

Psalm 145 is the last Davidic psalm and the final acrostic psalm.<sup>1</sup> Its placement in the psalter serves to bring Psalms 138-145 to a conclusion and to introduce the last five praise psalms which form a concluding crescendo of praise. Doxology is the theme of Psalm 145 and the resounding concern of all the concluding psalms. The psalm reaches back to the Exodus and Yahweh's self-revelation to Moses, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exod 34:6-7; see Ps 145:8).

And the psalm reaches forward to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus' challenged his followers not to worry but to pray to their "heavenly Father" who knows their needs. The exhortation to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" echoes the themes of Psalm 145: the Lord's abundant goodness, his everlasting kingdom, and his compassionate and merciful response to all who call on him. Exuberant, uninhibited praise is the overarching theme of this lively, passionate psalm. If you are looking for a psalm to sing in the shower this is it!<sup>2</sup>

We can safely assume that Jesus prayed Psalm 145 often, maybe daily. He knew it inside and out, not just the words, but the whole psalm permeated his understanding and outlook on life. When the rich, young ruler ran up to him and fell on his knees saying, "Good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone" (Mark 10:17-18). His response is consistent with Psalm 145 with its emphasis on the greatness and goodness of God. It is not difficult to see how this jubilant Kingdom-oriented psalm shaped Jesus' self-understanding and how it inspired his overarching joy and confidence.

*Praise Never Quits!*

*I will exalt you, my God the King;  
I will praise your name for ever and ever.  
Every day I will praise you  
and extol your name for ever and ever.*

*Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;  
his greatness no one can fathom.  
One generation commends your works to another;  
they tell of your mighty acts.  
They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty –  
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.  
They tell of the power of your awesome works –  
and I will proclaim your great deeds.*

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<sup>1</sup> There are eight acrostic psalms (Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145). Each verse or group of verses (Ps 119) begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This alphabetical structure gave the poet-psalmist a tight artistic structure to work with, although the poet was not entirely beholden to it. The acrostic style is thought to aid in memorizing the psalm in Hebrew, but it is difficult to carry over the style into another language.

<sup>2</sup> Reardon, Christ in the Psalms, 289.

*They celebrate your abundant goodness  
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.  
Psalm 145:1-7*

The forceful and declarative “I will” statements from the psalmist overshadow whatever lingering malaise we might bring to the psalm. His enthusiasm shakes us out of our lethargy and apathy. Doubt is drowned out in his confident commitment to “exalt,” “praise,” and “extol” the Lord. Skepticism is sidelined in his passionate desire to “meditate” and proclaim the “wonderful works,” the “awesome works,” and the “great deeds” of “my God and King.” Whoever heard and observed the psalmist knew immediately that his praise was not dependent on his feelings in the moment nor in the mood of the congregation. His passion to praise the Lord was independent of his aesthetic sensibilities or his acoustical preferences. His unstoppable praise was not rooted in personality, profession, or performance. The reason nothing got in the way of his worship was because it was grounded in the Lord’s mighty acts and abundant goodness. The psalmist found no reason in himself – in his existential self, to praise the Lord. He did not look within. He looked up, to the Lord. Those on the outside may attribute the psalmist’s passion for praise to expressive individualism. But not the psalmist, he is overwhelmed by the greatness and the goodness of God.

He joyfully gives himself to the wonderful work of praising the Lord “every day” and “forever.” His motivation is clear: the Lord is “great” and “most worthy of praise.” He leads others into the joy and privilege of worship by his example. He speaks of the Lord, to the Lord. “I will exalt *you*. . . I will praise *your* name.” He refers to “*your* majesty,” “*your* wonderful works,” “*your* awesome works,” “*your* mighty deeds,” “*your* righteousness,” and in so doing he inspires the generations to extol “the glorious splendor” of the Lord’s majesty. He is in the company of like-minded worshipers who celebrate the Lord’s “abundant goodness” and “joyfully sing” of his righteousness.

The psalmist revels in the revealed character and redemptive acts of the Lord he knows personally by name. Calvin inferred from the psalmist’s description “that the greatness of God is not that which lies concealed in his mysterious essence, and in subtle disputation . . . for true religion demands practical not speculative knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Calvin goes on to say that the more a person feels drawn to God, the more he or she has advanced in the knowledge of him.<sup>4</sup> Knowing God is not a theoretical exercise in speculative thought, but a personal and practical experience of God’s goodness and grace. It is the knowledge *of* God, and not the knowledge *about* God, that celebrates the Lord’s abundant goodness and sings joyfully of his righteousness.

“The prayer encouraged by this psalm,” writes Goldingay, “is the kind embodied in the Lord’s prayer.”<sup>5</sup> It is as if Jesus took Psalm 145 and compressed it into four or five sentences. “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10), covers the psalm’s opening section which extols the name of God

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 273.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 275.

<sup>5</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 705.

and celebrates the greatness of God's coming kingdom. The implications of each line in the Lord's prayer can be found in Psalm 145. "Give us today our daily bread," is reflected in the Lord's gift of food and open handed generosity (Ps 145:15-16). Forgiveness for sins is expressed in the Lord's nearness "to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth" (Ps 145:18) and "deliverance from the evil one" is found in the Lord's watch care over "those who fear him" and "over all who love him" (Ps 145:19-20). The caption under Psalm 145 could read, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

### *Reasons for Praise*

*The Lord is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and rich in love.  
The Lord is good to all;  
he has compassion on all he has made.  
All your works praise you, Lord;  
your faithful people extol you.  
They tell of the glory of your kingdom  
and speak of your might,  
so that all people may know of your mighty acts  
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.  
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.<sup>6</sup>  
The Lord upholds all who fall  
and lifts up all who are bowed down.  
The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food at the proper time.  
You open your hand  
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.*

Psalm 145:8-16

The psalmist expands on his opening declaration of praise by beginning with Yahweh's self-revelation. The covenant people of God have never known the Lord apart from his compassion and grace, apart his love and forgiveness. This is the one and only living God who redeemed them out of bondage and called them to be his "treasured possession," and "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6; see Ps 103:8). However, the Lord's goodness is not confined to Israel, "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." Israel's role in the world is to communicate to "all people" the glory, power, and splendor of the Lord's everlasting kingdom. This is so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3).

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<sup>6</sup> Kidner, Psalms, 480. Kidner writes, "One letter of the alphabet (*nûn*) is lacking from the standard Hebrew text; but most of the ancient translations and now a text from Qumran supply the missing verse, which RSV [and NIV] and subsequent translations include at the end of verse 13 ("The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.")."

Once again the psalms confirm that worship is the cutting edge of evangelism. The good news of what the Lord has done in his mercy and grace is communicated to the world through the praise of God's people. There is an organic, natural reality to genuine praise. Praise is not a duty performed nor an obligation imposed. It is a privilege embraced out of joy. Grace, not guilt, provides the motivation to praise the Lord and to tell of the glory of his kingdom. Even in the secular age, where the truth about God and the gospel has been driven underground, there is an exuberance, a joy, that cannot be denied. Ironically, the truth of Psalm 145:13 is quoted by King Nebuchadnezzar in a preamble to a dream in which he is judged by a "holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven." In his dream the reason for the verdict is given, that he would know "that the Most High is sovereign over all the kingdoms on earth. . ." (Dan 4:3,13,17). It is telling that the meaning of the Lord's "everlasting kingdom" should be impressed upon an egotistical, power-driven narcissist like Nebuchadnezzar. Clearly, the Lord is more than capable of making himself and his kingdom known in any secular - pagan age.

The psalmist leads by example. He gives us the language and reasons for praise. Contrary to the power schemes of the world, the Lord's greatness and majesty is evident not in human domination but in human liberation. "God reigns only for the promotion of the general welfare of mankind," wrote Calvin.<sup>7</sup> The psalmist doesn't say it. He doesn't need to, but human leaders are not trustworthy in their promises and faithful in their actions. They do not uphold the fallen, lift up the weak, provide "food at the proper time." They don't practice open-handed generosity and "satisfy the desires of every living thing" (Ps 145:13-16). But the Lord does! Hebrew scholar John Perowne writes, "Where is the cosmic excellence of the kingdom seen? Not in symbols of earthly pride and power, but in gracious condescension to the fallen and the crushed, in a gracious care which provides for the wants of every living thing."<sup>8</sup>

Christians praying Psalm 145 today know there is much more to be said of the Lord's mighty acts than the psalmist had lived to experience. "My God the King" (Ps 145:1) became Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). The Divine disclosure deepened and that which was anticipated became actualized. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). At Pentecost, following the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Peter assured Israel of this: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). Later, Peter would write, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance than can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Pet 1:3-4).

### *"All" Praise*

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways  
and faithful in all he does.  
The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.*

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<sup>7</sup> Calvin, Psalms, 277.

<sup>8</sup> Perowne, Psalms, II:471 (quoted in Ross, Psalms, 916).

*He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;  
he hears their cry and saves them.  
The Lord watches over all who love him,  
but all the wicked he will destroy.  
My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord.  
Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.*  
Psalm 145:17-21

The simple word “all” is repeated some fourteen times to describe the totality and universality of the Lord’s goodness (Ps 145:9-20). The Lord is good to *all*, compassionate to *all*, and near to *all* who call on him. *All* his works declare his glory to *all* people and to *all* generations. The Lord is trustworthy in *all* his promises, righteous in *all* his ways, faithful in *all* he does, upholding *all* who fall, lifting *all* who are bowed down, near to *all* who call on him, and responsive to *all* who call on him in truth. The Lord watches over *all* who love him. This is a beautiful description of the inclusiveness and universality of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its total impact on every aspect of life. The Lord is worthy of praise every day and forever and ever, and “of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end” (Isa 9:7).

The person who commits to this *all* enters into the psalmist’s exuberant praise. This is the *all* that believes that Jesus accomplished *all* on the Cross. This is the *all* of covenant love that is grandly inclusive of all we are and will be. This is the *all* that says with David, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord *all the days of my life*, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Ps 27:4).

The very last “all,” the fifteenth “all” describes the judgment of the wicked. The Lord promises to destroy “*all* the wicked. The fourteen to one ratio is significant. The psalmist emphasizes the Lord’s goodness fourteen times and in the whole psalm refers to the Lord’s righteous judgment of all the wicked just once. To reject the Lord’s goodness and to persist in one’s evil ways takes unbelievable effort. It means going against the grain of the universe and violating the witness of one’s conscience. You have to really want to turn your back on God, because everything in creation and in your soul is bearing witness to the goodness of the Lord.

The psalmist concludes where he began. He pledges his everlasting praise to the Lord, knowing that he is not alone, but that he is joined by all creation. “Let every creature praise his holy name.” C. S. Lewis wrote, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”<sup>9</sup>

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small:  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*  
Isaac Watts

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 95.