

Worthy of Praise

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[0 : 00] Psalm 135 Whatever the Lord pleases, He does in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from His storehouses. He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of beast, who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants, who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan, and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to His people, Israel.

Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renowned, O Lord, throughout all ages, for the Lord will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants. The idols of the nations are silver and gold with the work of human hands.

They have mouths, but do not speak. They have eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear. Nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them.

So do all who trust in them. O house of Israel, bless the Lord. O house of Aaron, bless the Lord. O house of Levi, bless the Lord. You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord.

[1 : 52] Blessed be the Lord from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord. Psalm 135 is a chorus of praise to God.

Praise the Lord is the phrase that's hallelujah that we are familiar with. It begins with the invitation to praise the Lord in verses 1 to 4, and it ends with the invitation to praise the Lord in verses 19 to 21. But this isn't an invitation to everyone. There are psalms, for example, like Psalm 150, which extends the invitation to everyone.

So it says in Psalm 150, verse 6, But Psalm 135 is addressing a more exclusive audience. It says in verses 1 to 2, Praise the Lord.

Praise the name of the Lord. Give praise, O servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. So if you read that, you could probably, you probably notice the emphatic kind of repetition of the phrase, of the Lord, of the Lord, right?

[3 : 01] Name of the Lord, servants of the Lord, house of the Lord, courts of God. So this is a specific invitation to the chosen people of God, the people to whom God has revealed His name, the Lord, and the people who dwell in God's chosen place, who are worshiping in the temple of the Lord.

So there's a sense of kind of this beaming pride in these verses of God, of being God's people. It's saying we do not praise any old name.

No, he says we praise the name of the Lord. We're not servants of any old God. No, he says we are servants of the Lord. We do not worship in any old place. No, we worship in the house of the Lord, because He is our God, it says, the God who has redeemed us, the God to whom we belong.

And then verses 3 to 4 give us some of the general reasons why we should praise Him. It says, Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good. Sing to His name, for it is pleasant.

For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself. Israel has His own possession. So it says that the Lord is good and that His name is pleasant. And why is that?

[4 : 15] Why is He good? Why is His name pleasant? And then he gives the reason, For the Lord has chosen us as His own possession. So the fact that God chooses His people, that's what we call the doctrine of election, right?

God is the creator of the cosmos, and He therefore owns everything. So it's not like there's anything that He doesn't own as His possession. In that sense, all the nations belong to Him.

And yet, there's a distinction that out of all those nations, God chose Israel as His own possession, to put His name on them in a special way.

But why did He do that? Was Israel particularly appealing or glorious or powerful as a nation? It says in Deuteronomy 7, verses 6-9, God says, Lord Moses says, For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.

The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you.

[5 : 26] For you are the fewest of all peoples. But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery.

And so Israel was not more numerous or powerful than the surrounding nations. God did not choose them for these reasons. So then, was Israel more righteous compared to the surrounding nations?

Deuteronomy 9, verses 4-5 says this, Do not say in your heart, After the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, Well, it's because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land.

Whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you, not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land.

But because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that He may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

[6 : 29] So once again, God did not choose Israel because of their moral uprightness either. He didn't choose them because they were a powerful nation. He didn't choose them because they were righteous.

He's simply keeping the promise He had made to their forefathers. Well, then why did God choose their forefather Jacob, also called Israel?

Romans 9, verses 10-13 says, So that's the love-hate contrast that Hebrew uses.

It's an idiom that indicates the choice of one over another. God chose Jacob over Esau. And there was nothing, according to that passage in Romans 9, about Israel, about Jacob, that commanded God's special affection.

And yet God chose him. Before he had done anything good or bad. And that's the mystery of God's election. Why did He choose His people? That it's unconditional. There's no merit.

[7 : 56] There's no deservingness on the part of the people for God's choosing them. Well, if that's the case, then isn't that unfair? Well, if it's unconditional, shouldn't God choose based on people's merit?

Shouldn't God choose people that are more deserving? Right? Paul anticipates that objection in Romans 9, 14-15. He says, What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?

By no means. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. And so that leads to the question, Well, how does that in any way dispel the objection that it's unfair of God to choose a certain people for salvation and not others?

Because it simply seems to restate the problem, right? It says, God is merciful to whom He wills. Yes. But the question is, why He chooses to be merciful to some and not to others?

But the answer lies in the fact that that's a quotation from Exodus 33, verse 19. And in that context, it's an interpretation of God's name, the Lord, Jehovah.

[9 : 02] So the logic of Paul's argument is that God's unconditional election is connected to the revelation of God's name, the Lord, Jehovah.

It says in Exodus 33, 18-9, I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

So then God's showing mercy to whomever He wills is connected to His name. And that's the name that occurs as a main theme of this psalm. The word name occurs three times in the psalm, verses 1, 3, and 13.

And the actual name of God, Jehovah, in all caps of the Lord, occurs 19 times in this psalm. And it's intricately connected to the idea of God's election.

And that's because the Lord, Jehovah, means I am who I am. I have mercy on whom I have mercy. I show compassion to whom I show compassion. In other words, dispensing mercy to whomever God wants is part and parcel of the name of God.

[10:14] It's part of God's essential nature to bestow mercy on whomever He pleases without being constrained by anyone else, anyone else's desire or will.

That's essentially what it means to be God. That's what it means to be sovereign, to not have anyone else with authority over you, to control, constrain anything that you do.

I am who I am. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. And that actually increases God's glory, His stature.

But not only that, it also magnifies God's grace. Because if God chooses us because we are in one way or another better than other people, whether it's because we're smarter or more moral or more faith-filled or more sincere, then we deserve at least some of the credit for God's choosing us, for being chosen, because we deserve it.

But if God's election is unconditional, if the reason for God's choosing us doesn't lie in us, not in our merit, but in God's mysterious will, if it lies in His grace, then He deserves all the credit for our salvation.

[11:28] And so in his autobiography, Charles Spurgeon once said this, he says, I believe the doctrine of election because I am quite certain that if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him.

And I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards. And He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love.

So I am forced to accept that great biblical doctrine. And then in verses, that's the invitation to praise the Lord because He has chosen us as His people.

And then in verses 5 to 18, the psalmist kind of talks about the worthiness of the Lord and the worthlessness of idols in turn to convey what an immense privilege it is to be chosen by the Lord. It says in verses 5 to 7, We will see clearly in verses 15 to 18 that the so-called gods that these verses are speaking of are actually no gods at all.

[12:50] But verse 5 makes the rhetorical point that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does. Once again, that's what it means to be God, to be the Lord, Jehovah, who does what He pleases.

This doesn't make Him a tyrant because He's good. He's not evil. But there is no God or man that constrains Him in any way. No one is above Him.

He doesn't owe anyone anything. And if you look at the pagan religions of the ancient world, sky, which is what it's referring to here as heaven, earth, seas, deeps, referring to the subterranean depths, lightning, rain, these were all attributed to various gods within their pantheon, right?

They all represented deities. But the psalmist tells us that all of these powers and all of these realms belong exclusively to the one God, the Lord, the Jehovah.

He's the only God who rules over all these things. And He is our God. That's the amazing thing about it. And then in verses 8 to 12, the psalmist reminds us of Israel's exodus from Egypt and of their conquest of Canaan, both of which display God's power and glory.

[14:05] He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both a man and a beast, who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all the servants, who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings, Sion king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan, and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel.

And it's really a remarkable piece of ancient history that a nation as small and insignificant as Israel escapes the slavery in the most powerful nation in the ancient Near East, Egypt.

And then after a period of wandering in the wilderness, with no city or home base to speak of, they successfully conquer numerous nations more powerful than they in the land of Canaan.

And this was all God's doing. This Psalm is telling us He's the one that sent signs and wonders in Egypt. He's the one who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings. And once again, why did God do this for them?

Verses 13 to 14 tell us, Your name, O Lord, endures forever. Your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages. For the Lord will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants.

[15:19] God did it for the glory of His name. When He vindicates His own people and delivers them, has compassion on them, He vindicates His own glory. It's showing that He is faithful to His covenant, that His name is holy, that He is the glorious one.

That's the worth, the worthiness of God, of the Lord. And then in contrast to the Lord, it says in verses 15 to 18, The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak. They have eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.

So the Lord created the heavens and the earth, as we saw in the first half, but these so-called gods of the nations are mere idols that have been created by human hands.

Instead of being creators, they are creatures, and not even live creatures. They're dead, right? They're powerless to do anything because they're mute, they're blind, they're deaf, and they're dead.

[16:28] They have no breath in their mouths. And that's the irony of it all, of idolatry, is that people create in the image of God dignified creatures, human beings with the breath of God in them.

They are the pinnacle of God's creation. They have mouths and they speak. They have eyes and they see. They have ears and they hear. And they have the breath of God in their mouths. And yet they, the image bearers of God Almighty, they worship idols who can do nothing for them.

It's tragic, right? In the U.S., most people don't worship idols made by human hands, but we worship idols made by human minds. We worship the idols of power and platform.

We worship the idols of beauty, and affection. We worship the idol of money. We crave the approval of our fellow creatures to be loved and liked by people and forsake the approval of our God creator.

But God warns us here, those who make them become like them. So do all who trust in them. So we're not to trust in the idols of our world. Instead, we're to trust in the true God who alone satisfies.

[17:39] And then at the conclusion, it comes back to inviting us to praise the Lord in verses 19 to 21. And it includes all the different groups of people among God's people.

O house of Israel, representing all of them, bless the Lord. O house of Aaron, representing the priests, bless the Lord. O house of Levi, representing the Levites who work as attendants in the temple, bless the Lord.

You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord. Blessed be the Lord from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord. And this is again an exclusive invitation.

It addresses the house of Israel, God's chosen people. It calls them to worship the God who dwells in Jerusalem. And this is great news.

If you belong to Him, if you are part of His special chosen people, but for those other nations that He spoke of, that God, the mighty kings that God defeated, for sinners who, by their sin, leave the God of their covenant, as Israel does over and over again so that they get exiled, being kicked out of the promised land, this is bad news.

[18:55] They are cut off from this great favor of this great mighty God, the Lord. And that's what ultimately points to Jesus and is that praise be to God.

I mean, we are, I think we're all right now, we're all Gentiles, if I'm not mistaken. that means none of us deserved this.

We were all cut off from this because of our sin and we had no hope of salvation and no privilege of worshiping Him.

But Jesus comes and He dies on the cross and by the cross, as it says in Ephesians chapter 2, He breaks down the dividing wall of hostility between God and man and between Jews and Gentiles so that we too can have this privilege of calling this great God, the Lord Almighty, as our God and worshiping Him.

And then to be called His chosen people as 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 9 to 10 says, but you, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

[20:24] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

that's us, right? God says, I have mercy on whom I have mercy. We were not one of those people on whom God had mercy apart from Jesus.

But Jesus comes, dies for our sins, and now, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy, that's what God says of us. And in the same way, before, Israel had nothing about them to commend them to God.

Likewise, now there's nothing about us, to commend us to God, nothing about us that deserves this. We were, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, not wise, not powerful, not of noble birth, but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

That's the grace that God has shown us. And how can we not praise the Lord? How can we not sing His praises all our days and look forward to eternity of praising Him?

[21 : 31] That's our privilege as God's people. People for His own special possession. Thank you.