

Series: Exiles	Reference: Psalm 145	Title: Are You Listening?	Date: 12.11.22
Website Writeup:			
<p>We've been talking in this series about the Exiles returning to Jerusalem to relearn how to worship God during the time of Nehemiah & Ezra. Worship which requires the proper perspective of God's character. Until we can see God as glorious, we can't possibly approach Him in worship. We must trust God is active in everyday life if we're to sense He's called us into His presence.</p>			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes



Psalm 145 is a poetic recounting of God's gracious & just actions which result from His character. I thought it would be nice to hear that in Hebrew as ancient Israel did. We've been talking in this series about the Exiles returning to Jerusalem to relearn how to worship God during the time of Nehemiah. A worship which requires the proper perspective of God's character. The fact is, until we can see God as glorious, we can't possibly approach Him in worship. We must trust He's active in everyday life to sense His presence which this Psalm conveys.

To better explain the role of the Psalms in the Scriptures, it's important to see how they've been put together. This next video clarifies how these songs are arranged & what they endeavor to teach in such a beautiful way: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/psalms/>.

Walter Brueggemann explains that the Psalms resonate well with people because of the essential connection human beings have in the share issues we face. He points out, "The Psalms, with a few exceptions, are not the voice of God addressing us. They are rather

the voice of our own common humanity - gathered over a long period of time, but a voice that continues to have amazing authenticity & contemporaneity. It speaks about life the way it really is, for in those deeply human dimensions the same issues & possibilities persist.”¹

In other words, humans throughout history struggle with the same issues, we can still identify with the feelings & sufferings of someone from 1st century Palestine, or Jeremiah in the Old Testament, as we can with our neighbors today, since our pain comes largely from human interactions in the realms of injustice, oppression & evil. Or, in the internal angst of unmet desires, dissatisfaction, loss & failure. This is why the Scriptures, including the Psalms, are timeless & supra-cultural. Any culture can understand throughout all time, given they speak to the human condition.

He argues the connection between our lives & the layout of the Psalms can be seen in the way humans experience life in general. As we read the Psalms, we’re invited into a space which bears resemblance to our own situations. He says, “The Psalms mostly do not emerge out of such situations of equilibrium. Rather, people are driven to such poignant prayer & song as are found in the Psalter precisely by experiences of dislocation & relocation. It is experiences of being overwhelmed, nearly destroyed, and (then) surprisingly given life that empower us to pray & sing.”² Or we could say, it’s the ebb & flow of suffering & joy which enable us to sing praise to God with hope.

He describes Psalm 145 as “the overture to the final movement of the Psalter.” The final five psalms all echo features & language in Psalm 145, and the concluding verse of Psalm 150 echoes that of Psalm 145. A psalm used frequently in Judaism & Christianity, the only Davidic psalm whose superscription labels it as “praise”.³

Psalm 145:1-2 reminds us God orders & directs the steps of His people. The words call us to see that God’s worthy to be praised in all things in v3. There’s a great reminder that the stories of God’s provision are an inherited estate for his people in vv4-7. Emphasizing that the stories must be passed along, generation to generation. Sharing these words in community in the context of church & family - pastoral preaching, as well as, moms & dads at home reciting & teaching these words to their children to prepare them for the joys & sorrows of life.

The key to refocusing on the worship of God is to set our minds on His character. Vv8-17 emphasize the reasons we worship God. As the Israelites came back from exile, they were challenged to see how God had been working all along & called to celebrate those ways. We need to be reminded of God’s working when we’ve not seen it, or don’t ‘feel’ it.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007], 1–2.

² Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, 4.

³ Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., “Psalms,” *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014], 603–4, Kindle

We don't address our situations by applying how we feel to the reality of our situation, rather we look to God's faithfulness & promises.

One pastor shares the story of a woman who came to him for counsel. He writes... "Her tears flowed as she told her story. Her husband was distant, children rebellious. They were in debt, and she had serious medical problems. As she told the story, he became depressed. She expected wise counsel, but he had none & couldn't see a way out for her. She finally came to an end & looked at him mournfully.

He couldn't say what he was really thinking, which was, "It's hopeless. There's no way out." So he asked a question to buy time. "Tell me how you became a Christian." Surprised by the question, her face changed to contemplation. Then began to tell her story of finding Jesus. As the story unfolded, she took on an earnest tone & her countenance changed to conviction. By the end, she was speaking as though she'd come testify of the love of her Savior. She felt better! He felt better!

He then asked a second question... "Why do you still have faith?" She gave the same contemplative look, then began to testify to the goodness & greatness of her Savior. By the end, it was as if she was counseling him on how to keep faith under trial!

These questions don't solve problems, but they're almost foolproof in providing what an individual needs most - which is hope. They feel despair, see no way out of their dilemma, searching for wisdom. But even if we have solutions, they aren't in the place to receive them, especially as most solutions have to do with making changes they're unwilling to make. They need to move focus from problems to what Jesus has done for them. We forget our first love. The time the love of the Lord was the most powerful experience we'd known. How Jesus rescued & gave us hope in the first place. We've not forgotten Him necessarily. We continue to exercise faith, but over time it becomes more habit than devotion. We need to continually preach the Gospel to ourselves which first held & transformed us.⁴

Psalm 145:8-9 speaks to a common theme found first in Exodus 34:5-6 when the Lord came to Moses. It says, "*Then the Lord came down in the cloud & stood there with him & proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate & gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love & faithfulness."* Psalm 145 calls the Israelites to accept that God's behavior toward them was not unique. The promise of God's punishment upon the guilty in v20 may have been a point of interest to those returning from exile, they needed to know He's just - a way of reminding them God's compassion shouldn't be their only focus. Keeping that in mind, this is a great reminder of how God's compassion & forgiveness work out. Putting God's mercy on display, they're reminded of how God works to bring people back to Him

⁴ https://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/marion-clark-two-questions-to-break-despair-3134?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=button&utm_campaign=scbpu20221202&maropost_id=743804115&mpweb=256-9878188-743804115

through all circumstances & that His approach always points to His own glory & to restoring dignity to people (145:14-19).

Speaking of restoring dignity, when British troops liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 15, 1945, they discovered 40k emaciated prisoners & 10k dead bodies. Troops were so shocked by the conditions, many wept. They spent weeks bulldozing bodies into mass graves, scrubbing survivors & burning down infected huts. And although 500 inmates a day were still perishing from wounds & lack of nutrition, little bursts of hope began to filter throughout the camp.

One of these came by way of an anonymous shipment of lipstick. Soldiers were first annoyed by the useless cosmetics when so many more critical supplies were needed, but they soon began to have a change of heart. British Lieutenant Colonel Mervin W. Gonin, wrote in his diary...“It was shortly after the British Red Cross arrived...that a very large quantity of lipstick arrived. This was not at all what we men wanted, we were screaming for hundreds & thousands of other things & I don’t know who asked for lipstick. I wish so much I could discover who did it, it was the action of genius, sheer unadulterated brilliance. I believe nothing did more for these internees than the lipstick. Women lay in bed with no sheets & no nightie but with scarlet red lips, you saw them wandering around with nothing but a blanket over their shoulders, but with scarlet red lips. I saw a woman dead on the post mortem table & clutched in her hand was a piece of lipstick. At last someone had done something to make them individuals again, they were someone, no longer merely the number tattooed on their arm. At last they could take an interest in their appearance. That lipstick started to give them back their humanity.”

Such a small gesture changed the lives of thousands of women on the brink of death.⁵ When we direct someone back to the Word & therefore to worship revealing God’s gracious & merciful character, and away from their issues, it’s like giving lipstick to those women. Situations may not have changed much, but hope found in Scriptures like Psalm 145 are life-changing.

Sometimes, to truly appreciate the Scriptures, we need to *hear* them, not simply read them. We’re always fighting to find time to read. But, Joshua Bailey argues that we just need to redeem time by using it to listen to Scripture. He says, “Most of the time when we listen, we don’t immediately start analyzing. We don’t try to break down the text because we can’t see it! We simply *take it in*. Like the slow & steady marination of meat, we immerse ourselves in the speaker’s words, trusting that our heart will, in good time, absorb its full meaning. We don’t fuss over detail. We instead allow the speaker’s wide-sweeping themes to seep in.

Our tendency when we read is to *study*. Building understanding word by word, sentence by sentence. Examining carefully, rereading, and working out context. We investigate meaning, which is good & right. Both acts change us, but in different ways. **We might say reading helps us draw *out* of the text & listening helps us draw *into* the text. This**

⁵ <http://thewisdomdaily.com/how-a-haircut-nail-polish-and-lipstick-saved-untold-amounts-of-lives/>

distinction may help us recall what the early followers of Christ already knew about listening, that...*having the words of God spoken over you is a life-giving practice that can deepen your faith.*"

He points out those times he can use to listen while doing other things. He says, "I've happily discovered lots of listening time in my schedule - my 45-minute commute, 20-minute bike ride, and hours of cleaning & errands. Autopilot moments, routine activities...little pockets like these allow me to dive into God's word, even when I can't open a Bible. In these moments, I feel like I'm following Paul's command in Ephesians 5:16 to make *the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil*, making better use of my most precious resource."⁶ The precious resource of God's Word.

As the exiles returned to worship, it required them to truly embrace the character of God. As they retrained themselves to read & listen to the Scriptures, they were invited to celebrate God's faithfulness even when they hadn't been before. It's a reminder, God can be trusted, especially as we consider the work of Jesus' redemptive work on the Cross. Take the time to study & draw out of the text, have your quiet times. And, use those other times. Take the time to just have the Word spoken over you, take it in, absorb it, allow it to draw you in. Ask Alexa to read the Bible to you. Get a copy of an audio Bible & play it in your car, or while you run, or clean the house. Let God speak.

⁶ Joshua Bailey, "Are You Listening to God?," *Desiring God*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/are-you-listening-to-god>