
Topic : How to Praise God in All Circumstances
Passage : Psalms 145
Date : 17 April 2005

I'm going to share today from Psalms 145. David, the composer of this Psalm, says at least three things about God. v3 He is great. v4 - 7 He is good. And v17 - 18 He is loving.

Three Things about God	
v 3. "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise ..."	God is great
v 4 - 7. "One generation will commend Your works to another ... They will celebrate Your abundant goodness"	God is good
v 17 - 18. "The Lord is ... loving ... The Lord is near to all who call on Him ..."	God is loving & personal

But life does not always seem to square with this.

Most of us have gone through a time when everything went wrong. A parent falls very sick. Your child has a bad fall. Your boss tekans you. You fail your exams. Your best friend betrays you. You get grounded. You get ditched.

When I was first told to preach from this Psalm, the post-Christmas tsunami had just hit multiple countries in Asia. Over 280,000 people died. Many of these people were good people. Many were Christians.

In bad times like this, people ask : where is the greatness, the goodness and the love of God ? The words in the Psalm seem unreal.

But today I want to challenge you to look at God in a different perspective. To see how God remains great, good and loving even in bad times. Which leads me to today's sermon title, "why should we praise God in all circumstances" or, to put it bluntly, "when life sucks".

David praised God despite the downs in his life

Before we look at how Psalms 145 applies to us, let us look at the life of the person who wrote it.

This psalm was written by King David. But although he was king, David did not lead a life of pleasure and comfort. His life was in fact full of ups and downs.

Before David became king, Saul was jealous of his popularity and tried to kill him. For the next couple of years, David lived on the run, in forests and caves. Sometimes he had to beg for bread. He was even betrayed by a city that he risked his life rescuing from bandits.

At the time that David became king, he found out that his best friend – Jonathan – had died in battle.

While he was king, his enemies tried to overthrow him. Even his own son tried to kill him !

We do not know which time in his life David wrote Psalms 145. It might have been a difficult time, or a happier time. But we do know that David's life, like ours, had its ups and downs. Of all people, David knew what it meant to live in fear of death, to suffer indignity, hunger and poverty, to be betrayed, and to grieve the loss of close friends.

Despite that, David composed Psalms 145, praising God for His greatness, goodness and love. How was David do that despite his many bad experiences ? I believe that some of the answers lie in Psalms 145.

(1) God is Great. David Acknowledged God for who He is – God (v 3)

And I start first with verse 3. Here David says that God's "greatness no one can fathom". The NASB translates the original Hebrew text to mean "unsearchable".

David is saying "God, You are great because I don't completely understand everything that You do ... You are great, because I cannot see the limit of Your greatness".

God is infinite. God's wisdom is infinite. And in verse 3 David acknowledges that an infinite God is too big for a mere human to completely understand. This echoes Isaiah 55 : 8 - 9, where God says :

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts".

Sadly, this is something that mankind is less and less able to grasp over time. Today, there are some very smart people – philosophers and scientists, and ordinary people like you and me – who vainly try to reduce an infinite God into an equation. We try to psychoanalyse God as if He were another human being. We come up with theories about God, saying that God must behave according to our rules : "if God loves me, He will give me a job" or "if God is good, I will find a partner" or "if God is great, I will pass my test" or "He will heal my relative".

And when God does not behave according to our rules, which happens because God's standard of greatness is much higher than ours, when we cannot understand what God is doing in our life,

we – humans – conclude that (1) there is no God or (2) if there is a God, He doesn't care or (3) God is bad.

Friends, is this the nature of your faith ? Do you believe a good God is only one who acts according to your understanding of goodness ? Do you believe that a good God is only one who gives you a job NOW, or who gives you a partner NOW, or who helps you pass your test NOW, or who heals a relative NOW ?

If so, you need a change how you look at God. Ephesians 3 : 20 says that God is able to act immeasurably beyond what you can ask for or imagine. Stop trying to put God into a box.

When confronted with a bad situation – we praise God not because we completely understand what is happening, or why, but because we know that God's greatness exceeds what our human minds can grasp.

I don't want to pretend that this is very easy to do. But when confronted with doubt, I encourage you to draw hope from the death and resurrection of Christ.

Historically, the Jews expected Jesus, the Messiah, to lead a rebellion against the Romans and establish a physical kingdom of God on earth. But Jesus did not lead a rebellion. Instead, He allowed the Romans and religious leaders to trap him, and said things that made it easier for them to condemn Him.

Jesus was crucified. Suddenly, everything that the Jews had hoped for came crashing down. Jesus the king was dead. The Romans were still in power. The Jews had no self-government.

To everyone, it looked like the end. But in God's perfect plan, this was only the beginning of better things to come. God planned for Jesus to die on the cross, only to be resurrected three days later. By His death, Jesus atoned for the sin for the world. And by His resurrection, there is hope beyond our life on earth.

So friends, stop trying to define God's greatness by your human standards. No more, God, if you love me, You must do this NOW. You are only setting yourself up for disappointment. Like David, humbly acknowledge the limit of your human understanding.

Trust God because He exceeds whatever you can ask for or imagine.

(2) David stood in awe of God as revealed through His wonderful works (v 5)

The second reason why David praises God is because he sees God's goodness revealed through God's wonderful works. What are the "wonderful works" that psalms 145 refers to ?

These are first of all the works of Creation around us. If you look carefully at Creation, you will see the remarkable and undeniable power of God.

In this area, some people falsely assume that science and a belief in God cannot co-exist. I disagree. Many scientists are fervent Christians. There is even a division of Roman Catholic priests that are scientists who dedicate themselves to scientific discovery ! There is no contradiction between science and faith because the more we learn about the universe, the more we realise how complex and amazing it is. And how all this points to an intelligent design that can only result from a Creator God.

The tree that grows from a seed, a butterfly that grows from a caterpillar, a baby that grows in a mother's womb – science has explained the conditions necessary for growth to take place – add seed, soil, water, sunlight, fertiliser, etc. – but it cannot explain the power that brings otherwise inanimate objects to life !

This confirms what the Bible says in Romans 1 : 20, that “since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what He has made ...”.

Need more proof ? Even the *Da Vinci Code* says this. This book has generated a big fight between Christians and non-Christians because it suggests that some Christian beliefs are false. While I believe that the writer has made many inaccurate and irresponsible statements, I think that both Christians and non-Christians have missed a very significant point made by the writer, probably by accident. In chapter 20, the writer talks about how a special number, PHI or the Divine Proportion, recurs throughout Creation. For example, when you measure parts of the human body, or of DNA, or sea shells, or flowers and more :

“My friends, as you can see, the chaos of the world has an underlying order. When the ancients discovered PHI, they were certain they had stumbled across God's building block for the world ... God's hand is evident in Nature ... the mysterious magic inherent in the Divine Proportion was written at the beginning of time. Man is simply playing by Nature's rules, and because art is man's attempt to imitate the beauty of the Creator's hand ... [there are] a lot of instances of the Divine Proportion in art ...”

How amazing is that ? Even the non-Christian writer is in awe of God's creation. What about us Christians ? I believe that like David, if we take the time and effort to see God at work in His Creation, won't we also see the goodness of God despite our troubles.

Now, apart from Creation, “wonderful works” also refers to how God touches our lives personally, even through what seems to be ordinary and random events.

When you get better after you fall sick, when you are not caught for being late for school, when your boss does not notice your mistake – are you just lucky ? Lucky that you got better ? Lucky to get away with being late ? Lucky that your boss did not spot your mistake ? Yesterday Joyce and I went to the gynaecologist. He told us our baby is growing normally. Are we just lucky ?

I believe that this is the grace and protection of God at work. James 1 : 16 - 17 says that when good things happen, it is not luck or an ordinary, random event. Rather, “every good and perfect gift is from above”, from the “Father of heavenly lights”.

So, if you think there is nothing to praise God for, is it because you do not realise that God is at work even in what seems to be ordinary or random events ?

At one CG session, David shared about a programme he heard over the radio. The deejay asked callers to name him the seven wonders of the world. Most callers gave answers like the Great Wall of China, Pyramids of Egypt, Taj Mahal of India, etc. But one caller said that his seven wonders were his ability to see, hear, smell, taste, touch, talk and feel. Only one caller could see an extraordinary miracle in what everyone else takes for granted.

We need to be aware that a modern society like ours has desensitised us into ignoring the wonder of God’s work in what seems to be ordinary, everyday events. I say this because our science textbooks refer to “Nature” rather than to “Creation”. I say this because we are taught that it is only by hard work alone that we get the results we want. God is not a factor. I say this because we allow statistics to tell us that many things are part of the normal course of life – such as recovering from a common cold. But no one praises God for making these things common.

Friends, in Psalms 145, David praises God for His goodness, and David was able to see this goodness because he meditated on the God’s work in and around him. In the same way, to see God’s goodness, we need to re-sensitise ourselves to God’s wonderful work. Take time to thank God for the simple things in life, like the food that you eat or when you get better after an illness, or for the trees you see in a park. Once in a while, perhaps every few weeks, take time to meditate – to think upon – what God has done for you, instead of stoning in front of a TV or a computer game.

(3) David experienced the nearness of God (v 18, 19)

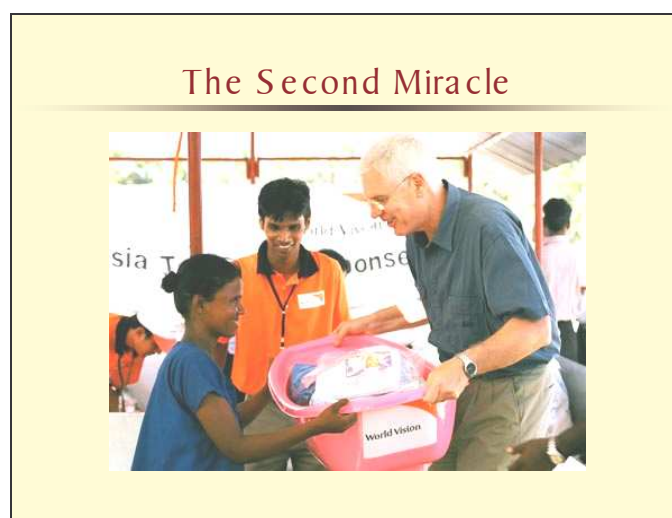
Finally, in verses 18 and 19, David praises God as a loving God who is always near and who saves him from his troubles.

How true was this in David’s life ? Well, the Bible records that there were a few times when God supernaturally intervened in David’s life to protect him. But most of the time, David escaped harm because of friends who helped him. Was God near to David in those times ? Did God save David, or did David’s friends save David ?

What I am trying to say, is that God is near and that God saves, not only when He performs extraordinary miracles. Many times, God draws near to you by moving other Christians to show you greater grace, care and love than you would expect from the man in the street.

Going back to my first question about “where was God in the tsunami”, Pastor Malcolm shared the other day about his experience doing humanitarian work in Aceh. When Aceh was hit by the tsunami, two miracles happened.

The first concerned one of the local churches located in the town centre. Because of restrictions imposed on the Christian minority in Aceh, they had to celebrate Christmas on Saturday evening (25 December) instead of Sunday morning (26 December). Now this turned out for their good. Because if the Christians had gone to church on Sunday morning, the entire congregation would have been wiped out by the tsunami. However, when the tsunami struck on Sunday morning, they were safely at home outside the town centre. This incident speaks about how God uses an apparently bad situation – restrictions on worship – to miraculously protect His people from harm.



This is the second miracle. God showed His nearness, and His saving grace, to the victims not by stopping the killer waves, but by sending Christians to deliver humanitarian aid – building shelters, cooking food, providing medical aid, searching for missing relatives and counselling people in trauma.

Friends, I believe that God uses the church and its Christians as a way to draw near to us and bless us.

Sadly, there is a trend amongst Christians today to withdraw themselves from God’s cover of blessing in this respect. Some refuse to be a regular member of a church. They limit their involvement with God to just sitting in a worship service and hearing a good sermon. Others may be regular church goers, but refuse to plug into the community of Christians. They might be invited many times to get involved in the lives of fellow Christians, by joining a cell group, or serving in church. Always, they refuse. Or even if they turn up, they do so unwillingly.

Some Christians constantly withdraw from God in this way because of a previous bad experience with Christians. But you are a Christian today only because God had moved another Christian to reach out to you, or your parents if you were born into a Christian family. If you are

struggling with this today, God says that the abundance of His love is not experienced by living as a hermit. Put your past behind and plug yourself back into the community.

Other Christians withdraw from God because they fear the sacrifices that comes along with drawing near to God. When we plug into a Christian community, there are some sacrifices we need to make. We need to open our homes for care group, we need to buy refreshments, we need to go to church early on Sunday or on other days for worship practice, we need to visit the sick, we need to stay back after church to help clean up or to help with the children's or youth ministry.

In our humanness, we want the benefit of God's blessing, but not the burden of the sacrifices that come along with plugging into the community. So after counting the cost, we draw limits on what we will do in church. Maybe some of us are only willing to join a Sunday service, but not a weekday fellowship. For others it might be the opposite – only a weekday get-together but not a Sunday service. Others go a bit further – maybe we are prepared to commit to Sunday service and two hours of ministry a week, but we won't go beyond that even if the church building threatens to collapse.

Sadly, when we draw limits on our involvement with God, we also draw limits on how close God can draw to us and bless us.

It is human to want the benefit but not the burden. Joyce and I often joke to each other that our greatest ambition in life is not to be a pastor, missionary or ministry leader, but to go to some mega-church and warm the pews. And during the times when we feel particularly over-worked or stressed out, withdrawing from God seems so attractive.

But Joyce and I also know that the happiest Christians in the world are not those who devote their lives to themselves. The happiest Christians are not the richest, or the ones with the biggest houses or cars, or who are the most popular or the smartest in school. Rather, the happiest are the ones who are the most plugged into the community of Christians, and how involved they are with God, shows how deeply they have experienced the nearness of God.

I think all of us have seem kids, especially older ones, who squirm out of the arms of the daddy or mummy that carries them.

I believe that God wants to carry us in His arms. He is a personal and loving God who wants to draw near to us. That is why David was able to praise Him at all times. David experienced the love and protection of God, not just supernaturally, but through the people around him. The question for us is do we, like some kids, try to squirm out of God's arms ?

Conclusion

If you remember nothing of today's sermon so far, I hope you take these two phrases away.

If you remember nothing else ...		
<u>God on Call</u>	vs	<u>Call on God</u>
A Pizza Delivery God who :		The "Psalms 145" God :
answers when we want Him to		who is greater than we can imagine
in the way we want Him to		whose goodness is revealed in His works
without needing to truly believe in or get involved with Him		who draws near through people and circumstances

God on Call. We live in a world that has distorted ideas about God. Whether Christian or non-Christian, many people believe that if God exists, He must be a "God on Call" or a "Pizza Delivery God". We call pizza delivery when we want to have a good meal, without having to go through the effort of cooking and cleaning up. In the same way, many people have the idea that God is someone who should answer them when they want Him to, in the way that they want Him to, without the need to truly believe in Him or to get involved in cooking or cleaning up.

And because God is not a "God on Call", when life gets difficult – when it sucks – they think that God either does not exist, does not care, or is bad.

Call on God. Psalms 145, on the other hand, tells us that God is not a "Pizza Delivery God". Instead, it encourages us to "Call on God".

It says that that God is greater than anything we can ever ask for or imagine. Therefore we call on God by trusting Him more than our limited understanding of negative circumstances.

It says that God's goodness is revealed in His wonderful work. Therefore we call on God by observing and reminding ourselves of God's work in and around us.

Finally, it says that God is near, sometimes supernaturally, and other times by the people he places in our lives. And so we call on God by getting involved with His people, by plugging into the community of Christians.