

# Psalm 138—The Only God Worthy of Thanksgiving

## I. Introduction

- a. The created in the presence of the Creator. Humble, glad servants before their King!
- b. The very idea of thanksgiving and praise is rooted in the facts that the unworthy responds to the worthy for who the Worthy One is and what is done for the undeserving.
- c. The God I see in this glorious Psalm has no limits and David who is limited in many ways offers up thanksgivings and praises to the only God worthy of them.
- d. I have no use for a god with limits because I am limited. A god with limits is unable to help the limited. A god like that is unworthy of thanksgiving and praise.
- e. As we think about what it means to give thanks from Psalm 138, we hear in this psalm of David the presence of enemies and the pouring forth of gratitude from the one who has been threatened but protected. There is sure hope in the future because of God's steadfast love and faithfulness in the present!
  - i. We might often want to love and be faithful but our limits keep us from doing so. Our love and faithfulness stops and starts.
  - ii. But the God of no limits is able to love steadfastly forever and his faithfulness has no end.
  - iii. This is the God worthy of thanksgiving and praise!

## II. Main Point

- a. The God of no limits is worthy of thanksgiving

## III. Outline

- a. David's thanksgiving is Personal, Bold and Humble for good reason
- b. David anticipates the praise of all the Kings of the earth
- c. The God of enduring steadfast love, always finishes the work he began

## IV. Exposition

- a. Let's consider David's personal, bold and humble thanksgiving.
  - i. He begins with "I give you thanks with my whole heart" there in verse one.
    1. David's worship is personal. He says "I" not "we." I mention this because we have a tendency in our culture to use the "royal we" to include ourselves in a particular matter for which we do not participate.
      - a. When I was into duck hunting, there was often a conversation in the blind that said "we need to do so and so" but it did not mean they were going to help do anything.
    2. I think there's a danger here too. Not that we should never say "**we** give you thanks, Lord" but we should also frequently say "I give you thanks."
    3. It's easy to go with the crowd. It's easy to praise God here in the assembly of believers. It's altogether different in public where we have multiple opportunities to glorify the Lord throughout our day.
  - ii. One possible reason people struggle to give thanks to the Lord *personally* is because thanksgiving is not natural.
    1. We may, because of our upbringing, be polite and moral towards other people. This can be taught and it should be. But at some point, you must decide whether that is really what you mean.
    2. David's thanksgiving is personal and with a whole heart.
      - a. It's not just from his lips or what he has been taught by his parents but he means it.
      - b. There's a Pharisee in all of us and we must be intentional to fight against empty worship that is not from a whole heart.

- i. How do we fight this?
  1. Again, it is coming to God's Word in submission and letting it evaluate your heart while asking the Holy Spirit to reveal those things in us.
  2. Also, you should ask other brothers and sisters what they see in you. And listen, you need people in your life that are not going to simply tell you what you want to hear. We all need restoration love not damage.
  3. More often than not, we struggle to know our own hearts and it takes real life events that are hard to make the truth known.
  4. The context of this psalm tells us that David was in some kind of trouble. Trouble will reveal who we really are, not what we pretend to be. It's harder to pretend in hard times.
  5. I have found that a heart that is broken but forgiven...broken but mended...broken but comforted leads to whole hearted worship.
  6. In other words, it's something only God can do.
- iii. Another way David praises God is *boldly*. It says there at the end of the verse, "before the gods I sing your praise."
  1. This is bold worship, isn't it? This is somewhat hard for us to imagine. Unless you take note of the Buddha at some of the restaurants you eat in there's very few carved images representing false gods around us.
    - a. I wonder how many families still thank God for the food publicly?
  2. Wherever David finds himself, he is praising the Lord before the gods. He is certain that YHWH is the only, true and living God. He does not hesitate to make music before those who cannot hear nor cannot speak. He boldly offers up praise.
- iv. But not only is David's thanksgiving bold but *humble*. In verse 2 we see him bowing down.
  1. This bowing down is usually understood to be down to one's knees or to lay flat on the ground. It is intended to be an outward expression saying that God is superior and worthy. My full allegiance is to Him alone.
  2. How serious is this posture?
    - a. When the decree of Nebuchadnezzar went out in (Dan. 3:10) to fall down and worship the golden image.
    - b. The reply of some who refused to do so and were threatened to be thrown into the furnace. (Dan. 3:16-18) <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
    - c. I trust their God who isn't puny and limited and made of gold. They didn't even melt or smell like smoke and the king soon finds himself eating grass like the cattle. Yes. I bow down to no one but the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- v. Maybe it would help our personal worship *if we sought the reason why*. Not only do we need to see God as majestic and glorious in who he is but also, we have experienced the benefits of His mercy and grace.
  1. Notice there in the middle of verse 2 David gives the reason for his bowing down and giving thanks—for your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

- a. David had experienced this amazing covenant love of God and faithfulness.
- 2. There are many places in the Scriptures for any of us to see David receive mercy firsthand but I want to draw your attention not to David's experience of love and faithfulness but the certain source of it.
  - a. The Psalmist intends for us to make the connection of experience with God's word...God's written promises.
  - b. We need to be honest with ourselves. How do we validate God's involvement in our lives? What does God's love feel like?
    - i. I'm reminded of a place in Job that one of his friends attempts to confirm that he is right by saying I saw this in a dream and my hair stood up.
    - ii. Indeed, these things are part of our human experience but they lack credibility for confirming the truth.
    - iii. If decisions of God's worth are made merely on how one feels about Him, then when those feelings change—and they will—then you are forced to question your decision or make a new one based on your new feelings.
    - iv. Instead, base your decisions about God's love and faithfulness on the overwhelming number of stories in Scripture that show God keeping His promises.
    - v. Who can be certain about what causes the hair to stand up on your neck or the craziness of our dreams?
    - vi. But rather base your understanding on that which David placed it—(Ps. 138:2) for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.
    - vii. That is enough to move David to whole-hearted worship and it's enough for us too.
  - vi. May we have. Personal. Bold. Humble. Thanksgiving. Of the unlimited God of the Bible who keeps his promises.
- b. David's public praise had more than one purpose because he anticipated the worship of YHWH to spread to all the kings of the earth.
  - i. But how can the fame of God begin to spread to the ends of the earth and even into the royal household? (Jonah's story comes to mind) but...
    - 1. It's very possible that David's weaknesses (anxiety and fears) had something to do with coming before the kings of the earth. In verse 3, David prayed for strength and the Lord answered.
      - a. On the day I called, you answered me. So swift. He really cares.
      - b. Often you will hear in the Psalms (Ps. 119:46) <sup>46</sup> I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame
      - c. This assumes that David took note of his own weaknesses and he called on the God of no weaknesses who has an endless supply of strength.
        - i. Can you imagine the scene? David is in this gathering of the kings of the earth and they boast of the victories of their gods and may even threaten Israel. But David is reminded of Goliath and how the Lord took him down.
      - d. This strength David needs is to be bold and valiant-hearted for the Lord in the midst of everyday life.
      - e. He, like Paul, can boast in their weaknesses. They know that it's not always the situation that needs to change but the man in the situation.

- i. He must trust the Lord to be with him.
    - ii. The troubles of this world will not end until Christ returns.
    - iii. Therefore, what is needed in the present is the strength of the Lord to have bold faith in every circumstance.
  - f. It seems very possible that David gave glory to God with thanksgiving and praise in the presence of the kings of the earth and said (1 Sam. 17:26) For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"
- ii. Oh...but David had far more in mind too. "He was predicting the wide-spread of the truth of the Gospel" not defeat in battle. This is a very common theme of the Psalms.
  - 1. It says in (Ps. 72:11) <sup>11</sup> May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!
  - 2. In Psalm 138, all the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD.
    - a. Why? Because they have heard the words of your mouth.
    - b. And as a result of hearing, verse 5 they shall sing of the ways of the LORD.
    - c. Many will come to know THE WAY through David's greater grandson who is promised to sit upon his throne forever. And someday, at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11)
  - 3. The gospel is penetrating nation after nation. Daily, the Lord is transferring people from darkness to light. Look, it's common for us to say the world is becoming darker but I don't want you to lose sight that the spread of the gospel is advancing as well.
    - a. And in (Phil. 1:12-13) <sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me (imprisoned) has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.
    - b. And yet, there is more work to be done. We need Christians who have this kind of heart: (Rom. 15:20-21) thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."
- iii. I think David pauses to say something to us. Thus far, he has been speaking to God (you). Verse 6 is different.
  - 1. Let's listen: (Ps. 138:6) <sup>6</sup> For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty (or high) he knows from afar.
  - 2. Again, like giving thanks to God is not natural to us nor is being lowly. Thus, our nature is against us. But God's work of grace is not limited by our nature.
    - a. No one would have ever imagined on of the most powerful kings in all of history, Nebuchadnezzar, saying this: (Dan. 4:37) <sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.
  - 3. Dear unbeliever, if you are high and exalted that means that you think they have no needs and no limits. Therefore, you need no care from God.
    - i. The result is that God knows you from a distance. In other words, "I don't want you near me."
    - b. The gaze of the Lord is on the lowly who like David cry for help. By God's grace, they have been humbled and they recognize their sin and brokenness. They discover they can do nothing to gain God's favor and they must depend on the work of Jesus Christ for salvation.

- i. The religious man works to be saved. The Christian works because he is saved.
    - c. "Because they think little of themselves, God things much of them." He cares for the needy.
  - 4. Dear unbeliever, Salvation can be thought of as being judged now in Christ. To reject Christ is to be judged later. Those who are judged in Christ now are the lowly...those cut down by repentance and faith at the cross. Those who reject Christ are the high standing who will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
    - a. Hidden in the Lowly Jesus is the only safe place. And Jesus says, Come to me!
- c. David ends with hope...certain hope that God whose love endures forever will complete what he began.
  - i. That child that was promised in Genesis and promised to be David's Son and sit on his throne forever was not yet complete. The hope of verse 4-6 await its full completion even now.
    - 1. For now, this world has many troubles. And David is in the midst of them. Yet, he must be a lowly king because God takes care of him.
    - 2. He not only preserves his life but he stretches out his invincible, victorious hand against the wrath of this enemies and delivers David.
      - a. Faith looks beyond the present and trusts the Lord to keep all of his promises and finish what he began. The LORD even fulfills purposes for which David is alive.
      - b. Because of God's enduring steadfast love, David says, "Do not forsake the work of your hands."
      - c. "This will be done by raising up David's seed to the throne of glory and eternal King over the church!"
      - d. In him we are rescued and preserved. Eternal life awaits the lowly who are cared for and deliver through the blood and power of the Lamb!

## V. Response

- a. As we think about how to respond, may we ask the Lord to help us personally thank Him boldly and in humility before a watching world. Let us be specific because we have experienced God abundant mercy and grace. But let it be firmly fixed on the Bible because the Lord keeps all his promises.
  - i. You can start here: (Acts 17:24-25) <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.
- b. Boast in your weaknesses as you seek God's strength in this broken world. The Lord told Paul: (2 Cor. 12:9) "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- c. Paul responses: Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
  - i. At Thanksgiving dinner this week, be thankful to the Lord before all. Boast in your great need of him and that his grace is sufficient.
- d. Finally, dear unbeliever, come to Jesus. Come and bow down to him in the presence of all in glad allegiance. Come serve him with gladness. Repent and believe and you will be saved and he will care for you!