

In Grateful Praise

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Bible Verse: Psalm 147
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In his book titled "The Truth For," John MacArthur said this, I was reading this just yesterday and I thought it was a fitting introduction for our text tonight. It's a rather extended quote, so bear with me. I don't often read extended quotes but I wanted to in this instance. He says, "Churches are filled with baby Christians, people who are spiritual infants. That is a fitting description because the characteristic that is most descriptive of an infant is selfishness. Babies are completely self-centered. They scream if they don't get what they want when they want it. All they are aware of are their own needs and desires. They never say thanks for anything. They can't help others. They can't give anything. They can only receive." He goes on to say, "Now, certainly there is nothing wrong with that when it occurs in the natural stage of infancy, but to see a child whose development is arrested so that he never gets beyond that stage of selfishness is a tragedy, and that is exactly the spiritual state of multitudes in the church today. They are utterly preoccupied with self. They want their own problems solved and their own comfort elevated. Their spiritual development is arrested and they remain in a perpetual state of selfish helplessness. It is evidence of a tragic abnormality. Arrested infancy means people do not discern; just as a baby crawls along the floor, putting anything it finds in its mouth, spiritual babies don't know what is good for them and what isn't. Immaturity and lack of discernment go together, they are virtually the same thing."

And one of the things about the Psalms as we're coming to the end of the Psalms, one of the things that the Psalms accomplishes for us is that it lifts us out of that spiritual immaturity. The nature of the Psalms is that they take our focus and lift it up in confession, they lift it up in praise, they lift it up in dependence, in dealing with adversity and rejoicing; the Psalms lift us up and lift us out of that state of immaturity and bring our focus back to where it should be. It focuses us on the living God and ultimately pointing us to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so as you come to the end of the psalter, that accent is emphasized even more. As we saw last time, the final five Psalms, 146 through 150, are an exploding fireworks display of praise to God. By the time you come to the end of the psalter, God intends for the psalter to have done its work in your heart to extinguish selfishness and self-centeredness in you, and to lift your heart to praise to the Lord and that's what we're seeing in the final five Psalms. Last time we looked at Psalm 146, tonight, we're going to look at Psalm 147 and what you see in these final five psalms is kind of a kind of a goal of spiritual maturity where self has been left behind, self and the world have been abandoned, as it were, and the heart is fully preoccupied with the glory

of God, the glory of Christ and offering praise to him for his greatness, for his goodness, for his glory, for his grace. And that's what we have as we come to Psalm 147, a magnificent Psalm that would be easy to overlook if you did not go through the Psalms sequentially as we have done over the past eight years.

Let me read Psalm 147 to you and tonight I would just ask you to stand with me as we read this praise to God, and then we'll take the next 50 minutes or so to look at its message. Psalm 147.

1 Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming. 2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. 3 He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds. 4 He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. 5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite. 6 The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground. 7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises to our God on the lyre, 8 Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who provides rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains. 9 He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens which cry. 10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. 11 The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness. 12 Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! 13 For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your sons within you. 14 He makes peace in your borders; He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat. 15 He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. 16 He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. 17 He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? 18 He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow. 19 He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. 20 He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!

Please be seated.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism famously asks in its first question: what is the chief end of man? And the well-known answer is that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. The vivid finish of the psalter makes the duty and the privilege clear. "Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD." And Psalm 147 is a major contributor to that great climax of the psalter. What I want to do at the start here is to just show you the structure of this Psalm because it sets the stage for entering into the fullness of its message. This Psalm has three rounds of praise that are clearly identified in the structure. You can see it at the beginning at verse 1, at verse 7, and at verse 12. Verse 1 you see, "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God." In verse 7 you see, "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises to our God." In verse 12 it says, "Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!" And so the three sections of

the Psalm are clearly marked out in terms of a unique and distinct call to praise as the Psalm progresses throughout its message.

Now along with that, and I love these structural things about the Psalms. I will miss them when we are done with the Psalms in a few weeks. Each of those three sections ends with a contrast. Each of the three sections contrasts mutually exclusive people, so that you see in verse 6, the end of the first section of the Psalm, you see a contrast between what the Lord does with different groups. It says, "The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground." He shows mercy, in other words, to the hurting. He brings down, he brings judgment upon the wicked. That's the end of the first section. The second section has a different kind of contrast. In verses 10 and 11, it says that God "does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness." And so there's a contrast between those who rely on man, who rely on their own strength, and those who consciously and dependently fear God and trust in him come what may. And then the Psalm ends on another contrast, verses 19 and 20, where we read, "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!" And so there's a contrast between Israel and all the other nations.

And so there's this call to praise at the start of each section, and then there's a contrast at the end of each section, and the effect of that is very personal in its application to you. The opening praise and the closing contrast presents you with a choice in terms of the way that you will live, in the way that you will respond. Will you praise God with those who fear him? Will you honor God in response to his revealed glory? Or will you go the way of the world, will you choose a path of judgment, a path of self-reliance and a path of abandonment ultimately by God? In other words, you could put it this way, the message of this Psalm is whose side are you on?

And so the Psalm leads us through these things in a compelling examination of the glory and the praise of God, and so to title these three sections, I'll title this first section: the call to praise. The call to praise, and the opening verse sets the theme for the entire Psalm in verse 1. "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming." The opening word in Hebrew is literally Hallelujah. Praise Yah, the shortened version of the name Yahweh. And as we've seen often in these concluding Psalms, the word "for" explains and emphasizes why we should honor the call to praise God. The command is, "Praise the LORD," and he doesn't simply leave it there, he explains why you should enter into that praise, why you should obey and honor the call, and he says it's a good thing to sing praise to God. It honors him, It's reviving to our own souls. It ascribes proper glory to the Creator and Redeemer. And so we're called to praise God, he gives us incentives to obey. "It will be good for you and it will be give glory to God if you follow my lead," the psalmist's lead, "in honoring God in this way."

Now, on a night like this where we are corporately gathered together, this is an especially appropriate Psalm for us to be considering together because this Psalm particularly emphasizes corporate worship. Corporate worship. Someone who thinks that he can live

the Christian life on his own, someone who thinks that he can go out and, you know, worship God from his deer stand and hunt deers and commune with nature and that's his act of worship, we've talked about that so often that that's not biblical Christianity at all, but in particular a Psalm like this shows how impossible that approach is to the call of the Bible to praise God. This Psalm emphasizes corporate worship.

Look at verse 1 again and notice the plural pronouns that we see here. In verse 1 we read, "it is good to sing praises to our God." In verse 5, "Great is our Lord." Verse 7, "Sing praises to our God." So there's this corporate dynamic. We are in this together. We are to do this together, not in isolation. And so there is a great value in being in person with the people of God as you are able to do so, to be in person with the people of God to enter into this aspect of it. You know, when you join personally corporate worship, two things are happening. By your very presence, if nothing else by your presence, you are ministering to the people of God by saying with your presence, "I'm here with you. I share in your desires. I share, we share a like common faith." That is a critical aspect of it and as Paul says in other places of Scripture, the Apostle Paul, he says, "I want us to be encouraged together, you by my faith, and my faith by yours." And so when you are here, it's an encouragement to me that you are each here and it is each time I see you. It's a great encouragement to me. And I trust that as you are with other believers and you see other Christians and you join together in the singing of praises to God and joining together under the teaching of God's word, that others are encouraging you. It encourages, it has to encourage you when you see the same people being faithful and being with you week after week after week, and you have this sense of strength that you draw upon. "I'm not in this by myself, I'm in this with my brothers and sisters in Christ." And we draw upon that together, and as we draw upon that mutual encouragement, we join our voices together and vertically lift them up to the glory of God and with gladness corporately, not just individually, but together we praise God together and we are glad to do so.

The first-person singular pronouns "I, my, me," sometimes they're prominent in other Psalms, not in this one. They do not appear at all. By contrast, beloved, there are 44 distinct references to God in Psalm 147. In a Psalm of 20 verses, there are 44 references to God himself, and so you see that there is this overriding central focus on the on God and his character and the surrounding halo of that, you might say, is corporate worship, looking in on that glory and expanding out in praise to God.

And so what's happening here as a practical matter, and how does this help you walk the Christian life in your own personal life? Understand this, beloved, and keeping in mind that introduction that I read from the "Truth War" a few minutes ago, this Psalm in a particular and a powerful way calls you away from self. It calls you away from a contemplation of your inner feelings. It calls you out of that self-centered introspection that we so often easily fall into. How am I feeling today and, you know, what's happening with me? It calls us away from all of that to have a vertical focus, to look up. This Psalm, as it were, takes you, it leads you by taking you by the chin and lifting your chin up so that you are looking up into the glory of heaven itself.

And so in this Psalm with the structure, with the pronouns, with everything that we've said so far, this Psalm does this to you, it says to you, "Set yourself aside. Remember God and honor Him." Beloved, honoring God and praising him is not first and foremost about how you feel, it is about who God is. It's about his character. It doesn't start with the way that you feel about God. Praise starts with his character, his attributes, his perfections. Here on this side of the cross, here in the New Testament era, here as born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our praise does not start with our circumstances or how we feel inside at all. It's so critical to understand, and it's so critical to moving beyond that spiritual infancy and to move in the direction of spiritual maturity. Our praise starts with a remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ, who he is in his person. He, who is God Incarnate, fully God fully man, two natures united in one person. That is the glory of Christ and the glory of Christ seen in his incarnation, the glory of Christ seen in his perfect life, the glory of Christ seen in his redeeming work on the cross where he offered himself as a substitute to pay the penalty of our many, many, many sins. The glory of Christ seen in his burial and soon thereafter his resurrection. The glory of Christ seen in his ascension into heaven as witnesses looked on and saw him received into the clouds. The glory of Christ interceding for us in his session at the right hand of God, even as we speak. Even as we speak beloved. It's a wonderful thought to realize that even as we are here gathered together praising God through the preaching of his word, Christ is at the right hand of God representing us as our high priest and interceding for us to make sure that at no moment would our salvation be lost. It's glorious to contemplate. That, beloved, to a redeemed heart sets off the sparks that light the fire of praise and we respond to that truth with praise, independent of how we feel in the moment, independent of what is happening in in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones at any given time. We praise God because he is worthy of praise and therefore it is good for us to praise him. And so we praise this God because he is great as seen in his power in creation, we praise this God because he is gracious as seen in the Lord Jesus Christ and in our redemption, he is gracious as seen in the way that he providentially cares for his creation and cares for us. You don't have to speak about these things very long before you're just lost in the wonder of it, and the glory of God drives out the preoccupations of earth. As the hymn writer said, "The things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and His grace."

This particular Psalm was likely written after Israel returned from their 70-year exile. If you look at verses 2 and 3, you see suggestions of that, "The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel." You remember that they were taken away in exile as judgment upon their sin, God had mercy on them while they were in a distant land and brought them back to their homeland. Yes, Jerusalem was broken down, the walls were broken and there was a lot of repair work and a rebuilding of the temple that needed to be done, but God brought them back. He did not ultimately and completely and finally abandon them, they underwent a time of discipline, and then God brought them back, evidence of his power and grace, even by working in the heart of a secular king in order to grant them the permission and the ability to go back.

Look over at 2 Chronicles for just a moment. We're skipping over so many details, but 2 Chronicles 36:22 which was the launch point of the return from exile, 2 Chronicles 36:22.

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!"'" A secular king granted them permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild their city.

Now, as they did that, and as you read in the book of Nehemiah, there were many difficult and discouraging challenges for the returning exiles. What a Psalm like this did for them in their day it does for us in our day. It calls them out of the discouragement. It says look beyond the present circumstances, look beyond the challenges that you face, look beyond the uncertainty of life and who knows what tomorrow will bring. You don't know what your life will be like tomorrow, and I know that some of you have felt that in urgent pressing ways even in very recent days, seeing life turn for some people that you care about suddenly and unexpectedly. I get that. I get that. What Psalm 147 does, it says look beyond that, don't let that define the way that you think about life and respond to it. Look up, look up to this God who is worthy of praise and honor him from your heart.

Why praise God? People get discouraged and, you know, they want to withdraw from praise. "Well, why should I praise God when my life is so very difficult like this, when I am suffering as I am, when I've been betrayed as I have been?" So many people, I would wish I could just plant this in their ears, so many people living in in long term bitterness that is just so sad to see, so unnecessary. So bitter and just throwing their life away out of anger at whatever it is that has cast them down. Not us, not we, not the people of God. We respond differently, beloved. We understand that we can praise God especially because he cares about his discouraged people. When he sees us in our affliction, he cares. It matters to him. He views us gently and bids us to come to his gentle and humble character, as Christ explains in Matthew 11. God helps his people in their trouble as shown by the way that he dealt with the Jews as they returned from exile and protected them from those that wanted to destroy them, as shown by the fact that God showed mercy to you when you cried out to him and in repentance in the midst of your sin, in the depths of your depravity, being conscious in your mind and you cried out, "God, have mercy on me, the sinner. Lord Jesus, save me! Come into my life. I deserve to be judged. Save me!"

And as I've asked you many times when you cried out to Christ like that, how did he respond? Did he swat you away? Did he say, "Nope, too late for you"? What did he do? Did he remind you of the many times that you had lived as the hypocrite? Did he remind you and reject you because your sins were so great? Say, "I don't save sinners like you, you're too bad"? Is that how Christ responded to you? Is it how he responded to me? No. No, what did he do? He whistled for the servants, as it were, to bring the best robes, to bring the ring and put it on your finger, to kill the fatted calf because the son had come home. The Holy Spirit had brought one of the elect to Christ and Christ gladly received him to the glory of God the Father. Listen, we can never exhaust describing the glory of

Christ and the grace that he has on sinners and we need to come back and remind ourselves of this again and again, and let it inform our praise in the most difficult and challenging of times. God is gracious to his people in their trouble and, beloved, the point of this Psalm and what all of that to say this, is the fact that God is kind like that. God is patient like that. God is gracious like that. He is merciful like that. Demands and calls for our praise and we gratefully, gladly, and eagerly respond, "Yes, O God, I praise You. I join with the people of God in honoring Your name tonight and I consider it a privilege to do so. Let everything else go, Father, my mind is preoccupied with Your glory, and I ascribe greatness to my God."

And in the context of this Psalm, you know, and looking out at however many people are here today and more over the live stream, the question is how are you going to respond to that choice? How will you respond this evening in the midst of that? Will you continue to cater to your introspection? Continue to wallow in self-pity as so many do? Oh, it's so sad to see. You don't know how it breaks a pastor's heart to hear of people that could be living in the glory of praise to God and choosing a different attitude of regret and bitterness instead. You have no idea how sad that is. The question is for you, forget about them, what will it be for you as you go through life? What will it be for you tonight? Will you say, "Yes, I'll follow this call to praise." or will you go on your own way and disgrace and dishonor the God who has been good to you in Christ?

Why praise God? He cares about his discouraged people. Why praise God? In his greatness he sustains his creation. Look at verses 4 and 5. Verses 4 and 5, and you just see the contrast between his kindness and his condescension. In verse 3, "He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds." And then it rockets out to his transcendent greatness in verse 4, "He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" This is a great God and the call of worship is to acknowledge one who is greater than you in essence and to respond in worship as a result. We don't worship men, we don't worship saints, we certainly don't worship Mary because they're all of like human flesh. Even angels we don't worship. In the book of Revelation, John fell down at the angels who were bringing the revelation to him and the angel said to him, "Don't do that. Don't do that. Worship God instead."

And so we praise him for his grace, we praise him for his greatness and in his greatness he meets the needs of the weak in order to help them. look at verse 6 with me. "The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground. Are you a sinner here tonight weighed down with guilt? God will hear your prayer for mercy. Are you crushed under the weight of life's load? Are you facing an immediately uncertain future? Scripture bids you to call upon this great God who looks upon the afflicted with kindness and meets them in their need. Those who trust the Lord in affliction will find that he is faithful to them, but by contrast, those who resist him, those who rebel against him, who harden their hearts against Christ, against the gospel, and harden their hearts against even the people of God, what happens to them? They meet with the justice of God. Verse 6, "He brings down the wicked to the ground."

And so beloved, in this first section, in this call to praise, we are beckoned to honor God with our worship and we are warned at the end there against refusing the call. "Come and join in the worship. Come and join in the grace of God. Come and receive the grace of God and He will pour it out upon you abundantly even in your loneliness," Scripture says. Just be warned that to reject that call is to invite the other aspects of the attributes of God against you. Don't refuse the call.

Well, that brings us to our second section for this evening: the call to sing. The call to sing and here the psalmist in verse 7 leads us into a musical expression of the required praise. Psalm 147:7, "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises to our God on the lyre." And as we contemplate the broad subject of praise, you know, I can remember as a young Christian, you know, I didn't understand praise. I didn't know know, you know, "Well, Lord, I praise You. Yeah, yeah, I certainly praise You, O God." I didn't know how to go beyond that. I was a spiritual infant. I was a baby. I didn't understand the different aspects, you might say, of praise. Well, one of the things that you see here in verse 7 is that a central part of praise is expressing gratitude to God.

"Sing to the LORD," look at it there in verse 7, "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving." And express gratitude to God as a central core aspect of your praise. We remember the acts of God and we praise him. Those revealed in Scripture, those that we've seen in the outworking in the church, those that we've seen in the outworking of our own lives, we look at how God has blessed us, and we thank him for it. We remember his acts and we praise him. We remember his attributes, and we praise him. "God, You are the sovereign God of the universe. You know the stars by name, the billions of galaxies are known and You have a catalog of them eternally present in Your mind, and You know the name of every star, every supernova, every black hole, and You know the courses of all of them," and we've barely scratched the surface of understanding them in our human efforts at astronomy. "Lord, I recognize that and I ascribe glory to You. I thank You for that. I ascribe glory to You for Christ. I ascribe glory to You for the cross where my redemption was won. I ascribe glory to You for the shed blood of my Lord. I ascribe glory to You for the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing me to Christ, coming and indwelling me and sanctifying me, setting me apart for Your purposes. O God, I praise You for that. I praise You that the Spirit is a down payment, showing that You will certainly complete the salvation that You've begun in me. God, I am so grateful for that. I'm so grateful that in Your holiness You chose not to judge me but by grace to save me in the Lord Jesus Christ. What can I do but be thankful and grateful and I praise You and ascribe greatness to my God as a result of that."

Let it all sink in, beloved. Life is difficult, life is uncertain, but don't you see that the things of which we're talking here this evening transcend all of that? These are things of eternal value, eternal, glory. These are eternal things that cannot be taken away from us. And if you have Christ, you have everything even if earthly things and other matters come and go. And because of that, we thank God and we express our gratitude as a part of our worship and the psalmist here says to express it musically.

Now as it goes on, the psalmist returns to a focus on God's work in creation. Look at verse 8 where we read that this is the God who, verse 8, "covers the heavens with clouds, Who provides rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens which cry." The range of God's work in creation is just stunning. He establishes clouds in the sky that provide rain for us. The rain brings food by which the animals eat. You see the goodness of God in the way that he cares for the most inconsequential aspects from a human perspective, the most inconsequential aspects of creation. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent and yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from Your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Who is this God? Who is this God who holds galaxies in place and yet has his eye on the sparrow? And if his eye is on the sparrow, beloved, don't you think that his eye is on you as well in your need? "His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me." How can you not praise a God like that? How can the glories of God be laid before a man, before a woman from Scripture with such clarity in the written revealed word and a man not respond in praise? Don't you see that the refusal to praise God is a great great sin against his glory? This is no passing matter. To tread on the blood of Christ, to reject the gospel offered in grace, offered in sincerity to all men, offered in love and seeking your best well-being, to reject that is the greatest of sins. To engage in false religion is the greatest of sins and a violation of the first four commandments.

This is no passing matter. This God is to be praised and as the psalmist goes on, this Psalm I pause over it because it just pulsates, it just pulsates with the glory of God and with these lofty themes. Having stated the glory of God as he cares for creation in the heavens and on the ground, he goes on and he makes a statement about how God views human strength compared to a tender heart before him. Verses 10 and 11, we see that God does not delight in military power or in athletic power. Verse 10, "He does not delight in the strength of the horse," which was a, you know, even until recent times critical in military battle. God does not delight in the strength of the horse. "He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness." Beloved, the things that impress the people of the world, strong mighty men, the things that seem great in terms, think of great military equipment and jet planes and all of that, strong armies, great athletes with great human accomplishments running, you know, sub four-minute miles and all of these things, understand this, beloved, those things get all kinds of headlines and recognition in the minds of carnal men, in the minds of the media, view those from the perspective of understanding that those things are inconsequential to God. He does not care about that at all. He's not impressed about it. Nations are a drop in the bucket to him. And so external human strength and power is meaningless to him. What God favors is taught to us in 1 Samuel 16, the Lord looks on the heart. The Lord does not see as man sees for man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart. The Spirit of God searches, as it were. The Lord seeks those who will be his true worshipers.

In the second contrast, contrast between the strength of man and those who fear God, close the second section of the Psalm. Men delight in physical appearance and physical

accomplishments. God delights in spiritually-minded people who fear and trust him even if they are unknown to men. Men delight in athletic accomplishments. Beloved, hear me well, hear me well on this: men delight in athletic accomplishments, tens of thousands of people will go to meaningless athletic events, and I'm not saying don't watch sports. I'm saying two things, 1) keep them in their proper perspective. And to parents, I'm saying this: contemplate the fact that God does not take pleasure in the legs of a man and as you are contemplating, those of you that have young children, set your priorities accordingly. Yes, you can drive your children and set your children into all kinds of athletic pursuits and fill their minds with those priorities and run your whole family life around an athletic calendar, but understand, understand the perspective of God on it. God does not take delight in the legs of a man. So sad. So sad over the course of 30 years of ministry, to watch families structure their life around children's athletics to the neglect of their souls, to neglect of the honor of God, to neglect of cultivating the fear of God in the hearts of their children.

Beloved, in the context of this Psalm and those of you, those of you that are contemplating starting your family out soon, understand where the priorities are and structure your life accordingly. I plead with you. Trophies are eventually just going to be put in a box and thrown away. I know because the few trophies I got when I was in sports when I was little, I'll give you a sense, champion trophies were like this. My participation ribbons were like that. I was not an athlete. It bothered me at the time, now I don't care. But just understand, beloved, competition trophies are not going to matter a whit in eternity and they don't matter to God now if they're produced apart from a life and a family that fears him. And I'm just pleading with you to set your priorities right in your mind and help your children know what the priorities are. God delights in spiritually-minded people who fear him. Let every parent heed and set priorities accordingly. Athletic exploits are forgotten but the fear of the Lord, Psalm 19:9 says, endures forever.

And so parents, I ask you what priorities will you instill in the hearts of your kids as you raise them? God's care is for those who simply trust him and that displays his grace. It is not the self-sufficient who know his blessing. And, you know, beloved, these are not things, you can't just say this to a kid one time and expect them to grasp it forever and then never return to it. This is about a lifestyle priority. This is about how you structure your entire life. And I'm very grateful to have so many families in Truth Community Church that understand this and are living accordingly, and I have great hope for the children that are being raised under that kind of direction. I'm very encouraged by that. It's important for me to both affirm that and to issue the call and the admonition to those who are neglecting what God considers to be the most important thing. Not just athletes, money, education, you name it, we have to step back and say what are my priorities as I'm leading my family and what are the priorities that I'm truly teaching my kids?

Well, thirdly, and our final section here tonight, we get a call for Israel. A call for Israel. The psalmist in this third and final section calls on the people of God in his day to praise him. Look at verse 12, "Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!" Zion being a poetic name for Jerusalem. "Praise God, O Israel," he says to the people of

his day, "because God has given security and provision to you, and these are signs of His grace."

Look at verses 13 and 14, "For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your sons within you. He makes peace in your borders; He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat." God protects you, God provides for you, Jerusalem, therefore praise him. Look at what he has done for you, look at what he is doing, look at what he has promised and go beyond the recognition of it and respond from your heart to honor him with your gratitude and with your praise.

And as God undertook the care of the nation, they were to praise him and to recognize the preeminence and the priority of his word. Verse 15, "He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly." And now again in a wonderful way, bringing to a climax everything about this Psalm, here in verse 15 he's introduced God's word and that word, God's word becomes a theme for the entire closing section of it. Verse 18, "He sends forth His word." Verse 19, "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances." Beloved understand this, that in everything that we look upon on earth and all of the earthly blessings that our Lord provides to us, the pinnacle of his blessing to us is in his revealed word. This is where God now makes himself known, here and nowhere else in terms of direct revelation. It is here in his word, and his word is precious. And so his word becomes the culminating climax of praise in this Psalm as the climaxing, if I can make a word like that, the climaxing grounds of praise in a Psalm that has been magnificent in the breadth of its call to praise him. God commands creation through his word. He communicates to his people through his word. His word is so precious. It is so precious and that's why it is so essential for us to study it, to read it, to know it individually, privately and corporately, publicly, making it clear this is the duty of every church whether they obey it or not, to make clear week after week that the word of God is central to worship. The priorities are all out of whack if you sing for 40 minutes repetitive choruses and stir people's emotions up and then you follow it up with a 15-minute message. That's out of whack. The word is central to worship. The word is the place of safety and provision. Revelation is more important than your experience. God's word interprets your experience, your experience does not interpret God's word. You do not approach God's word and say, "It must be mean this because I had this experience." No, you go to the word of God and let it tell you what your experience means. If Charismatics would do that, it would end their theology. May God hasten the day when that comes.

Well, in this emphasis on the word, he alludes to a relatively rare occurrence in the land of Israel in verses 16 to 18. He talks about winter weather. Verse 16, "He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow." In his greatness, what he's saying is God controls and directs the forces of nature. The variance, the chill remind us of his sovereignty and all of that becomes another ground for praise.

And then he ends, as I've already alluded on, the highest note of God's provision for us. Beloved, the best provision that God has given to you is his written revelation in his word

because it is in that alone that you find the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is in that alone, in that special revelation where you find how to receive forgiveness of your sins. It is in that alone where God's character is fully expressed, and the saving gospel is made known. That alone. And so the word, you know, everything that we base our eternal hope on, everything that we stake our salvation on is known in and through the written word of God and through no other means. And so this is just so abundantly precious. God has graciously and freely given it to us and as we know that and as we read it and his word becomes more and more precious to us, this word becomes the climactic ground upon which we praise him.

Look at verse 19. This is the climax of the Psalm. He's gone through all of these grounds of praise, a call to pray, sing to praise, O Israel, praise him, look at him in creation, look at him in his care, look at him in his kindness, and where does he end? You end on the high point in a Psalm like this and the high point, verse 19, "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel." Remember in this section he's calling Israel to praise, and the nation of Israel had the greatest privilege given to them. God revealed his word to them. Romans 3:2 speaks about how God favored Israel by giving them his ordinances. It draws upon the thought here in Psalm 147.

And understand he's speaking to Israel. This is a great cause for the nation of Israel to praise him because God did this, God chose them and did this for them and he passed over all the other nations and did not give them that privilege. Verse 20, "He has not dealt thus with any nation." Israel, you have been shown remarkable grace. Other nations left in darkness. As for the ordinance of God, verse 20, "they have not known them." And you come to the end of the Psalm, the psalmist looks back on these 20 verses, there's only one possible conclusion, Hallelujah. "Praise the LORD!" One commentator said it well, he said, "The words 'Praise the LORD' are meaningless except on the lips of those who are responding to the grace of God in a life of obedient commitment."

Beloved, true worship is not about what we feel or what we get out of it. True worship is God-centered. True worship is Christ-centered. Are our minds preoccupied with our needs or with his attributes? Beloved, that is the measure of whether our worship is worldly or whether it is done in spirit and in truth.

Let's pray together.

O great God of highest praise, we honor and worship You. Fill our hearts with Your Spirit. Expand our minds to comprehend what is the greatness, the depth, the breadth, and the height of the greatness of God and the love of Christ. And Father, renew our spirits by Your Holy Spirit. Renew our hearts toward trust, toward obedience, and toward praise, all for the glory of Christ. Whom we love, we love the word written, O Father, and we love the Word Incarnate. Draw as we lift Him up, O Father, through the proclamation of Your word. We pray that You would draw men to Him, save men by Your Spirit, by grace through faith in Christ alone not of works lest any man should boast. To the glory of God, we pray. Amen.

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