

Psalm 138: 1-3; “A Person of Praise & Prayer”, A sermon preached during the time of the Coronavirus restrictions, sent out as a video sermonic message, Online, on Sunday, April 29th, 2020.

For those of you who are not familiar with the Psalms, the vast majority of them were written by king David; the man who was given, by God the Holy Spirit, many prophetic things to say about the Lord Jesus Christ; his Lord, and ours. This was because David's life was going to be like the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in a number of very significant ways. But Christ's would be the greater. In this Psalm, in verses 1-3, David praises God the Father for the things that He, God, would do for him, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And we should know that God has not only done these things for David, but God has also done them for us as well; that is, for all those persons whom He will save spiritually, and help in an eternal sense, through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. 1st of all – David praises God with all of his heart. (verse 1) 2nd – David praises God for His magnifying His word above all His name. (verse 2) And 3rd – He praises God for answering his prayer to make him bold by giving him strength in his soul. (verse 3) May the Lord teach us more, at this hour, about what it mean for us to become people of praise and people of prayer.

1st – David praises God with all of his heart. (verse 1)

“I will praise You with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing praises to You.” So, I want us to see, to begin with, that David, when he was penning these Psalms, he was often praising God; he was often extoling Him for His greatness and His glory. And you also find that David was often praying to God, often lifting up all of his concerns to Him, so that He might be filled with God's Spirit to do God's will in all of the difficult circumstances of trouble and difficulty that he was going through. Let me ask if you do this? Do you often praise God when you go through your day, or are you often murmuring and complaining? Philippians 2: 14 says – Do all things without murmuring or complaining that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Why should we not murmur or complain? Very simply, because God is not glorified by it, and you as a Christian should think about what is pleasing or displeasing to Him. When you praise Him you are saying that You believe that He does all things well, in the way that He providentially leads and guides You. And He does very definitely, very particularly lead and guide you, providentially ordering all things necessary to make you over into the image of Christ His Son. When you are murmuring and complaining you are saying to Him that somehow He is not ordering things in the right way for you; that you do not need to learn what He wants to teach you. You are saying to Him by your murmuring and complaining that you shouldn't have to go through the things that you are going through.

But the further reason that you shouldn't murmur or complain is that the Lord would have you to become holy, harmless, and blameless in this crooked generation that we live in. And God knows that in your becoming a person of praise and of prayer, you will find much comfort and consolation and fellowship with Him, the living God, in your becoming a person of praise. You will become more like Christ in terms of your godly behavior when you do not complain, but rather you praise Him. It seems that there are not many Christians who are thinking this way in these days of the coronavirus, but they really should.

You see, it is true that the Psalms give us much of David's prophetic knowledge of Christ, but they also give us much of David's experiential heart knowledge; both his as a type of Christ, and of Christ as the fulfillment of the type. We see this here in the Psalms more than in any

book of the Bible. Since David was both a prophet and a king, he was an eminent type of Christ in many ways; but he was most of all a type of Christ, in relation to this heart relationship which he had with God. David, it says in the Scripture, was a man after God's own heart, by which we should understand that David was in many respects like Christ in his heart. Christ's heart relationship with the Father was perfect. But David was learning, and we see in this Psalm, that he was making great progress in learning to praise God and to pray to Him. What specific kind of progress was David making? Well, he was making progress in bearing up under trials, for one thing.

You will recall that the 1st king of the nation of Israel was a man named Saul, and he was very impressive in his appearance; he stood taller than all the rest of the people. He started out well as a king, but he ended badly. Why? Because he was not a person of praise. He was not a person of prayer. He became a proud and suspicious man in relation to people around him because he was seeking his own glory. He envied David for his popularity after David had killed Goliath the Philistine. He sought to kill David because he suspected that David would take his kingdom away from him. He started out being little in his own eyes, but then as time went by, he sinned against God in not keeping God's express commands to him at a number of critical points. This disobedience to God's word led to the Lord to say to him, through Samuel, in 1st Samuel 13: 14 – "But now your kingdom shall not continue." "The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

The man that God sought out, in order to make him king over His people Israel, in the place of Saul, was David. Perhaps you remember the story. God sent Samuel to anoint the man who would be the next king. He sent him to Jesse the Bethlehemite, and Samuel told them that he had come to offer sacrifice to the Lord. They were to sanctify themselves and come with him to the sacrifice. And so, Samuel had all of Jesse's sons pass before him so that the Lord would show him which one of them He would have, become the next king. Eliab was the first, and the Lord said to Samuel in 1st Samuel 16: 7 – "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him" "For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

In other words, as men look at other men and evaluate their strength and capabilities to lead them, they are sometimes deceived by appearances. They think that the outward appearance proves the inward strength or wisdom or capability to lead others. But God tells Samuel that what He looks at is the heart. For the state of the heart, whether it is trusting in the Lord or trusting in themselves proves the whole real strength of that person. Are you a person who is trusting in yourself and your own wisdom and strength, or are you are person who is trusting in God and praising Him for the wisdom and strength which He alone can give? Very important. Men, since they cannot see the heart do not know the true strength or weaknesses of people around them. But the Lord's discernment of the heart is perfect. God knew that David had a heart for Him. He knew that David's great passion was for His glory and honor. He knew, that by His grace, that David would praise Him with his whole heart, and before the gods he would sing praises to Him.

2nd – David praises God for His magnifying His word above all His name. (verse 2)

"I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name." Who were these gods, before which David would sing praises of God, before them? It seems pretty apparent from the whole context of the narrative of David's life that he was speaking of the people who were the rulers of his own country and the countries around him; that is, those kings and princes who were considered as gods by their people because of their ruling authority. In Psalm 82, it says – "God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods." In verse 6 it says,

‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.’ “But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” I believe from this evidence, that they were the political rulers of the nations, and that even king Saul was one of those gods. In the context of our Psalm 138, he was one of those gods, one of those political rulers whom David sang before.

You will remember that when God rejected Saul from being king, it says in 1st Samuel 16: 14, that a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him. And his servants perceiving this, said to him – Command your servants to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp. And it shall be that when he shall play it, then this distressing spirit would not bother him. Well, that’s what they did, and who was it that they found to play on the harp? None other than David. One of the servants said – “Look I have seen the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord is with him.” Yes, it was true that David had all of these good qualities that the servant mentioned, but I want you to observe that it was not until God revealed those good qualities to the people around him, that they really saw how useful that he would be to them, and then they wanted to promote him at every point. Let me ask whether you have thought of how important it is that you sing praises to God before the gods; all of the people in authority around you, who look to see what you will do this time of the coronavirus; when you are staying at home. Do you worship God still on Sundays? This glorifies God. His pleases Him very much, even as David’s singing before the gods of his day.

And then this word “gods” also refers to men who were kings and princes of the foreign nations around Israel; men who were themselves no doubt worshipers of other gods besides the true and living God. I think of that time when David was being chased by Saul and he went over to Achish, king of Gath to avoid being captured by Saul. The lords of the Philistines were passing in review before Achish by the hundreds and the thousands. But the princes of the Philistines said – What are these Hebrews doing here? And Achish said to them – Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected to me? But the princes of the Philistines said – Make this fellow go back. Do not let him go down to battle with us, lest in the battle he become our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of these men? Is this not David, of whom they sent to one another in the dances, saying: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’

Well, Achish called David to him, and he said to him – Surely as the Lord lives, you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army is good in my sight. For to this day I have not found evil in you since the day of your coming to me. Nevertheless the lords do not favor you. Therefore return now, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords. When David questioned this, Achish said to him in 1st Samuel 29: 9 – I know that you are as good in my sight as an angel of God; nevertheless the princes of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle. And so he sent him away with his master’s servants who had come with him. Now, it ought to quite amaze us to hear this Philistine king speak to David like a man who knows God, but that exactly what he did. He even takes an oath in the name of the living God; “As the Lord lives, you have been upright.”

Now, we have to ask ourselves the question, how would Achish have known whether David was upright, or not, unless David had taught him all of these Biblical, theological, and spiritual truths about the true God? Unless he had, at times, even worshiped before this “god” of a leader of the Philistines and sang to him some of the songs of Zion? I wouldn’t doubt at all that he did; that he probably even still had his 10 stringed lute with him, and that he sang to him like he did with Saul sometimes. In those times of worship, he and the men with him, would worship toward the holy tabernacle which was there in Jerusalem. David would praise the Lord’s name for His lovingkindness and His truth. Dear Christian, is this what you and your family do in this

time of the coronavirus, when you cannot go to church, and gather with the saints there? The worship of our God, I am saying, must be upheld wherever we are, and under whatever strange circumstances we face. For it glorifies God and it pleases Him very much. We must not be afraid to worship before the gods. It may mean that some will be saved, even like Achish.

When David says that he would worship toward God's holy temple, we should understand that he was declaring that he would worship in God's appointed way, through Christ the Mediator who would not come into the world for a thousand years yet. And yet David believed in all of the promises of God, in relation to his Messiah who was coming. David knew that God had magnified His word above all of His name. Such an unusual phrase, is it not? How shall we understand it? I believe that we should understand it in this way: That God's word, and specifically all of the Father's promises concerning Christ, is what He has purposed to magnify above all of His name. The Father would sum up all things in Christ. And we can open this up further if we will recall that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Essential Word of God; and thus the Father would magnify Him, His Essential Word even above His own name. He would give all judgment to the Son, so that all would honor the Son even as they honor the Father.

Christ, God's spoken Word, is the only-begotten of the Father; the only One who is the exact representation of His being. He is the Lord of glory who would fulfill all of His purpose to declare His love and compassion towards fallen sinners everywhere. It would be by the giving of His only-begotten Son that He would fulfill all His holy purposes concerning all of mankind. He gave Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as He, the Father, gave Him. (John 17: 2) And so, when Christ came into the world, it was not to do His own will; it was to do the Father's will on our behalf.

In His Incarnation the Lord Jesus Christ became the Essential Word magnified. Everything that He did in His earthly ministry has been magnified. Christ by His perfect righteousness fulfilled the law, and in doing so, He did it so well that He exalted the law and made it honorable. (Isaiah 42: 21) Because He would fulfill all righteousness and die on the cross for our sins, the Father would be pleased for His righteousness' sake, to magnify His word of promise, of the offer of salvation through His Person and His work, above all His name. He would have it offered to all, even to the vilest of sinners.

But God the Father would magnify His Essential word above all His name by the Lord Jesus' confronting sin and error with His righteous judgment as well. In John chapter 2, verses 13-21, we are shown that He came into Jerusalem on that first Passover during his earthly ministry, and when He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, doing their business there, He took a whip of cords and He drove them all out of the temple, and overturned their tables. And He said to those who sold doves – Take these things away! And do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise! Little did they know that He was fulfilling the Scripture in doing so. So, the Jews answered and said to Jesus – What sign do you show us, since You do these things? And Jesus said – Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” And the Jews said to Him – It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days? But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

This is how I believe you and I should worship the Lord today; we will worship towards God's holy temple. And what is God's holy temple? It is the Person of the risen glorified Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father. We will worship toward Him, as our Mediator, our King, and our God. We will worship the Father, through Him, and our worship will find favor with God the Father. The Puritan Philip Henry says this – “Now our temple is Christ.” “If you have, any of you at any time, anything to do with God, you must go to Him in Christ.” “In Christ it is that He will meet with you – no otherwise.” “If you have done amiss and would be pardoned, it must be, only in, and by Jesus Christ.” “All your repentings are nothing without Him.” “It is His blood alone that makes atonement.” “In the temple was the altar.”

Philip Henry goes on to say – “If you have done well and would be accepted, it must be only in and by Jesus Christ.” “The Jews when they pray, they turn their faces toward Jerusalem to this day, because of the temple that was once there – as Daniel.” “So must we toward Christ – not the face of our bodies, no matter whether eastward or westward, but the face of our minds and souls, the face of our faith, looking at Him as our Advocate with the Father, as the great high priest of our profession, as our altar, our temple, our all.” So let me ask you now, whether you look to Christ for everything that you need, both physically and spiritually? If you do, you will be lacking in nothing. The Lord God is a Sun and a Shield, the Lord gives grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!

3rd – David praises God for answering his prayer to make him bold by giving him strength in his soul. (verse 3)

“In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul.” Now, you will notice that it was when David prayed, when he cried out, that God answered and made him bold with strength in his soul. This inward spiritual strength to be bold for doing and saying what is right and appropriate, for being able to do good works and engage in spiritual evangelism and exploits that will forward the kingdom of Christ, this is not always found in the Christian’s heart and mind to the same level and degree at all times. There are sometimes when a Christian may feel quite timid. Some Christians are like this naturally in their temperament, and some are naturally more bold. But I want to show you that in terms of being righteously bold in God’s service, it takes the spiritual strength of Christ being given to our souls.

Take Timothy for example. In 2nd Timothy 1, verses 3 to 7 Paul says – “I thank God whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.” “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, (a spirit of timidity, it says in the NAS) but of power and love and of a sound mind.”

You see, Timothy had genuine saving faith, and Paul thanks God that he saw the evidence of that faith in him. But there had been times, Paul knew, that Timothy had evidently been timid when it came to suffering for the gospel. And so, he tells Timothy to stir up the gift of God which was within him; that is, through prayer that he would ask God to give him the fortitude of heart and the spiritual strength not to be ashamed of the gospel but boldly to proclaim it, and to take his stand with others who were preaching it. Actually the apostle Paul needed this too. In 2nd Timothy chapter 4, verse 16, the apostle Paul says – “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me.” “May it not be charged against them.” “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear.” So spiritual strength is that which gives the heart and the mind of the Christian, the moral courage and fortitude of heart to stand for the truth; to stand against the enemies of the gospel, and then to go ahead and preach the gospel. This text is telling us that this spiritual boldness only comes when we cry to God for it.

I am saying that you and I must learn to pray and cry to God for this spiritual strength. We have a good example of this in David’s life in 1st Samuel 30, when David was greatly distressed because, when he was trying to avoid capture by Saul, the Amalekites had invaded the south where he was, and they attacked Ziklag where he and his men had been staying, and they burned the city with fire and they had taken captive everyone who was there; their wives, their sons, their daughters had all been taken captive. Then it says in verse 4 – “Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.” “And

David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive." It says – "Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and daughters." "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." That is, he prayed and cried out to God and God answered him.

He didn't just sit there bemoaning his condition. He specifically asked God for wisdom; if he should go and pursue that troop? Would he overtake them? And God answered him that he most definitely should pursue them, for he would most surely overtake them, and without fail they would recover all. And that is exactly what happened. Through the means of prayer, David strengthened his own soul, and then he went about to strengthen the souls of the others with him. But really, it behind the scenes, it was God who was strengthening their souls, to by faith, obey what He would have them to do. And this gave them success. They were made bold with strength in their souls to do this. The same will be true of you and me if we will pray and cry to God for spiritual strength in our souls. He will give it.

This is why David says in Psalm 18: 29 – "For by You I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall." "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him." "For who is God, except the Lord?" "And who is a rock, except our God?" "It is God who arms me with strength, and make my way perfect." "He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places." "He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." Let us understand that all strength to be spiritually bold for truth and righteousness comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the days of Christ's earthly ministry, the apostle Peter, when he knew that Jesus was going to the cross, said that even if he had to die with Him, he would not deny Him. And so said all the disciples. But when it came time to pray, neither Peter nor any of the others could stay awake. When Judas and the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter was bold enough to cut off the high priest servant's ear. But this was a fleshly boldness, and Jesus told him to stop. Could He not call ten thousand angels to rescue Him if He wanted? No, Christ willingly went to the cross and suffered and died for our sakes. And we should further understand, that one of the reasons that Jesus suffered for us was, that He might purchase the grace for you to endure sufferings of various kinds, which come to you in relation to your taking our stand for truth.

Christ, you will remember, prayed earnestly in the garden of Gethsemane, in Matthew 26: 42 – "If this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." And it says in Hebrews chapter 5, verse 7 that when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, He was heard because of His godly fear." But this didn't mean that he was spared the suffering of the cross. No, it meant that He had spiritual strength as a Man to endure it. God answered Him in that way, and made Him bold with strength in his soul. The same will be true for you when you pray and cry to God for spiritual strength. He will make you bold with strength in your soul to face all the difficult situations that He will lead you into, so that you might glorify Him and become more like your Savior.