

Great is the LORD

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Date: 08 January 2017

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[0 : 00] Now, I lie for a little while this morning to look back at Psalm 145. I'm going to do something I haven't done for quite a long time, which is really focus on one verse. I will take in the Psalm, but I'm focusing on one verse for our thoughts, and that's verse 3, which is, Great is the Lord and Greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.

That's what I want to speak about today. And you take part, you take part as you hear the word of God, as it's given to us in His living Word, and as we seek to respond to that.

So it's not passive. I remind us all again, it's active to be under God's word and to be listening to Him as we worship together.

Now, 2016, it's past, and it was an interesting year. It was maybe a great year for some of you, a terrible year for others. But one thing about 2016 that you probably all recognize and know from the media is the number of famous people that died.

So many famous people, people in the media, in entertainment, in politics. Lots of famous, well-known people died, and they did a kind of a rough study of that, a scientifically, a loosely scientific study.

[1 : 20] And yes, there were more. I don't quite know how you worked that out. I think they worked out on the base of pre-prepared obituaries, which doesn't seem very accurate, nor scientific. But it does seem to be the case that there were more famous people who died over this last year.

And with each one of these deaths, there was a real outpouring of grief, and superlatives were mentioned often about these people in their lives.

Often, that grief between famous people was played out in public and played out for us all to see.

And there were many Twitter tiers for people over this year that were made known.

But it's interesting, isn't it, that a great amount of time and effort and words were spent on these people. And their worth is weighed by the media very often.

There was little time given to those who died in Syria or possibly in Istanbul over this last week. Because generally speaking, and I'm not condemning this, it's just an observation, that generally the measure of greatness that we have is dictated to us and fed to us by the media.

[2 : 40] And whoever is significant, whoever is important is important because that's what society and that's what the media has judged to be important.

And I think we can safely say that however great people are or however significant they are in lives, that the media and society in general would not place God in that category of greatness.

The Lord is not great to the vast majority of people we know, far from that. Whenever he's mentioned in public, the Lord or God or even Jesus, maybe Jesus is slightly different, people will regard him as being for a few psychiatric cases, for a few people who are oddballs, for a few people who are out of touch or who are phobic of someone or something in this world and who need really to be taken aside and dealt with, there is a general apathy and disinterest in God and who certainly wouldn't be regarded and called and considered as great.

Yet although that would be the media reaction for God, the reality for us as we look at the world around us, that there are millions of people in this world and have been over the centuries for whom God, for whom the Lord is great.

People from every strata of society, of which you are representative here today, young and old, professional, working class, men and women, all kinds of different people, and your testimony, your life revolves around this confession that for you the Lord is great.

[4 : 28] The Lord is significant, the Lord is important, the Lord is good and I hope as we begin the New Year and as we look at this passage that you will reassess that in your own life, as you look back on this last week, as you look back on this last year, as we all do that, we will consider that

question.

Well, actually is he? Is God great for us? Would I grieve more at George Michael's death than I would leave in God out of my life?

What is our standard? What do we think of life and what do we think of God and what do we think of Him in our lives? Is He the one we trust? Is He the one who is first in our lives or is it all rather, what can I say, ritualistic for us possibly or ordinary and the greatness may have gone for us?

So let's look at this passage, great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and His greatness is unsearchable. There's a couple of things, there's many other things, a couple of things I just want to focus on quickly as we go through this and then look at some other things.

One is the, we see His greatness in the glory of creation. This Psalm speaks about in verse 6 and 7, they shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds and will declare your greatness and your goodness and of your righteousness and it speaks about His works in verse 9 as well, the Lord is good to all and His mercies over all He has made.

[6 : 00] So over this last number of years we've been greatly blessed by having David Attenborough telling us about planet earth and he's done a great service to the Christian faith and to the knowledge of God by exposing how glorious His creation and it is awe inspiring isn't it when we watch that?

It's tremendous when we see remarkably with the use of technology how great this creation is, the power, the magnitude, the creativity, the order, the beauty, the colour, the humour, the extravagance, the imagination, can I say the holy mischief that is unfolded in creation where we see a character, a God who is revealed in all His glory in the ways that we never really think of in ways that we never consciously, well I very often don't consciously attribute to God with just the variety and the magnificence and the size of it and God who is ever present in that universe but distinct from it, separate from it but over it, over it and as we struggle to measure the greatness of the universe scientifically we find that there's a God that we trust in that we believe in who is overall of that, who is truly great and we see it in creation and we see it in our creation, in our characters, in our uniqueness, in the fact that each one of us here are completely unique from the other, we've got a lot of things that bind us together but we're unique, no one else is like you, no one else thinks like you, acts like you, interacts like you, communicates like you, we're all absolutely unique and different with our talents and our desires and our longing for belonging and community and the purpose that we have in our lives and the gift of every day as you woke up this morning, the greatness of God is revealed that you woke up, that you woke up alive this morning, that God has given you another day and He's given countless billions of people other days today in His greatness, in His creative majesty and glory and as the Creator as the one who is sovereign over all things, the one to whom therefore He makes clear we are accountable in all our uniqueness, in all our individuality that He is the sovereign God to whom we give account.

So you will all and I will give account to this God for our lives, we will stand before Him and I think that's a really significant and maybe underplayed and underspoken about the concept today in the world in which we live certainly and even maybe in the church for which I apologize.

We need to regroup and reimagine and re-prioritize that fact that in the perspective of our lives that ultimately we are moral beings who stand before this glorious created God and are accountable to Him.

[9 : 04] For what we do, for how we live, for the decisions we make, for the conversations we have, for the choices that are ours, we are accountable to God ultimately, to no one else.

Societies will come and go, police will come and go, teachers will come and go, parents will come and go but we are accountable every day ultimately to the living God and we'll stand before Him. We are made in His image and we see His glory and His greatness in the creation of which we are a part. The Samus here also speaks, not just the glory of creation but the glory of His character, that He is great because of who He is as well.

We think of a Creator and even the world will sometimes think of a Creator, an impersonal kind of force or power behind the world but the Bible makes clear for us that this great, some powerful Creator is also hugely personal in a way that is beyond recognition by so many.

He is, as verse 7 tells us, He is a good God and righteous in His character. That is, He is infinitely and unflinchingly morally good and right and perfect.

[10 : 29] So as the one to whom we are accountable, He is also the one that is the standard. He is the one by whom we will be judged because of His perfect character.

Yet He also goes on and we love these verses and we often speak of, I often use a verse, a Sam like this, maybe at funerals or elsewhere, what it speaks about, the Lord is gracious, the Lord is merciful, He is slow to anger, He is greatness, He is amazing, He is a great God and it is shrunk down.

His character is shrunk down into words, small words, small sentences that we can understand, He is slow to anger. We get that, don't we? We get that because that makes sense to us.

He is abounding instead, fast love. He is good to all, His mercy is over all, He is made. Not just to those who, as we will go on to see, bow the knee, but to everyone.

He pours out unmerited favor and goodness on them. He is someone in verse 13, we are told, who doesn't lie, he keeps His word.

[11 : 36] The Lord is faithful in all His words and kind in all His works. So what He says is personal, communicating reality of a being. It is communicated, He has been great, He provides for, He is gentle, He listens, He responds, the psalmist goes on to say, He protects.

There's great human, if we can call it that, great human characteristics here that's the language that's used so that we can understand it.

These are the things we can understand. And in many ways, these characteristics are absolutely what we would look for in a person.

We're attracted to people like that. We're attracted as people to people who are compassionate, who are loving, who are protecting, who listen to us, who are caring, who are good, who are upright. We're drawn to them, aren't we? Aren't you? We're drawn to them in our lives. But these same characteristics sometimes make us fear God.

[12 : 45] We're drawn to them in one another, but sometimes they cause us to kind of recoil from God who is like that, because He's more than just like that.

Because He's infinite in these qualities and His goodness and His care and His compassion. Just like that, Samus 139, wherever we go, it's there.

And it exposes our imperfections and our falling short and our sometimes selfishness and comparison. And so His greatness and character, however humanly explained in ways that we understand and are attracted to and attracted by, it also somehow fills us with dread.

Because it is just so great. So we close the book. We close the book on His compassion. We close the book on His care.

We close the book on His listening voice, because it exposes our need. And it exposes where we don't want to be cared and loved for and overruled and sovereignly cared for by the King of Kings.

[14 : 00] So we see the glory of His character. We also see the glory of His rule. Verse 12 and 13 speaks about this invisible, and for us anyway, many ways invisible rain, make known to children your mighty deeds.

And the glorious splendor of your kingdom, your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, your dominion endures throughout all generations. So that's why He's great.

Because His greatness supersedes all other greatness, all other standards of greatness, all other definitions of greatness, all other experiences of greatness that is seen in authority and in power and in kingdoms and in rulers and in generations.

They all come and go. They will all come and go. However great they will be at any one time, they will all come and go. And yet Jesus Christ in the Lord, God is the King of Kings.

He has an everlasting kingdom that over this last year we were looking at His purpose and plan and the mission of God and how that is being fulfilled, even though sometimes it doesn't look like that and then the Bible makes clear it doesn't even look like that.

[15 : 12] But He's the all present, all knowing, all just, all loving God, whose standard is sovereign, whose law and whose rule is sovereign, however much it's despised and rejected and ignored, His rule and ultimately His rule will rule and it's a rule of love, loving Him and loving one another.

That is the greatness that's spoken of and expressed here. And as we discuss that, as we talk about that, the psalmist also gives us a moment of awkwardness.

I guess we can all receive and speak about and think about and maybe accept, maybe not accept the greatness of God as it's referenced here in the Psalm, but He also references here in the power of the Spirit, He references our response, how you will respond to that and how I respond to that.

In verse 20, He speaks about, the Lord preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. Okay, let's leave out that verse, because that makes the whole thing pretty difficult. There is the Psalm we can take. We might not understand, we might just think He's going through the motions, but let's leave out this verse because it's devil that says wicked. We don't like to speak about that word today, cultured, sophisticated, scientific age in which we live.

[16:47] We can't possibly talk about that. But what we have here in the Psalm is the response, ultimately, that humanity gives to God.

It's either one of love and reverence and worship as we come to see through Jesus Christ, or it's one of not love.

And that's the definition of wickedness. Wickedness is an interesting word. Wicked is an interesting word. I don't know how you would use that word today.

It's not a word you would attribute to other people generally. Normal ordinary people, as we regard normality and ordinariness. A wicked, someone who's wicked is someone who's really bad.

Someone who's horrible, who's evil, who's bad or mad. I guarantee it's never us. We're never wicked. We would never attribute ourselves as being wicked.

[17:53] We might occasionally do, oh, that was a wicked thing he did. If you kind of would say it, it may be a bit of a jest. But maybe even sometimes you'd say, oh, that was a really wicked thing I did. But generally, we wouldn't regard ourselves as wicked people.

It's maybe suicide bombers or rapists or terrorists of some kind. Really wicked people. And that would be society's definition. And so it's very difficult to take that word and reimagine it and rethink it.

But here, really the definition of high treason is a lack of response to this God.

That is what God here is saying is wickedness. It's rejecting the lordship, the kingship of God. It's not loving Him.

It's the really wickedness, the highest treason by God's standards. And God is the ultimate judge.

[18:54] Is rejecting His love, rejecting His kingship. Now, that can look absolutely nice in the world in which we live. We can be really nice people, really good people at a human level.

But we can reject His lordship. We can be independent. We can be unloving to Him, prayerless, thankless, self-reliant, and simply not acknowledge His lordship in our lives, His rightful first place. We can be resentful of all that He says He is. And that, God says, is wicked. Because it's the ultimate rejection of ultimate love and of ultimate responsibility to our Creator.

Or a response can be one of recognizing the truth and that sobering truth that by nature the verdict of wickedness lies over us all.

By nature, that sinful reality in all of us. It can be laid at all of our feet. There's never a place for self-righteousness or judgmentalism or pious consideration of ourselves is better than other people.

[20:14] Because we all need to call on Him for rescue. The Psalm speaks about that. It speaks about loving Him, calling on Him, hearing, He hearing our cry and Him saving us.

And it's that recognition and the response to that of love and service and loving obedience, which the Psalmist calls us to.

Now, it's a recognition that we've moved from death to life and from destruction to transformation. That's what the invisible truth of the Gospel says.

That's what we need to consider as we go into this year. And you know the thing is about it? It's beyond our understanding. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. His greatness is beyond our understanding.

It is unsearchable. And that's a huge lie. It's unfathomable. So we need to go into this year as believers with that perspective in our lives.

[21:19] It's so often the case, isn't it, that we think really we understand everything that is to understand about God. We know what that is. There's nothing really more I can do and absolutely I've got him sussed out completely.

But that can only be the case if God is our puppet, if God is our slave or our equal or our project or our icon or our pet, He can never be God if we can say we have a grasp on Him. We can never live by faith if we can say that everything about God is fathomable, is understandable, is searchable, because that is not the God we put our trust in.

I think one of the dangers of apologetics, and I think apologetics is really important, defending who we are and defending the truth and wrestling with the truth and sharing the truth, is that sometimes

we feel we need to have an answer for everything because it's scientific age and science has got the answer for everything.

But in reality, and I'm not in any way suggesting this is an excuse for ignorance, far from it, but it's a recognition that if that's the kind of God we have, then it's a God who is toothless and safe and he's our genie in a bottle.

[22 : 34] He's the guy that we just pull out of a hat and who does what we want him to do. And isn't that what we say so often? You know, if something happens in our lives that we don't like or we struggle with, we say, well, that's not the kind of God I believe in.

That's not the kind of God I think because we're making a God in our own image so often, one that suits us and one that we can mold. But His great is not great.

And how is His greatness revealed? How is His unsurachable, unfathomable nature revealed most clearly? The God in His greatness enters the womb of Mary.

That is the greatness of God. He becomes flesh. Jesus becomes a homeless refugee. No classic education, no wealth, no career, 12 loyal and inverted commas, questioned Mark followers, died on a criminal's death on the cross.

The cross itself is the greatest absurdity that we can ever contemplate. And yet that is God's unfathomable outworking of rescue and love.

[23 : 47] He's chosen that. You want to argue against that? You want to suggest there's a better way of a different way? Go ahead. But you'll be accountable to God in the last day for suggesting that maybe if I just come along to church now and again, or if I read my Bible, if I know things, if I'm good now and again, that that'll do.

But the unfathomable reality is that the cross is God's answer and God's rescue and God's outpouring of love that can't be any deeper, that can't be any stronger.

He takes our wickedness. He becomes wicked because we can't deal with it and we can't make ourselves right.

And He dies paying the price for our wickedness and rises to reestablish love and to reestablish life. To reestablish all we have lost and more.

May it be that this year we don't make up the God of the Bible, that we don't simply live our lives as gods and have Him in our back pocket, but that we seek and strive to recognize the greatness and also appreciate the fact that it's unfathomable, it's unsearchable.

[25 : 11] We simply can't. It's not an A to Z that we can learn of. There will be moments of great darkness, moments when you say, why?

Why are you doing that? Why are you like this? Why aren't you different? Why don't you change other people? Why don't you change circumstances? Why don't you do this?

Why don't you do that? Why don't you change the moments when we have that? Jesus cried that, but ultimately submitted to the will of His Father and that's what we're asked to do. We're not asked to put God in the judgment seat.

We're not asked to make God accountable to us. We're asked to follow Him unreservedly because He's committed His love to us in ways that are unfathomably great and that He will never leave us or forsake us.

That means as we close, He is worthy of praise. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. He's worthy. If only, you know, Christ fully ascertained could change it.

[26 : 16] If only that could make a difference. If only I could see things clearer. If only you could see things clearer. If only the scales would offer eyes so that the trivialities of what we expose ourselves to on a day-to-day basis and make so important, so significant, if only we could see them in the right perspective so that we would praise Him and we would throw off the shackles of whatever it is that binds us so often in our lives.

And the psalm speaks of generational praise, community praise, you know. One generation, verse 4, shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.

They shall speak of the might. They will pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness. So this great element of corporate worship and our theme for Sunday evenings is going to be our worship and our Sunday evening service is going to be looking at different elements of worship.

But there's this great element of generational praise that God has made worthy through people, through people together, through family worship, through covenantal worship, through celebratory worship.

They will sing aloud and celebrate a reform of your worship. That's a great, it speaks for you, just a great witness to the society, a full church of people coming together.

[27 : 44] Why do you do that? We come together to praise God for His goodness and for His grace, spoken and shared and passed on, you know. One generation commending your works to another.

We've got a demographic that God has given us, you know. It's God's demographic and there's a lot of young parents here.

What a responsibility for young parents. And for all of us, because we all take vows when kids are baptized, we all are part of that community. Whether we have kids or not, whether we're single or married or whatever our situation, this next generation, we have such a responsibility.

What a burden, what a privilege to pass on this greatness of God. What I need, do you know what a pray for?

Do you not pray on a daily basis, because we don't know what to pray for? Pray for one another. Pray for the kids here. Pray for the teenagers. Pray for the young people who are growing up in this world.

[28 : 43] And pray for each other that our praise might be generational and that we're encouraging one another in this great work, because believe me, it's a battle, isn't it? You know it's a battle, I know it's a battle.

I know that we struggle every day. We don't come skipping and dancing in a church. If we do, it's usually because we're trying to put on a show. We usually struggle and we battle and it's difficult for us and therefore we need one another.

Stop pretending we don't need one another. Let's be honest with one another and rely on one another and together commend the works of God. When did we last speak to one another about Jesus and commend Him to one another?

Generational but it's also of course personal. Along with the we, along with the generations, along with them all, the psalmist speaks personally. He says, every day I will bless you.

And he goes on in verse 5 to say, I will meditate on your wonderful works. And in verse 6 he says, they will speak, I will declare your greatness. So there's this corporate and there's this individual recognition of His worthiness of praise and that is what you and I must do if we understand the grace of God and understand the greatness of God in our lives.

[30 : 02] There's this personal responsibility to be meditational. I will med, you know, I think that requires and I don't want to be legalistic and I strive not to be but I think it requires reading Him every day.

I think it requires us praying to Him every day. Give us this day our daily bread. Cody mentioned it last week that we recognize His place, that His importance is there.

This is old stuff, isn't it? But we live in a world of huge distraction. Huge distraction so we can give Him no time.

There's no time for Him and yet He wants us to have this. We can only recognize His awesome deeds as we consider Him and spend time in His presence. It's a relationship, it's a rebuilding of love, isn't it?

As those that call on Him, He says, those who need rescue, those who desire Him, He gives, He gives, He gives. It's personal.

[31 : 05] It's a proclamation of experience. The Samus says, you know, He's lifted me up. He's upheld me. He's been faithful. He's satisfying.

He's loving. He's near. He listens. Listen, read all these things. See them. This is the Samus' personal experience wrought in battle and struggle and He therefore praises God because He's experienced God and you will never, you will never experience God from the pew.

Dodgey, I think to say, maybe slightly provocative and possibly even unorthodox, probably even heterodox.

However, what I mean is you'll never alone experience God second hand as it were, simply from another.

However encouraging and generational and corporate worship is, it comes from your experience of Him. This worship becomes meaningful when you come with your experience of Him and your battles with Him and your need for Him.

[32 : 22] Don't need to come with answers. We don't have answers often, but we come to Him because we need and we come from our experience and we listen for others who have been satisfied and for whom God has been near, whom God is listening and we come ourselves with that personal reality and that simply can only come from trusting Him as being great and taking Him at His word and taking Him at His action and recognizing the cross for what it is, not some kind of symbolic expression, but as the greatest act of sacrifice and the most significant and the only act that actually works for us, where He takes our darkness and He pays the price and gives us His light, death to life.

So that's how significant it is and when we draw our last breath, we will immediately be in His presence and everything else will no longer be great.

And that is a great challenge for us as we come into this world. Is He worthy of us? Of what I mean by, is He worthy of our praise?

Do we regard Him as that? As you go from here, when you think of your week, your time, your timetable, your challenges, your relationships, your conversations, your use of social media, everything, is He great and that's what we strive Him to be in our lives and seek His forgiveness and I seek His forgiveness when I know He's not great in my thinking.

Let's do that as we close in prayer. Father God, we ask and pray that you would, we thank you that you call, when we call out to you, when we are honest with you, you're patient with us, you draw near to us, you don't necessarily answer us in the way that we expect, probably very ordinarily you don't answer us the way we expect because our vision and our expectation is simply often not, we know what yours is.

[34 : 46] Help us Lord God to be forgiven and to know there is no great probationary period in which to be forgiven. May we start fresh in your presence, meditate on your greatness, encourage one another in that, that we would not be alone, that we would not be loners, that we would not be people who strive to simply live the Christian life on our own and make judgment of everyone else as a failure.

May we recognize the generational aspect, the corporate aspect, the encouraging aspect of being together and may love cover a multitude of sins and our experiencing in our community as a church.

So bless this day to us and bless our time in your presence and bless our praise. May it respond in song in a way that is from our hearts and real and reflects your Holy Spirit at work.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.