

## *Wonder Regained*

Psalm 145

1/3/16

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And so this is about what the Lord is teaching me in the process of learning from his Word not as a preacher, but as a son of God. And I'm praying that the Lord would enable me to experience wonder regained, as I hope he will do that with you as we begin this new year. Psalm 145. Hear now the Word of God.

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 will commend your works to another;  
they will tell of your mighty acts.  
They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty,  
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.  
They will tell of the power of your awesome works,  
and I will proclaim your great deeds.  
They will celebrate your abundant goodness  
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.  
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 you have made will praise you, O Lord;  
your saints will extol you.  
They will tell of the glory of your kingdom  
and speak of your might,  
so that all men 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 faithful to all his promises  
and loving toward all he has made.  
The Lord upholds all those 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.  
The Lord is righteous in all his ways  
and loving toward all he has made.  
The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.  
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.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Pray with me.

And now, Lord, by the mighty power of your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to see wondrous things in your Word, that we might have our wonder regained, restored, awakened. Begin with the teacher. We give you thanks and praise for this portion of your Word. Now help us, we pray, in the mighty name of Jesus, at whose name every knee shall bow on heaven and on earth. Amen.

This Psalm—you will see as we look at it together—will tell us how we are created for wonder, how wonder is to be an inheritance, but also the recovering of wonder. Created for wonder, wonder as inheritance, and recovering wonder.

One of my hobbies is photography, and one of the things that I love most about photography is the panoramic image. Regardless of what it is I am taking in, there is something about seeing a massive landscape, urban or nature or whatever the case may be—seeing multiple images stitched together so you can see a broad panoramic view of the world in front of you. There's something about that image, because it helps us to see a much grander story with our eyes. And if we were to see and look at Scripture with the same kind of idea, with a panoramic view, we will see that from the beginning of Genesis even to Revelation, and everywhere in between, a part of that panoramic view is that man and woman, boy and girl, regardless of age, were created for wonder. And specifically, that wonder is to be given to our God, the Creator.

We hear it when the psalmist speaks and he says in the opening verses, "I will exalt you, my God, my King. I will praise your name forever and ever." And then he talks about the repeated nature of that praise. "Every day I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever." And he says, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom." What he's doing is he's giving word to that which the human heart was created to do, and that is to praise who God is. Indeed, he recognizes as the psalmist, as he's leading the people of God in worship, as the psalm was used in the temple worship of God's people, that they understood that they were created for worshipping who God is forever and ever, because he is eternal. He is transcendent and glorious.

We know that from the earliest pages of Genesis, looking at the beginning of this panoramic view, that we see that it is God who's created man in his image. And he says, "Let us," that is the triune God, "Let us make man in our image." Created for relationship, set in a garden, in a place of abundance, to be in perfect relationship with the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it was to be a place of intimate relationship, of worship and enjoying the abundance of that intimacy, abundance of food and drink, abundance of intimacy not just with God but with Eve as well. This is always what God is talking about when he talks about, throughout this panoramic view of Scripture, of how he wants to draw his people back to himself. When he says, "You are my people and I will be your God. I will never depart from you, and you are not to depart from me."

But why does God speak this way? Why have we just finished this past few weeks of advent, as we look at that next part of the panoramic view, of the fact that even though God desired his people to be in relationship with him and to return them to an intimate covenantal relationship with him, they kept rejecting him. Why do we celebrate advent? It is because God would be necessary to send the Messiah, his son Jesus, to restore his people to himself.

As we look at this panoramic image, we see that from the earliest pages of Genesis, we were created to be in relationship with him, in perfect intimacy of worshipping him and enjoying all that that means. But this panoramic image—though we were created for wonder, something happened. And into

that panoramic vision of what God's story tells us, is that wonder of God was broken. Not that God was broken, but that our hearts were broken. Why? Because we exchanged wonder of God for wonder of ourselves and what our hands can seize. This is what Paul is talking about in the earliest parts of his fantastic letter to the church at Rome, when he says in verse twenty:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fool and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.  
[Romans 1:20-23]

The wonder that we were to experience of being in relationship with God, of being created for that wonder and awe and longing for who God is, was broken because it was exchanged for the wonder of created things. And man and woman was plunged into the endless cycle of self-love and of wanting to be gods ourselves. And so though we were created for wonder, that special thing that God was to give to us has been broken.

I'm grateful for the writing and the work of Dr. Paul Tripp, who's been both a pastor and a counselor. He's written a number of books, two of which have captured me over the last few weeks as I've returned to them. One is new, and one is a couple of years old. And he talks about what are the ways in which—and though they're not exhaustive, three of them stood out to me—three ways in which this wonder and being created for wonder has been broken.

The first, he says, is that we have become blind to his glory—that we are surrounded, as Paul says, we are surrounded by creation, beautiful creation. I follow a number of photographers whose life work has been capturing the world in all of its amazing beauty. But you find that as you follow people and you look at their photographs or at books, you can just turn—it's like eating potato chips. You just start taking in one photo after another. You never really just stop and chew on that one potato chip and say, "That's enough." On my Instagram feed is one photographer after another who's capturing images from Australia to British Columbia and Canada. And I'm amazed, but I'm amazed for about two seconds. I like it, and then I move to the next image.

It's because we're surrounded by such beauty, but we begin to be blind to the one who is behind the beauty. And in a much more mundane way, Paul Tripp recounts a recent trip with his son, when he writes these words:

I remember taking my youngest son to one of the national art galleries in Washington, D.C. As we made our approach, I was so excited about what we were going to see. He was decidedly unexcited. But I just knew that, once inside, he would have his mind blown and would thank me for what I had done for him that day. As it turned out, his mind wasn't blown; it wasn't even activated. I saw things of such stunning beauty that brought me to the edge of tears. He yawned, moaned, and complained his way through gallery after gallery. With every new gallery, I was enthralled, but each time we walked into a new art space, he begged me to leave. He was surrounded by glory but saw none of it. He stood in the middle of wonders but was bored out of his mind. His eyes worked well, but his heart was stone blind. He saw everything, but he saw nothing.

[Paul Tripp, *Awe: Why it Matters for Everything we Think, Say, and Do*]

Tripp recounts that story not as an indictment on his son, but just how much of his son he sees in his own art—that one of the things that has broken our being created for wonder is that we become blind to the God who is behind all that is created, which then leads to the second thing that breaks that wonder.

That is, we become fickle—don't we? We become so fickle, and we mistake the gift for the Giver. And so we take these things in as ends in and of themselves, whether it be great art, whether it be a great meal, whether it be a great experience with friends. We enjoy them, but then we quickly begin to seek them out, because we are bored and we long for more. The nature of the human heart is it is fickle. Because when we are blind to the God who is behind all that is made, then we take what is made for an end in and of itself. And when we try to squeeze out of the creation that which we think will satisfy us—jobs, relationships, experiences—when we try to squeeze out of it, we realize at the end there is not enough to satisfy, and we simply turn to the next thing. We become fickle.

The third thing that Tripp points out is, we become amnesiac. We forget what God has done. And isn't that the story of what we've been looking at in the prophets? God's people, over and over again, forgot what God had done. But being an amnesiac is a natural byproduct of being blind to the God of glory behind all that is made, of being fickle in heart, which then means—if I'm just turning to one thing and another, I forget. I really forget what is most valuable. And if there is anything that the prophets wanted to remind the people of God—remember what God has done, remember what he did when you were in Egypt, remember what he did through the King David, remember what the Lord did in the building of the temple, remember what the Lord has done. And they continued to forget, and they turned to one god and another.

And the reality is, in my own heart, I am blind. I am fickle. And I am amnesiac. Before I need a new mind, I need a new heart. And if I'm honest, I am like a guy on a Saturday afternoon sitting in front of the television with a t-shirt and my potato chips spilled all over my tummy with my remote control in my right hand, living in life looking for the next thing that will excite me. Yes, even as a pastor, I grow bored with God—not because God is boring, but because, in my heart of hearts, I need my wonder regained.

Why do I need it regained? Because wonder is to be an inheritance. Notice what he says. He says, "One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts." And then he talks about how this is wonders to be given to the next generation, and to generations and generations. And what he does is he simply lines them out. He says, one, we're to talk about the mighty acts of God, the works of God. He calls them the mighty acts, the works, the awesome works. "I will proclaim your great deeds." And for the psalmist, that meant to tell of what God had done for the nation of Israel. And what that means—that each week, I—as a pastor and as a parent, as a husband, as a friend—I need to be telling others about, yes, what God has done in his Word, but also the great deeds and works of what God has done in my life.

But not only does he say that we are to give wonder as an inheritance of the great works of God. Also he talks about the person of God, how he is eternal, he is sovereign, he is transcendent. In fact, what he tells us is God is unchanging. And it reminded me, as I was reflecting on Psalm 145, of that great shorter catechism question that our church holds as a part of its constitution. Question number four, "What is God?" "God is a Spirit whose being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable." That is a modern translation of the shorter catechism. He is a being full of wisdom and power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, and they are unchangeable. There is no shadow of turning with Thee, we sing. Great is Thy faithfulness. The psalmist tells to the next generation that though you are fickle, though you are blind, though you forget, the Lord sees and has always seen from beginning to end. The Lord is not fickle; he is faithful. The Lord is not amnesiac; he remembers all things from beginning to end.

But then he not only tells the wonder as an inheritance of God's mighty acts and works or of his person—oh, he tells of his character. It's right here in the middle of the psalm, verses eight through nine. Let me read it again. "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 that is made will praise you, O Lord. Your saints will extol you." Here, he talks about how God's compassion, love, patience, goodness, is worthy to be told of to those around us and to the next generation.

Then he goes on in verse thirteen to talk about how we're to talk about God's faithfulness. The Lord is faithful to all his promises, loving toward all that he has made. But then there's this. Because if we were to stop there, God could still be defined as being very impersonal, very abstract. But what he tells when he talks about the character of God—he doesn't just talk about how good he is and how great his character is. He then says, no, God is also personal in all that he does.

Listen to what he says. You hear it in verses thirteen and following. He says, "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall"—those who falter, those who recognize their brokenness—"The Lord is near to all who call on him." The Lord upholds all who are bowed down, those who are broken. "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food." So he's talking about a personal relationship.

God is not just an abstract being worthy of our praise and wonder. No, God is worthy of our wonder and praise because he is personal. Yes, he is transcendent, but he is also imminent. He is infinite, eternal, but he is also in time and space, and he cares and loves you, and you, and you, and you. And when you pray, it isn't just God's announcement of his love and compassion on all that he has made. No, we can take this psalm, because the psalmist tells us so, and make it very personal. So when he says, "The Lord upholds me when I fall. He lifts me up when I confess. The eyes of the Lord are on me, because I have looked to him for help." It's very much like when the psalmist says, "I look up to the hills. Where does my help come from?" He doesn't say "where does our help come from." Where does *my* help come from?

You see, the beauty of wonder as an inheritance—friends, if you are a parent, I say to you, we can fill our children with knowledge of the Scriptures, of their order, and of theology, and that is all right and good. But we can do all of that and yet not teach them to wonder and awe at him. How do we do that, then? We are to tell of the Lord and all that he has done throughout history and the Scriptures, but we must also tell our children and the next generation, this is how the Lord has been faithful to me. This is how the Lord has forgiven me when I have fallen. This is the Lord, how he has met me in my brokenness, how his grace and compassion have been delivered to my house day after day, night after night. This is the Lord, how he has been faithful when I have been faithless. And this is when the Lord's love has fallen on me when my doubt is like a shadow over my own heart. We tell of the Lord's personal love. Not that the story is about us, but that the story is about him. And we share that wonder as an inheritance with the next generation.

This is why I'm sharing my heart with you this morning as we begin this new year. Because as I was praying this morning—I recognize that any time I share my own heart, I take a risk. But I'm just being honest when I say that I needed the Lord to meet me this morning, to show me the wonder and beauty of his grace, to meet me in my own fickleness, my own blindness, my own forgetfulness, so that I can tell you of how he met me there, and that his grace is enough, and that his eyes were upon me. And I want to tell you, he met me there in my tears, recognizing that my tears were not over how broken I was, but over how gracious he is and how I long for him and how I need him.

And this is where I will end—recovering wonder. He says in verse twenty-one, "My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever." The way I believe I am learning to recover wonder is to, again and again, first, to take in—a taking in of who God is, of his speaking through his Word, and of taking it in. But for me, it's not taking it in so that I can preach it to you. I need to take it in as a child of God first. To take in the mighty deeds of God, of his faithfulness in the past, of his faithfulness promised in the present, and of his faithfulness to come in the future, of taking in the Word, soaking it in, so that these psalms can become like wallpaper in my house. The wallpaper of my heart, what comes to mind as I'm walking throughout my day, that the Word would become—like the psalmist says, "I meditate on your works day and night." We need to take it in, so that our wonder can be recovered.

The next thing, and the final thing, is also—and this isn't correct, but it works sermonically, so I'm just going to do it—taking it in; the second thing is telling it out. Telling it out. What do I mean? I mean just telling God of how self-centered and selfish and fickle and blind you and I have become. Telling him. Confessing it to him. Because the psalmist says he is close and will come to the ones who are bowed down. If God is good to all that he has made and has compassion, then we can go to him who is good and say, "Lord, forgive me. I need to tell you a few things."

But then there's one more telling it out that we need to do. We need to tell out praise. To tell out the praise that when the psalmist says, "My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy Name forever and ever," he means he's going to tell of God's righteousness. What's beautiful is that in the midst of telling God what I really need to tell him, is that he tells me something back even greater—that this is precisely why we celebrate Christmas: for his grace is greater than all my sin. Christ has come, and he has gone before us. His wonder never broken. His righteousness always before him.

And the love and the compassion of God keeps telling us again and again in the incarnation, in the cross, in the resurrection. And when he will come again, he will keep telling us and keep telling us and keep telling us, "I love you, and I have redeemed you." And what we can tell is that when we confess, we can tell of the righteousness of Christ, in whose righteousness we are clothed, in whose grace we are restored, so that our wonder and awe and longing for him might be regained. May the Lord do this in us. May he begin with me. And may his Spirit renew us in wonder of God our King, Jesus Christ, our matchless Savior, and the ever-present help of his Spirit. Let's pray.

Lord, meet us in this place, in this time, in this moment. Forgive us for our fickleness, for our blindness, and for our amnesia. But in Christ, we proclaim a righteousness that is not ours, but has been given to us as a gift. And in Christ, we have the grace of your love. And if this is what you've done for us in Christ, then, by your Holy Spirit and your Word, do heart surgery on us, O Lord, and restore unto us a longing and wonder for you. Awaken us, enliven us, restore us, as we begin this new year. And now, in the name that is above every name, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.