once & for all in the hearts & minds of God's people that He loves them & they can utterly depend on His love to keep them.

It's pretty clear that this Psalm was read responsively – with a priest speaking the first part & the people giving a unified response with the second part of each verse.

1 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good! • For His mercy *endures* forever.

2 Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! • For His mercy *endures* forever.

3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! • For His mercy *endures* forever:

4 To Him who alone does great wonders, • For His mercy *endures* forever;

5 To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, • For His mercy *endures* forever;

6 To Him who laid out the earth above the waters, • For His mercy *endures* forever;

7 To Him who made great lights, • For His mercy *endures* forever—

8 The sun to rule by day, • For His mercy *endures* forever;

9 The moon and stars to rule by night, • For His mercy *endures* forever.
 10 To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 11 And brought out Israel from among them, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 12 With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 13 To Him who divided the Red Sea in two, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 14 And made Israel pass through the midst of it, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 16 To Him who led His people through the wilderness, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 17 To Him who struck down great kings, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 18 And slew famous kings, • For His mercy *endures* forever—
 19 Sihon king of the Amorites, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 20 And Og king of Bashan, • For His mercy *endures* forever—
 21 And gave their land as a heritage, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 22 A heritage to Israel His servant, • For His mercy *endures* forever.
 23 Who remembered us in our lowly state, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 24 And rescued us from our enemies, • For His mercy *endures* forever;
 25 Who gives food to all flesh, • For His mercy *endures* forever.
 26 Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! • For His mercy *endures* forever.

Psalm 137

This is a lament of those Jews in Babylon who are unable to worship the Lord in His temple in Jerusalem because they are in forced exile & both Jerusalem & the temple are in ruins.

In contrast to the Songs of Ascent which were a joyful celebration of going to the temple, this song is filled with eloquent pathos & regret at being so far removed.

1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.

2 We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it.

Weeping willows- it's a picture of depression.

The harp was an instrument of joy & beauty – but now it's hung up, on a weeping tree.

3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us *requested* mirth, *Saying*, “Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion!”

Their captors tormented them by provoking them to sing funny songs when trying to be humorous was nothing if not painful.

4 How shall we sing the Lord's song In a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget *its skill!*

6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.

While some of the Jews who'd been carried away captive were absorbed completely into their new land and forgot all about Jerusalem, this captive never wants to lose his identity as a captive, a foreigner in a strange land. His home was Jerusalem and we would never be content till he was where He knew God wanted him to be.

It's interesting because before the Babylonians conquered Judah, the prophet Jeremiah told them of the coming conquest & not to resist the invaders.

He told them they would be carried away captive to Babylon as judgment for their rebellion against God.

Their captivity would last 70 years, then they would return & rebuild.

So he told them when they arrived in Babylon, they were to make the best life they could; to build homes, raise families, start businesses, farm fields.

They were to settle down – but they were not to settle IN & merge with Babylon.

They were to stay true to Him & one day – they would return to their rightful land.

When the 70 years were up, it turns out that only a very small contingent of Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild.

Most of them stayed in Babylon; they'd become so identified with the land of their captivity, they no longer had a desire to live in the Promised Land.

This is the way it is with us.

This world is not our home. It's a foreign, fallen kingdom where we live as strangers.

We're to live here as best we can, making a life, doing business, prospering & growing.

We're to settle down but not settle IN – cozying up to a world that hates & opposes God.

In Jesus' parable of the talents, the master told the servants to, to "Do business, till I come."

The business they did was to be conducted in light of the fact that one day He will come & they will stand before Him to give account for what they had done with what He had given.

The wicked servant was the one who took what his master gave & immediately forgot about that day of accounting.

7 Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze *it*, raze *it*, To its very foundation!"

8 O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!

9 Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock!

Wow – that's harsh! Why so cruel?

As with some of the psalms we read last week, the psalmist understands the principle of blessing & cursing.

Those who bless Israel will be blessed & those who curse her will be cursed.

Jerusalem's enemies had applauded Babylon's destruction of the city; they egged Nebuchadnezzar on.

They rubbed their grimy little hands with glee to see the temple burned to the ground.

The psalmist simply says – "Don't forget it, Lord."

While God used Babylon as the instrument of His judgment on Judah, they'd way overstepped the boundaries of just war & committed **heinous atrocities** against the Jews; things **too abominable** to describe.

The psalmist says the cruelty these nations have inflicted on others will be visited on them.

What you sow you reap.

But there's a **practical** application to v. 9.

Children grow up; babies don't stay that way.

And it was **ingrained** in the cultures of these pagan people to exact revenge, even if it took a lifetime to do so.

When a man was killed, his son was raised with the conviction it was his **duty** to reclaim family honor by getting even with his father's killer or his family.

Bitterness & spite were virtues passed on from generation to generation.

In ancient warfare, people killed little children, not so much because they were being especially cruel as because they were being careful, trying to protect their future from the reprisal of vengeance.

The application for us is in **spiritual** warfare.

We can be so preoccupied with the large battles & the major enemies we fail to see the threat posed by the **little things**, the infant sins.

The little darlings must be destroyed or they will destroy us.

C. S. Lewis wrote about this very thing –

I know things in the inner world which are like babies; the infantile beginnings of small indulgences, small resentments, which may one day become [alcoholism], or settled hatred, but which woo us and wheedle us with special pleadings, and seem so tiny, so helpless that in resisting them, we feel we are being cruel to animals. They begin whimpering to us, "I don't ask much, but," or "I had at least hoped," or "you owe yourself some consideration." Against all of such pretty infants (the dears have such winning ways) the advice of the Psalm is the best. Knock the little brats' brains out. And "blessed" he who can, for it's easier said than done.

Psalm 138

David expresses his joy in the Lord for answered prayer.

While the psalm doesn't tell us outright what event prompted his thanksgiving, a hint is given in v. 1.

In 2 Sam. 5 we read how when David was declared king of Israel the Philistines attacked.

David asked the Lord for how to respond to the attack and the answer was so clear & quick it led to a complete rout of the enemy.

The Philistines had to retreat so quickly, they left behind all their supplies, equipment & even their idols, which David's men confiscated.

A Psalm Of David.

¹ I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to YOU.

Knowing the purity of David's affection for God at this point in his life, being still a young man, it's not hard to imagine David lining up all the idols of the Philistines, calling all his troops to join in, then loudly worshipping God right there in front of the idols, as a way to cement & seal the superiority of Yahweh over the false gods of their neighbors.

Don't forget that in the ancient world, battle was more than a contest of armies; it was a clash of gods.

The winner had bragging rights.

David knew many more battles with others lay in store.

This wasn't the end of their problems with The Philistines.

He wanted his men prepared for those future battles and this was a great way to prepare them mentally.

² I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your loving-kindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

This is an amazing verse because we know how thoroughly the Bible exalts the Name of God.

Yet here David says God sets His Word **above** His name.

He'd just seen an amazing display of God's faithfulness.

He prayed, God answered, then David stepped out in faith in response to the answer – and an amazing victory was given.

All of this has brought David a fresh revelation of the goodness & greatness of God.

The reality of the potency of God's Word has been impressed on him like never before.

³ In the day when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold *with* strength in my soul.

⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, When they hear the words of Your mouth.

⁵ Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, For great *is* the glory of the Lord.

⁶ Though the Lord *is* on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows [thoroughly] from afar.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me.

⁸ The Lord will perfect [bring to completion] *that which* concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, *endures* forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

V. 8 is such a great promise! God always finishes what He starts.

This is why Paul could say to the Philippians – "I'm confident of this very thing – that He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion in the Day of Jesus Christ." 1:6

Psalm 139

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

This psalm is a sober meditation on the attributes of God; specifically His omnipresence, omniscience, & omnipotence.

What's prompted this reflection on God becomes clear as we come to the end of the psalm.

Remember what we said when we began studying this book – to discover the theme or reason behind a psalm look for the emotion expressed in it.

It's that expression of emotion that drives it.

¹ O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.

² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.

Long before he even thinks it, God not only knows it, He knows **WHY** David thinks it.

³ You comprehend my path [way of life] and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *But* behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.

God knows what we are going to say before we utter it.

5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.

God stands before us, behind us & next to us.

6 *Such* knowledge is too wonderful [much] for me; It is high, I cannot *attain* it.

Just this one attribute of God is enough to blow his mind – but there's more . . .

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*.

'Hell' is the Hebrew word ***Sheol*** – equivalent to ***hades*** – the abode of the dead.

9 *If* I take the wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Fly off to some heretofore unknown island . . .

10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me;

God's vision isn't diminished by the night.

12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You*.

Now David looks back over his life & sees God's intimate communion with him.

13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.

David was one of those rare individuals who'd taken the time to ponder the implications of creation.

The fact of creation requires a Creator.

But David had gone further & considered the ***complexity*** of creation.

He realized that astounding complexity meant a Creator who was ***many magnitudes greater*** than the creation.

15 My frame [bones – skeleton] was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

'Wrought' = knit; embroidered.

'Lowest parts of the earth' = euphemism for unseen processes.

Here = his mother's womb = v. 13 >> Hebrew poetry

16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them.

This ought to give pause to anyone who calls themselves a Christian & pro-choice.

David doesn't refer to the pre-born as potential persons; they are full-persons with a destiny to fulfill.

Abortion is the premature ending of a fully human life.

This is part of the problem when people get into a pro-life vs. pro-choice discussion.

It isn't a political issue. It's by far the most moral issue of the day because abortion is the taking of innocent human life AKA 'murder.'

For those who are pro-choice, abortion is an issue of rights.

It's a legal issue based on the principle of a right to privacy.

The idea is that a woman ought to be able to do whatever she wants with her body.

Since the unborn child is inside her, she can do with it as she pleases.

That's the basis of the entire Roe vs. Wade & Doe Vs. Bolton decisions in 1973 that legalized abortion on demand.

The Supreme Court turned to doctors, theologians, & philosophers in their attempt to decide if the unborn was worthy of protection under the law.

Their question was – "Is the unborn a person, or not?"

The answer they got from all the experts was so mixed & confused they decided to legalize abortion based on the right to privacy of the mother.

This passage gives us ***God's view*** of the unborn – it's a person, invested with life & purpose.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

God does not give His precious thought to undifferentiated tissue; He gives it to men & women created in His

image – and such are the unborn.

18 *If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. David is blown away by the love of God that's been with him since before he was born & continued to that day. But here's where the subject turns & David's real emotion comes out -

19 Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.

20 For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take *Your name* in vain.

21 Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

22 I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

Someone has David's goat! He's cheesed about something!

He's fuming at people he sees as the enemies of God and he thinks God should nail them.

But into the midst of his anger & righteous indignation comes the thought that maybe, just perhaps, God doesn't feel that way about them at all.

What if God feels the same way about them, He feels about David?

What if God's thoughts toward them are as many & precious as they are to him?

After all, there were moments in David's life when **he** was less than faithful, less than holy, less than obedient to God.

Did God hate him then and want to snuff him out? No way – because He knew David would repent and come back.

Maybe these wretches would do the same and God knew it so He wasn't all bent about it.

David realizes he's let his anger & hatred get the better of him. So he prays . . .

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

What a great prayer.

To be honest with God about what we're thinking & feeling and asking Him to edit, correct, alter anything unworthy of Him.

One of the things I find difficult to pray but know I need to is – “Lord, if any of my **opinions** don't align with yours, edit them.”