

IN HONOUR OF KING YAHWEH: The Book of Psalms

Week 6 — Praise to our King



Your Psalm

What would happen if you took one of the Psalms you loved and applied the questions we've suggested?

1. What type of Psalm is it?
(Lament, praise/hymn, thanksgiving, royal, wisdom)
2. What would the Psalm have meant for the Jewish people?
3. How should we read the Psalm in the light of Jesus?
4. What does the Psalm mean for us?

Last week we suggested having a go. How did it turn out?
Would you like to share something from your experience?

How did you find this way of approaching the Psalms? Discuss.

Psalm 145

Analysis

- Genre: Praise (the only Psalm with this title)
- Attribution: Of David (the last Psalm with this title)
- Structure: Acrostic (each verse begins with the next Hebrew letter, though v.13 covers two letters.)

Meaning for Israel

- v.1-3 The Psalm begins by giving honour to Israel's divine ruler. Who is *I*, the speaker giving honour to God? (Hint: see title). What does it mean for Israel to be praised as Israel's *king*? On what basis does this person give honour to King YHWH?
- v.4-7 As God's representative kingdom, Israel passed knowledge of YHWH down through the generations of the Abrahamic family (v.4). In verse 5, they focused on:
- a) the *character* of their ruler (his glorious majesty),
 - b) the *actions* of their ruler (his wondrous works).
- The parallels in v.6 and v.7 focus on the same two facets, for his character shows up in the way he rules.
- v.8-9 Celebrating YHWH's character and resultant actions takes the Psalmist back to the way their ruler revealed himself. When God brought them out of Egypt and made them his own people in a covenant (like a marriage commitment), Israel was unfaithful (building a golden calf). God was really upset, yet he was astoundingly gracious to them. Their unfaithfulness showed up God's amazing faithfulness:
- Ex 34:6 YHWH passed before Moses and proclaimed,
"YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ..."

- v.10 The Psalmist therefore encourages Israel to expect that *all YHWH's works* (not just Israel) will see and appreciate his faithful commitment to them, for God committed himself to all the nations and to the earth itself before Abraham's family existed (Gen 9:8-17). Israel's role is therefore to be the holy people (*saints*) of YHWH, pointing creation towards him.
- v.11-12 By their lives as God's ambassadors, Israel proclaimed the glorious presence of YHWH their ruler and his power (v.11). They reveal to the other nations (*the children of man*) the mighty deeds and character of the most wonderful ruler.
- v.13 God never delegated authority to humans to rule over other humans: he has always had the right to rule, and always will have. Therefore God's authority is an everlasting kingdom that persists through all generations.
- The latter half of verse 13 is missing from all Hebrew manuscripts except one, though it is present in translations (LXX and Syriac) and one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QPsa). It also celebrates our heavenly ruler's character and works.
- v.14-20 Since YHWH is the heavenly monarch over Israel (his representative kingdom), the Psalm now celebrates specific ways in which God executes his rule (manages Israel):
- a) He supports the weak and those who cannot support themselves (justice – v.14).
 - b) He provides enough for everyone (providence – v.15-16).
 - c) He perfectly balances doing right with being kind (v.17).
 - d) He is available to those who call out for his help (v.18).
 - e) He rescues those who trust him when in danger (v.19).
 - f) He ensures the lives of those who love him, while preventing those who do evil from continuing (v.20).
- v.21 The king of Israel ("David") therefore declares to his people what a majestic ruler they have in YHWH, so that not only his own subjects but everyone in creation (*all flesh*) bring honour (*bless*) the ruler who does right and is committed to his creation (*his holy name*) as his subjects throughout all the generations ahead (*forever*).

Meaning in light of Jesus

Now let's go back and read this Psalm not only as David extoling God's kingly authority over Israel, but also as Jesus extoling God's kingly authority over creation (*the kingdom of God*). The kingdom of God was actually Jesus' main message: he saw himself as the human (the Son of Man) who restored to God his rightful authority as ruler over human life and society (the kingdom of God).

- v.1 Jesus lived his whole life to extol God as our rightful ruler (*King*). The Lord's Prayer—begins exactly like verse 1:
Our heavenly ruler, hallowed be your name.
- v.2 Every day Jesus rose to spend his energies on blessing God. When he healed people, it was to bring praise to the heavenly ruler who was setting things right through him.
- v.3 While Jesus would have agreed that God's greatness is *unsearchable*, he kept dreaming up stories that tried to capture what the world would be like under God's reign—parables of God's kingdom.
- v.4-7 In Jesus, God performed *awesome deeds*—works of restoration that were signs that God is restoring his realm.
- v.8-9 Jesus was the perfect picture of God being *gracious and merciful* towards the disobedient. Jesus chose to hang out with them, to give them an experience of God's grace.
- v.10 Jesus was very confronting against those who thought they were the holy people of God (*saints*) and yet dishonoured his name by not showing mercy towards those they labelled as unacceptable sinners.
- v.11-13 Jesus spent his entire life calling people back into the kingdom of God. His resurrection established that kingdom, and he now rules as Lord (Ruler) of all.
- v.14 Jesus trusted the Father to lift him up, ... even out of death.
- v.15-17 Jesus taught that even the birds looked to God for their food, so his people need to trust him that God will provide.
- v.18 Jesus was God-come-near to his people.
He was Immanuel, God with us.
- v.19-20 Jesus fulfilled the centuries-old desire of Israel that God would come near and rescue them. In doing so, he saved not only them, but the whole world from the dominion of evil into the Father's care (kingdom).
- v.21 This verse could be the mission statement of Jesus' life.

Note that we are not saying that Jesus did these things because of Psalm 145; rather, that Jesus lived what the Psalm was talking about in practice:

Yahweh's great and benevolent kingdom, to which Israel's experience is a testimony (as evident from the citation of Exod. 34:6), is open to all. His kingdom has no boundaries: "all flesh" is to "bless his holy name" (v. 21). This is a theme Jesus and the NT writers develop over and over.¹

¹ W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Jr. Hubbard and Robert K. Johnston. *Psalms*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 508.

Meaning for us

Go through the Psalm again. Is it the mission statement of your life? How can it inspire you to a life like Jesus—the life of Jesus in us?

Here's an example of how Psalm 145 defines our lives (not merely our singing), in the light of the kingdom of God revealed in Jesus the Christ (anointed ruler). Please read these comments in conjunction with the verses of the Psalm.

- v.1-3 I live my life to bring honour to our Creator and to the ruler he has set over humanity—Jesus our King.
- v.4-7 Each generation declares and demonstrates Jesus' lordship over creation. He became king in the most unusual way—not by taking lives to force people into subjection, by giving his life to overcome evil and death! He is the only ruler worthy of the name! With every waking breath, I keep declaring the wonder of what he has done, the amnesty he offers to rebels.
- v.8-9 God has, in Jesus, shown himself to be gracious and merciful, slow to react to evil, abounding in steadfast love. As a ruler, he is good to everyone, extending mercy to restore everything under his authority. I will treat people the way he treats us—extending forgiveness, seeking peace, living for reconciliation.
- v.10 His goal is to restore all his works so the whole creation discovers its *raison d'être* (reason for existing) under his reign. So, we live to demonstrate the devoted heart of our heavenly ruler—as his devoted (holy) people.
- v.11 We no longer live to build our own little kingdoms of wealth and power. Rather, we live to declare the glory of God's kingdom, to promote his power!
- v.12 This is not only about what happens in church: it's about making Jesus' name known and honouring that name among all people in all the communities we're part of (*all the children of man*).
- v.13 We want everyone to see that Jesus rules over the whole world. What Jesus did demonstrates God's faithfulness: our heavenly ruler never gave up on his rebellious world, but kept working to bring his realm back out of rebellion and chaos into his care and order.
- v.14 Our Lord lifts up those who are fallen and raises up those who are crushed, so that's how we treat people as well.
- v.15-16 Our Father provides food for the birds of the sky, and dresses the wildflowers with beauty. The whole creation receives sustenance from his hand. So we, too, live lives full of satisfaction at his reign and his care.

- v.17 Because our Ruler does what is right in everything, we show the same kindness in our business with others.
- v.18 When his citizens ask for his help, our Ruler responds to everyone who genuinely depends on him. We are partners with him in the expression of his love.
- v.19 When we reach out and trust our Heavenly Ruler as the one who has the real power (in contrast to others who try to dominate us), he satisfies and rescues us. Then he partners with us in extending his care to others in need, and nothing is more satisfying. We were built for this partnership!
- v.20 Those who love our heavenly ruler he rescues as his friends, but those who oppose his rule make themselves his enemies — a no-win situation.
- v.21 So, I live to declare the greatness of our divine ruler, so that every living thing can experience the blessing of his perfect authority for ever.

Conclusion

The Psalms open us to the God who rules throughout human history:

- a) He is the God of Israel, his representative people in the time before Jesus.
- b) He is the ruler revealed in the person of Jesus, the man who became Lord not by killing his enemies but by dying at their hands and trusting Father to raise him up. The Psalms contain hints that this is the kind of God we serve.
- c) The Psalms inform us how to be the people of YHWH who acknowledge the authority of King Jesus. We declare him in our words and demonstrate the character of our ruler in our lifestyle as the people of God.

Approach the Psalms this way, and they expand the horizon of your world:

I admit that my prayers can slide into small, all-about-me-or-mine prayers. Sometimes I am bored by my own prayers. The horizon of my prayer vision clouds with my own self-interest. I don't think I am alone in this. All along I have ready access and am invited to the pulsating life, expansive vision and flint-like reality of prayers called The Psalms.²

² John Frye, *The House of Prayer*, 2015. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2014/11/28/the-house-of-prayer/> accessed 29 Jan 2015.

Memory verse

Psalm 145:13 (NIV)

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.

Take home exercise

Take some time to meditate on how Jesus' life fulfilled Psalms like Psalm 145. How does this inspire you to respond?

The kingdom of God was Jesus' central message. It is the foundational message of the entire Bible, and is the theme of the Psalms:

This is the bedrock conviction of biblical faith: The Lord reigns! (see Psalm 96:10; Isaiah 52:7). This conviction, deeply grounded in the Scriptures, generates faith and trust, and so also the prayer, patience and courage we find in these psalms.³

The book of Psalms ends with resounding praise to our King, the God who rules over all. The final psalm is the noisy affirmation of praise for the way God rules. Eugene Peterson (translator of *The Message*) observes:

Psalm 150 does not stand alone; four more hallelujah psalms are inserted in front of it so that it becomes the fifth of five psalms that conclude the Psalter. These five hallelujah psalms are extraordinarily robust. ... no matter how much we suffer, no matter our doubts, no matter how angry we get, no matter how many times we have asked in desperation "How long?," prayer develops finally into praise. *This is not to say that other prayers are inferior to praise, only that all prayer pursued far enough, becomes praise.* ...

Don't rush it. It may take years, decades even, before certain prayers arrive at the hallelujahs, at Psalms 146–150. Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact, most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, are not. But prayer is always reaching toward praise and will finally arrive there.

So ... our lives fill out with goodness. Earth and heaven meet in an extraordinary conjunction. Clashing cymbals announce the glory. Blessing. Amen. Hallelujah.⁴

³ Mike O'Neil, *Courage & Compassion*, 2015. <http://theologyandchurch.com/2015/02/03/courage-compassion/> accessed 3 Feb, 2015. "These Psalms" was particularly referring to Psalms 9–11.

⁴ Eugene Peterson. *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (HarperOne, 1991), 128