

## **Psalm 138**

### **Intro**

I wasn't sure why I was drawn toward this passage...I just knew that I was.

So I started diving into what other folks have said to describe this passage and came upon an interesting breakdown of the following question: why do we praise God?

As soon as I read it, it struck a chord. Here's why: because in a few minutes we will be able to celebrate communion in the same sanctuary with one another for the first time in 15 months. Yes, we have been able to remain connected...and it still feels like something worth celebrating.

But are the things we feel blessed by the main reasons why we praise God? As we listen to the Psalmist we are absolutely able to hear that we should lift our praise and adoration because of what we feel we have received...but that is not the first (or even the second) reason why.

Hear these words through the prism of the question, why do you praise God? The scripture reads this way.

## **Psalm 138**

<sup>1</sup> I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; <sup>2</sup> I bow down towards your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. <sup>3</sup> On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

<sup>4</sup> All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth. <sup>5</sup> They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

<sup>7</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. <sup>8</sup> The Lord will fulfil his

purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

### **‘Why Do You?’**

This past week I wrote in the mid-week update about today’s service that this will be the first time that we have been able to celebrate communion together in the sanctuary in 15 months. As soon as I wrote that, I sat back and thought to myself, ‘thank God’.

And I didn’t mean that in a profane way...I meant it sincerely.

God, thank You for how we were able to see You, hear You and feel You over the course of the last 15 months! God, thank You!

God, thank You for leading the people to this place that the community of faith needed in order to remain connected with one another, especially during those times when we wondered what was going to be left if we were ever able to start to come out of quarantine. God, thank You!

God, thank You for reminding us, even when we were physically separated, that community should be so much more than simply sitting in the same seat most Sundays and saying ‘hi’ to the people who normally sit around us. God, thank You!

That was very much where my heart was at as I tried to figure out what God needed us to hear today.

It was as I started to get into the passage we just heard that I recognized that this expression of thankfulness and gratitude toward God for the blessings that we are able to perceive is something that is important and yes, necessary.

However, if blessings are the only switch that cause us to feel, let alone express, gratitude and thankfulness, then it's like our faith is running with a regulator, where it's there, but it's not able to get up to full speed.

For so many people, for so many of us, our connection to God feels dependent on our interpretation of what we experience. AKA: if we perceive something as a positive, then we attach God to that experience. If we perceive an event as negative, then we wonder where God went, or even if God is forcing us to deal with this experience that is negative.

But what our passage reminds us this morning is that our connection to and with God should never be tied exclusively to how we interpret the experiences of our lives. In fact, as I mentioned prior to the reading, our experience actually comes in, not at #1, or even at #2, but actually at #3 on the reasons why we 'give thanks' to the Lord.

What tops the list?

Let's listen again to the beginning of the Psalm.

<sup>1</sup> I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; <sup>2</sup> I bow down towards your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. <sup>3</sup> On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.'

So why do we praise God? Let's go to the countdown!

At number 3: the interpretation of our experience. The way the Psalmist articulates it? 'On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.'

Experience is absolutely part of why we praise God...and our interpretation of that experience goes a long way in helping us to determine whether something is worthy of praise. I keep saying interpretation, because the lens that we look out on to the world shapes how we see

the world. If we look out with a sense of defeat, we will find more than a few things to feel defeated about, even in areas of success. How many people do we know achieve a goal and the first thing that they do is start to talk down what was achieved, how they should have done to do it better or faster? I'm not saying there isn't value in that exercise, but if that's the go-to starting and finishing place, then we are always operating from a place of deficit.

And this is not me pushing a positive thinking mantra on events that are legitimately heartbreaking.

Instead, what I am saying is that if we begin to view our experiences through a lens of gratitude, then we will begin to realize that we had more to be thankful to God for than we thought that we had in the first place. Simply put, it is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.

That interpretation of our experience, when we open ourselves to being grateful, empowers and emboldens us to lift our praise to God. We are able to celebrate communion with one another today...and I am so grateful for that. God, thank you!

So there's #3.

Number 2 is actually mentioned first in the scriptural run down: 'give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness.' What's that mean? Give thanks to God...for being God!

This is not saying that we need to be in particular religious lanes of expression.

Instead, this is looking out at the world, looking at your world and thinking, saying, and living in such a way that there is an entity who created all that we know. And yes, there are things that are messed up in a whole lot of different ways, and it is still able to exude the mark of

that Creator, both in terms of its majesty, and in the way that it leads us to a place to say, ‘God, I may not get how You work, but I know that You exist and also that You care.’

Reason #2 to express thankfulness to God? Because it’s God!

And reason #1? Because God has revealed God’s self. The Psalmist says it this way: ‘you have exalted your name and your word above everything’ (that whole, ‘above everything’ is what pushes this one up to #1!).

What does that mean? It means the fact that we are able to have a working (albeit incomplete) understanding of who God is, is because God wanted us to know who God was, who the Creation came from, and ultimately how precious humanity is to the Creator of all. If we didn’t have The Word, if we didn’t have the scriptures, it would be even more like the blind people touching one part of the elephant and being completely at a loss as to what they were hearing from those who were interacting with a different portion of the same animal.

And yes, we still have more than a few moments that are still like that...and that’s with us having God’s Word!

But because of God’s revelation, because of God’s Word, we are able to know that God is love, that God is just, and that God is faithful to all the promises that have been made. God, thank You for helping us to see who You are, even if it is but dimly through a cloudy reflection: thank you!

So, do you praise God? If you do, why?

Yes, the things that we interpret as positive events, as blessings, are absolutely a reason why we praise God. And those blessings are a part of your life, and that is regardless of how the world may look at your life. When we celebrate those things that we are grateful for, the tide of God’s love begins to rush in ever more freely.

Now go deeper!

Praise God...for being God and creating all the intricacies we know and even more than that, praise God for revealing to us in small and large ways alike who God was, is, and always will be. Those revelations not only describe God's glory, but also how important we are to God. Those revelations help us to interpret the experiences we face on the daily with a sense of gratitude and hopefulness, and that is regardless of the circumstances that are before us.

God, I thank You for my wife, our kids, our friends, this church, for the points of celebration and the times of trial. God I thank You for being You and leading me, leading us to know who You are even just a little bit more. God, with my whole heart, I thank You!

What's your list sound like? Let God hear that praise...today!