

“It is Good to Praise the LORD”

Psalm 147:1-20

Today we celebrate our country’s independence and freedom from Great Britain. It is fitting to recognize our veterans because they were and continue to be instrumental in keeping our freedoms intact. They deserve to be recognized, celebrated and thanked regularly.

Our soldiers are a key reason why we have freedom but not the sole reason. Ultimately, our freedom comes from the One who created us. God is the giver of freedom and independence. He is the One who has set the captives free. He is the One who has freed us from the bondage of sin and death. And He is the One who has rescued us time and time again.

This is a great day to honor and praise God for who He is and what He has done. In fact, it is our obligation to praise God because we were created to praise Him.

A.C. Meyers writes, “Praise is regarded by the Bible as the response due to God from all creation because of his majesty and saving actions; it is the dominant characteristic of true piety. While the summons to praise God is addressed mainly to God’s people, God is clearly worthy of praise from all peoples. Indeed, the fundamental sin of the Gentiles is said to be their failure to “honor him as God or give thanks to him”.

Though we are obligated to praise God, Our Father doesn’t want our praise to come from cold or lukewarm hearts. God wants us to praise Him with thankfulness, joy, appreciation. He wants our hearts to be engaged. Rick Warren writes, “When you love God, you want to express it. That is called worship. Worship is far more than praying or singing in church. You worship when you trust God completely, love Him supremely, obey Him wholeheartedly, and thank Him continually. Anytime you bring pleasure to God you are worshipping Him! Worship is the first purpose of your life.”

Today we will be focusing our attention on Psalm 147. Psalm 147 is a post-exilic hymn which means it was written after the Babylonian exile. This hymn was written for the Israelites to sing

as they were arriving home from captivity in a foreign country. Psalm 147 can be broken down into three sections. These sections reveal why the LORD deserves to be praised and worshipped. Please turn with me to Psalm 147 and keep your finger on it. We will read the chapter as we go along. The first section tells us to: **[SLIDE]**

Praise God for His **Power** (vv. 1-6)

Look at verses 1-6, **[SLIDE]** “Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! 2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. 3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. 4 He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. 5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. 6 The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.”

Verse 1 exhorts the readers to praise Yahweh. The phrase “Praise the LORD” in Hebrew is where we get the English word hallelujah. The Psalmist is telling us that it is pleasant and fitting or right to sing praises to God. It is pleasant and right because there is no one more worthy of praise. It is pleasant and right because praise and worship is the chief end of man- it is what we were created for. It is pleasant and right because everything good we have ever received comes from God. He deserves to be praised every second of every day.

Notice the word **sing**. The book of Psalms is a book of worship music that the readers are to sing. Singing is one of the most frequently expressed forms of worship. Singing is an important part of our worship to God. He wants to hear His children sing praises to Him. That is why we spend a good portion of the worship services on songs.

If we were to record our congregation on video during the worship sets and then play it back on the big screens for all of us to see the majority of people singing would be women. The question might be asked why don't many men like to sing? The more accurate question is: why don't many men like to sing in church? I think a lot of men who don't sing in church do sing elsewhere like at sporting events when their school's fight song or the Star Spangled Banner or the rendition of “Take Me out to the Ballgame” is played.

God commands us to worship Him in all that we do and singing is one of the most frequently expressed ways to accomplish that. Other religions worship their gods in unique ways. I just saw this picture on *USA Today* a few days ago. [SLIDE] It is a picture of three priests doing worship to their gods in India. If you look in the background there is only one man even watching these three priests perform their form of worship.

Men, would you prefer to sing out loud in church or have your Pastors engage in worship like these priests? If you are unsure let me give you a glimpse of what it might look like. [SLIDE] Singing is a better choice don't you think?

Verse 6 says that God is mighty in power and His understanding is limitless. His power and understanding are demonstrated in the ability to bring His exiled children back home, healing broken hearts and knowing each star by name.

As was mentioned earlier, most Israelites were not living in the land promised to their ancestors. They were exiles in a foreign country. All their hopes and dreams of what could be were dashed. Many had to be questioning, "Where are you God? What happened to the promises you made to our people?" Jerusalem was in shambles, the temple of God was in ruins, the walls of that once great city were leveled.

But the LORD had not forgotten. He was still at work on their behalf and He was in charge. He worked through a pagan king named Cyrus to release the Jews from captivity. Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the Lord; he guides it wherever he pleases." King Cyrus' heart was directed to free the Jews and even offer assistance in rebuilding Jerusalem.

This same God who can direct the hearts of kings and Presidents is the same God who can and does heal those with broken hearts. The Israelites were weighed down by grief and despair. But God gave them new hope. God gave them new joy. God healed their hearts and mended their wounds.

And God can do the same for you. In the elevator at Trinity Hospital at Terrace Park, there is an advertisement promoting their cardiologists. Their slogan is something to the effect, “We heal broken hearts.” I don’t doubt that their cardiologists can fix a heart physically. But doctors aren’t able to fix one that is in grief and despair. God is the true heart doctor. He is able to fix broken hearts.

Maybe you are here today with a broken heart but question if God really cares to fix yours? There are many pieces of evidence in the Bible that prove He cares for you. Let me give you three. First, verse 4 says that God determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. You are more valuable to God than the stars. Jesus didn’t die on the cross to bring stars into a relationship with God. He died for you. The God who knows each star by name calls each one of us by name. A second piece of evidence is found in verse 6, “The LORD sustains the humble...” This verse means that God doesn’t kick you when you are down. He cares for you and lifts you up. And a third piece of evidence to explain God’s desire to heal your broken heart is found in Psalm 34:18. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible and I have seen God fulfill it in my life. It says, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Praise the LORD for His power.

The second section of Psalm 147 tells us to: **[SLIDE]**

Praise God for His **Providence** (vv. 7-11)

Please look at verses 7-11, **[SLIDE]** "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. 8 He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. 9 He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. 10 His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; 11 the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love." Providence, according to the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, is: “God’s activity throughout history in providing for the needs of human beings, especially those who believe in him.” God created all that we see and do not see and has been continually caring for His creation. The Psalmist shows us how God providentially provides. It is God who supplies the clouds that supply the rain that supply the

grass that provide the food for the cattle to eat. It is God that supplies the food for the birds to eat. It is God who supplies the resources that we need to survive. Every good and perfect gift comes from God.

Let's look at verses 10-11, "His pleasure is not in the strength of a horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man. The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love." Verses 10-11 means that God is not impressed by the power and strength of the horse in battle or man's strength. Rather, He delights, or finds great satisfaction in those who know their place in relation to God- they are feeble and weak compared to God and as a result they put their trust and hope in Him to provide and love them.

"The citizens of Feldkirch, Austria, didn't know what to do. Napoleon's massive army was preparing to attack. Soldiers had been spotted on the heights above the little town, which was situated on the Austrian border. A council of citizens was hastily summoned to decide whether they should try to defend themselves or display the white flag of surrender. It happened to be Easter Sunday, and the people had gathered in the local church.

The pastor rose and said, "Friends, we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed. As this is the day of our Lord's resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our services as usual, and leave the matter in His hands. We know only our weakness, and not the power of God to defend us." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden ringing, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the service ended, the enemy broke camp and left."

We can never earn the care and love that God gives us. So what do we call receiving good that we have not earned? We call it grace. Grace is pictured throughout this Psalm. God heals the brokenhearted. That is grace. God sustains the humble. That is grace. God provides the food and weather for our benefit. That is grace. And in the third section you will see more examples of grace.

What do we do to show our appreciation for all that God has done for us? We do what verse 7 encourages us to do- "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving, make music to our God..." Does

your heart well up with gratitude for all that God has done? It was never meant to stay there. It was meant to be expressed. So let it out. 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 not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed." As we sing and praise God with delight He is greatly pleased.

So praise God for His Providence.

The third section tells us to: **[SLIDE]**

Praise God for His **Peace** (vv. 12-20)

[SLIDE] "Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion, 13 for he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. 14 He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat. 15 He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. 16 He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. 17 He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? 18 He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. 19 He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. 20 He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD."

Verses 12-14 speak of God's working to bring security for the Jews coming back to Jerusalem. The bars on the gates speak of security. The stronger the bars the more secure the gates and the people behind them. The bars are strengthened and the borders are secure. No other nation is going to lay siege to them. God will give peace to them from their enemies. God will provide the wheat needed to survive in this barren area. What kind of wheat is God going to provide? The finest wheat. And God's commands are swift. What He determines will take place.

This doesn't look like the picture we have of Israel today. Israel struggles with peace. They have enemies all around them. Could it be because that they don't fear God and put their hope in His unfailing love?

God is the source of our peace. When difficult times come our way, He can help us find serenity even during the storms. **[SLIDE]** Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the

peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Peace comes through God’s protection and it also comes through His Word. Look at verses 19-20, “He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws.” The LORD chose to reveal Himself in specific ways to Israel. God promised to bless anyone who blessed Abraham. God’s blessings were open to whoever chose to bless God’s people. But God set the Israelites apart from all other peoples and nations by giving His word and laws. When we abide in God and His word we experience peace.

Being chosen as the recipients of God’s word and laws is grace. Being born into a family, in a country and understanding a language where God’s word is so prevalent is grace. Have you ever slowed down and thought questions like these: Why wasn’t I born in a remote village among a people group that doesn’t have a Bible in their language? Why was I given the privilege to live in a country where I can buy a Bible at time of day? Oh did I fail to mention in a variety of translations too? It is all because of God’s grace- nothing we deserved but always good.

What do we do to express our devotion to such an amazing God? Verse 12, “Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion.” Extol is part of the vocabulary of praise. It occurs mostly in the Psalms. It means to praise, honor or glorify God.

This is the third time the Psalmist has exhorted the readers to praise God. The Psalmist has built a great case to show us why it is pleasant and fitting to praise the LORD. Yahweh deserves praise for His power. Yahweh deserves praise for His providence. And Yahweh deserves praise for His peace.

Psalms 147 ends like it began- with “Praise the LORD.” Hallelujah

As we go to prayer, I want to encourage to you to take a few moments to praise the LORD by speaking out truths about who God is and what He has done for you. Let's give Him the praise He deserves.

Let's pray