

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church
Worship / #2
February 26, 2017

Sermon Summary #2

Celebrating the Unsearchable Greatness of God Psalm 145

You can't not worship. Ignore my use of the ungrammatical double negative and try to understand what I'm saying. ***You can't not worship.*** Or to put it yet another way, ***"we can't not love something ultimate"*** (James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 20). You may choose not to sing. You may choose not to bow down. You may choose not to lift your hands. You may choose not to give any outward or physical expression to your devotion, but you can't not worship.

Your heart and mind will always love something. It may be that you are so self-absorbed that you worship your own existence, your own soul, your own earthly abilities and accomplishments. It may be that you worship nature. Perhaps you are among those who believe the physical realm is in some sense divine or imbued with glory and you are drawn to elevate to a place of adoration, a place higher even than human beings, trees and mountains and streams and fields of lilies and gently flowing meadows and the ocean and all it contains.

Some of you, without even knowing it, worship money, or better still, you worship and are devoted ultimately to the pleasure and comfort that it can purchase for you. Everything else in life is subordinate to your endless pursuit of wealth and the joy that you are convinced it will bring you.

Simply put, you can't not worship. Your heart and mind are of such a nature that they invariably look for something or someone into which you can pour yourself and to which you can devote yourself and for which you can make the ultimate sacrifice. It is in that something or someone that you look for meaning and value and a purpose for living. That is what I mean when I say you can't not worship.

Maybe it's the beauty of the human body, or the ecstasy of sexual intimacy, or the hallucinogenic high of a chemical stimulant, or the thrill of a Super Bowl victory or a championship in the World Series. It may be that you prize above all else continual promotion at your place of employment, or the endless praise of your peers, or the simple satisfaction that comes from finishing a project perfectly and on time. But the fact remains unchanged: You can't not worship.

The loyalty and love and devotion and adoration of your soul will fix itself on something or someone. ***You have an ultimate and unrivalled treasure***, even if you can't always identify it. Believe me, it's there.

So my question for you today is a simple one. ***If you can't not worship, why wouldn't you worship the most worthy and glorious thing that exists? If you can't not worship, why wouldn't you devote yourself to the one thing in all the universe that is actually deserving of your ultimate allegiance? If you can't not worship, why wouldn't you pursue the one thing, the only thing that can bring eternal satisfaction and joy to your heart?***

I'm sure you see where I'm going with this. What possible reason could you possibly give for *not* devoting every ounce of physical, mental, and spiritual energy to the God of the Bible, the God who has Genesis 1 on his resume, the God who called everything into existence out of nothing, the God who is immeasurably great, unfathomably beautiful, limitless in power and knowledge and love and mercy and majesty?

That is what Psalm 145 is all about. It is a psalm in which David, King of Israel, does his best to explain why God and God alone is worthy of all praise and adoration and enjoyment and delight.

My aim today is simple. I'll come straight to the point. I want to impress on your hearts that the "Thing" you were created to worship, that "Being" whom your heart was designed to adore and love, is God. You weren't created to spend your time gazing on your own reflection in a mirror. You weren't created to exhaust your energy trying to

squeeze meaning and joy out of material stuff. You weren't created to devote your mental, physical, spiritual, and financial resources in the pursuit of the countless "idols" in our world that cry out for your affection.

You were created for God: to see him, to know him, to celebrate him, to rest in him, to rejoice in him, to be satisfied in him, to be exhilarated with him, to be enthralled and captivated by all that he is for you in Jesus Christ.

And in Psalm 145 David only scratches the surface of an infinity of *reasons* why this God and this God only is worthy of your undivided and singular devotion of heart, soul, mind, and body.

How Great is Our God!

I suppose there are as many different kinds of prayers spoken prior to eating a meal as there are families who pray. When our two daughters, Melanie and Joanna, were young, the greatest problem we faced wasn't in getting them to pray but in getting them to finish before the food got cold. Neither of them was able to pray for the meal collectively, but insisted on giving thanks for each individual item on the table. They thanked God for the potatoes, the fork, the milk, the salt, the napkin, the dessert, and just about anything else in sight. As time passed, we finally succeeded in getting our point across and were able once again to enjoy a hot meal!

At least one thing hasn't changed with the passing of centuries: people in the ancient world also expressed their gratitude to God before sharing a meal together. In fact, ***when they prayed before the midday meal it was customary for them to recite all or part of Psalm 145.*** This was largely due to the statement in vv. 15-16, which reads: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing."

But this psalm is important for more than what it tells us about where our food comes from. It is one of the most vibrant and expressive hymns of praise to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. Not only does it provide a marvelous declaration of the majesty and incomparable greatness of God, it also instructs us on our responsibility to worship him as he deserves. Interestingly enough, this is the only psalm in the entire book that has the one word "Praise" for its title.

Our approach to this psalm won't be verse-by-verse or in recognition of some elaborate structure. I'd like simply to summarize what it is says, first, about the ***character*** of God and, second, our privilege and joy in ***celebrating*** him. So let's begin.

God's Character

David begins with God's ***greatness*** (vv. 3, 6b), a word that is horribly overused in our day and applied to anything from deodorant to the most obnoxious professional athlete. Historically, many have taken the adjective *Great* and made it part of their name: Alexander *the Great*, Peter *the Great*, Catherine *the Great*, and in our own day the comedian Jackie Gleason simply went by the title, *The Great One*. And who could possibly forget the claim of boxer Muhammad Ali who declared himself to be *The Greatest of All Time*?

I beg to differ. God alone is Great! Furthermore, his greatness is ***unsearchable*** (v. 3). No one ever has or ever will fully fathom the depths of his greatness. Not all the minds of all the ages using the most advanced scientific equipment can capture all that God is. He is utterly beyond and immeasurably past finding out. Many have claimed to have spoken the "last word" on some event or experience. But ***there never will be a "last word" on God.*** For in saying that God's greatness is "unsearchable" David is telling us that it is infinite. There is no boundary within which God's greatness can be confined. You need never fear that a day is coming, not now nor in eternity future, when human beings will have discovered the last thing that can be said about God and his greatness.

This is one reason why this book, the Bible, is so precious. It isn't simply a record of the religion of an ancient people. It's not just a volume of fascinating stories. ***This is the infinitely and incomparably great God making himself known to you and me.*** The fact that the God who is by nature "unsearchable" has condescended and made himself "searchable" and "knowable" to hell-deserving people like you and me is almost too much for words.

David also points to his *majesty* (v. 5), or better still, the *glorious splendor of his majesty*. There is nothing remotely mundane about the majesty of God. There is a great light or luster or spiritual brilliance that emanates from the magnificence of his majesty. God's majesty is blinding and breathtaking and beyond comprehension or calculation. This is the sort of majesty that mesmerizes and thrills and enthralls.

Ah, but he is also *good* (vv. 7a, 9a). Can you envision how horrific it would be if this great and powerful and awesome God were *bad*? Don't take his goodness for granted, but joyfully celebrate it and declare it aloud and rest confidently in it. To say that God is good is to say something about both his nature and his activity. He is good in the core of his being, and therefore all he does is also good, never bad. That doesn't mean you and I will always be able to understand how some of what he does is good. At times, it looks bad. But I assure you that it is good. And that is one of the things I look forward to in the age to come, when God will demonstrate to us how and why everything he ever did or permitted was perfectly and altogether good.

Our God is also *righteous* (v. 7b). To say that God is righteous is not to say he conforms to human standards of right and wrong. Rather he conforms perfectly to the standards of his *own* perfections. One of the reasons we struggle to embrace the righteousness of God is that *we judge him by our standards instead of the standard of his own nature*. But if he is wholly and altogether righteous, how can unholy and unrighteous people like you and me enter his presence? The answer follows.

According to v. 8, God is "*gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*." Yes, God has a holy temper, but he has a very long fuse! Even those who deny and blaspheme his name are recipients of his patience and long-suffering. He permits his enemies to live, to spew forth their horrid sacrilege, all the while blessing them with food and air and earthly pleasures, affording them even more time and opportunity to repent (cf. Romans 2:4-5).

"Steadfast love" is the translation of the Hebrew word *hesed*, elsewhere rendered by such terms as mercy, goodness, loving kindness, loyal love, and occasionally by the word grace. Its primary emphasis is on God's covenant love, his steadfast commitment to his people.

But look closely at v. 8b. God is not simply steadfast and unchanging in his love. He also *abounds* in it. You and I know what it feels like to run low on love. We love others, even the unlovely and those who don't love us back, and we eventually run out of emotion. We find ourselves empty of affection. We lack the capacity to love beyond a certain limit.

But God *abounds* in his steadfast love. His love never scrapes the bottom of the barrel. His love never needs to be replenished. Every time you and I might be tempted to think that God's love has run its course and met its limit, he proves us wrong as his love abounds and overflows and surprises us with new expressions of affection. So don't ever think that one day you're going to wake up and find that your sin has drained God's love of its supply. His love is an infinitely deep well of refreshing water.

All these qualities of character inform his deeds and give shape to his providential oversight of creation. So let's look briefly at what this great and majestic and good and righteous and gracious and merciful and longsuffering God *does*. In other words, let's move now from what David says God is like to what David says God does.

For one thing, he *works* (vv. 4, 5b, 6a, 9, 12a). David goes even further and speaks of his *mighty* works, his *wonderful* works, his *merciful* works, and his *awesome* acts! God has never done anything mundane or boring or routine. All his works and acts partake of the magnificence of his nature and reflect the beauty and harmony and glory of who he is.

More specifically, he *rules* (vv. 11-13). But unlike every other ruler or potentate, God is in office for life (see Daniel 4:3, 34)! There is no transition team to move from one heavenly administration to another. There are no inaugural ceremonies (God has *always* been on the throne). There is no concern over the qualifications of a *Vice-God* should the Almighty be unable to serve out the full extent of his term. There are no tearful good-byes to the staff, no waving "so-long" from the steps of a helicopter, no cleaning out of the desk in the heavenly oval office to make way for his successor.

Among earthly kings, especially in British history, we hear of James I and James II and Charles I and Charles II and Charles III, etc. Not in the heavenly kingdom. There is no Yahweh I and Yahweh II, for God is **first and last** and there is no other. None preceded him and none shall succeed him.

The everlasting ruler *upholds or sustains* (v. 14) all who are weak and prone to falling. We should read this verse in connection with v. 13 and “admire the unexpected contrast: he reigns in glorious majesty, yet condescends to lift up and hold up those who are apt to fall” (Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, III.b.380).

He also *supplies* (v. 15) food and life and *satisfies* the desires of his creation (v. 16). This truth about God is unpacked with even greater detail in Psalm 104. There we read the following:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills; they give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart. The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers. . . . The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it. These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground (Psalm 104:10-30).

He is altogether *righteous* in his dealings with us (v. 17a). Of course, that's easy for us to believe when things are going well. But God is righteous in *all* his ways, not just in the circumstances that favor us. Nothing is more difficult to acknowledge when we are in trouble, or when he afflicts us, or when we feel he has been unfair.

And we must never forget that he is not only *righteous* but also “*kind* in all his works” (v. 17b). We don't typically put those two words together, for it's difficult to be both at the same time. We swing to one or the other extreme and are either rigid and demanding or excessively lenient and tolerant. All too often the people we perceive as “righteous” are downright “mean” and inflexible. But in God righteousness and kindness find perfect harmony, as seen most readily in Jesus, who was simultaneously high and humble; both strong and tender; righteous, yet gracious; powerful and merciful; authoritative, yet tender; holy, yet always forgiving; just, yet compassionate; at times angry, yet also gentle; and firm, yet friendly.

Finally, he *answers prayer* (vv. 18-19), *preserves* the righteous (v. 20a), and *destroys* the wicked (v. 20b). Do you “call” on God in truth and sincerity? Do you “cry” out to him in prayer? If you do, you can be assured that he will be “near” to you. Your prayers may not always be answered in the way you think is best, but they are always answered in the way that God thinks is best!

When David declares that God “preserves all who love him” he doesn't mean that the wicked can't kill the righteous. We see all the time and throughout history instances where the “wicked” persecute, imprison, torture, and kill those “who love” God. But David's point is that such is the worst and most they can do. They may take our lives physically but God preserves our lives spiritually in the sense that nothing done to us by evil people can separate us from God's love.

One additional word is in order with regard to God's destruction of the wicked. Some might be tempted to question whether or not God is really righteous and truly kind if he in fact “destroys” or judges eternally those he regards as “wicked”. But would God be worthy of our praise and adoration if he ignored wickedness and refused to judge evil men and turned a blind eye to unrighteous and idolatrous behavior? I think not. Why, then, does he not judge and destroy us as well? After all, we were once “wicked” and immersed in unbelief. Yes, and the only reason he does not

visit the judgment of our sin upon us is because he has visited it upon his Son in our place! But those who despise and spurn the offer of eternal life which Jesus died to obtain will surely be judged. God will surely “destroy” them.

Our Celebration of Our Great God

How does one respond to such a God? Needless to say, such splendor, majesty, mercy and might call for the loudest and most passionate of praise.

We are to *extol* him (v. 1a), which literally means “to be high.” God *is* high and we acknowledge and declare it so. We don’t make him higher than he already and always is. But we can declare him to be infinitely high and worthy of praise. Thus to extol is to *exalt* above all others, to set as pre-eminent over every other thing. We also *bless* (vv. 1b, 2a, 10b) and *praise* (v. 2b), and *commend* and *declare* (v. 4, 6b) and *meditate* (v. 5) and *speak* (v. 6a) and *pour forth* praise of his abundant goodness (v. 7a).

As if that weren’t enough, we *sing aloud* (v. 7b) and *give thanks* (v. 10a) and *make known* (v. 12) his mighty deeds. What do each of these expressions of praise have in common? They are all *verbal* or *vocalized* declarations. Some of you might wish to push back against this and say, “Well, for one thing I can’t carry a tune in a bucket. I can’t sing. And I’m extremely introverted and don’t outwardly express myself in relation to much of anything.” I hear you. And all I want to say in response is: You will never fully worship God in proportion to his greatness and will never experience in your soul the depths of delight that comes from celebrating who he is and what he’s done until such time as you give vocal expression to your praise.

And let’s be diligent to do it *every day* (v. 2a), and not just on Sunday morning. Indeed, our praise and exaltation of God is to continue *forever and ever* (vv. 1a, 2b, 21b):

"Through all eternity to thee,
A joyful song I'll raise;
But oh, eternity's too short
To utter all thy praise." (Adam Clarke; Quoted in Spurgeon, III:B:384).

A heart flooded with thoughts of the splendor of God and what he does can no more conceive of an end of praise than it can conceive of an end of God himself!

Above all else, may our praise and honor and joyful celebration of this God be *great*, for “great is the Lord, and [therefore] *greatly to be praised*” (v. 3a). True worship must always be proportionate to the object of adoration. Great praise for a great God. “No chorus is too loud, no orchestra too large, no Psalm too lofty for the lauding of the Lord of Hosts” (Spurgeon, 376).

You will notice that I said nothing about the kind of songs we sing. One can genuinely worship God with a medieval hymn, a contemporary chorus, or in spoken prose. Nothing has been said about physical posture. One can genuinely worship God sitting, standing, kneeling, lying prostrate on the ground, dancing, with hands raised, with hands in pockets, with hands clapping, with tears flowing or a wide smile. I said nothing about the presence or absence of musical instruments. One can genuinely worship God by singing a cappella or with musical accompaniment, both by the human voice alone or with a symphony orchestra. I said nothing about the freedom, form, or style in which worship is expressed. One can genuinely worship God through centuries-old structured liturgy or Spirit-prompted spontaneity, both through pre-written confessions of faith or impromptu shouts of praise.

Worship is an End in Itself

This worship that we read about here in Psalm 145 and everywhere else in Scripture is unlike every other Christian experience. *It is utterly and eternally unique in one critically important respect: worship is an end in itself.* In other words, worship that glorifies God must be expressed in conscious awareness that this is the ultimate goal for which we were created and redeemed. We do not worship God in order to attain some higher end, or to accomplish some greater goal, or to experience a more satisfying joy.

Every other ministry or activity of the Christian serves some higher end. *There is a “so that” appended to everything we do, except for worship.* We preach, so that . . . We evangelize, so that . . . We cultivate fellowship in the body of Christ, so that . . . We study the Bible, so that . . . But when it comes to glorifying God by enjoying him and all that he is for us in Jesus, we can never say we do it so that . . . as if worship simply was a step on the path to something more ultimate, or as if worship were merely a door through which we proceed into something more important, or as if worship were merely one experience that we pursue for the sake of yet another, higher and more satisfying experience.

“But Sam,” you may be tempted to reply, “with what ultimate goal in view do you ascribe glory and honor and praise to God?” None! For there is no more ultimate goal than that.

“But Sam, what do you hope to accomplish by means of enjoying the majesty and perfections and goodness of God?” Nothing! Worship is not a means to the accomplishment of an end. *Worship is itself the end accomplished by all other means.*

Worship is not simply one part of the church’s existence. It is *the point* of the church’s existence.