

NAURC worship

Sunday 5th July 2020

Exodus 34: 1-8 & Psalm 145: 8-18

> This week I have decided to continue to explore the Psalms and turn our attention to Psalm 145.

> At first glance, if you read all of it which I recommend, you will note both its layout is in pairs of lines and the fact that the flow is a bit disjointed. This is because it was originally written in Hebrew as an acrostic.

> So the first verse begins with the first letter of the alphabet, Aleph. The second verse is the second letter and so on – but the theme is lost when translated into English.

> Here's what the letters look like courtesy of John Parsons and his excellent website "Hebrew for Christians." Please note that Hebrew is read from right to left.

8  Chet	7  Zayin	6  Vav	5  Hey	4  Dalet	3  Gimmel	2  Bet	1  Aleph
70  Ayin	60  Samekh	50  Nun	40  Mem	30  Lamed	20  Kaf	10  Yod	9  Tet
400  Tav	300  Shin	200  Reish	100  Qof	90  Tsade	80  Pey		

Picture © Hebrewforchristians.com

> The only problem is that there are 22 characters on this chart and only 21 verses in Psalm 145 – and, no, I don't know why there is a disparity!

> Oh well, let get back to the content.

> Last week we looked at the importance of praise in our faith using Psalms 89 & 103. We also reflected on how the voice of praise has continued across thousands of years and generations all the way up to us in the here (wherever you may be) and now.

> Psalm, 145, which is one of the readings set for today, also contains these themes and helps move our thoughts onwards too.

> I'll begin with the idea of the continuum of praise with a link that is to be found in Psalm 145 to one of the foundations of our faith – one of the rare occasions when we discover God's name.

> In the book of Exodus is a record of both times when God gives Moses the stone tablets of the Law inscribed by God. Moses had destroyed the first pair in anger after seeing just how badly his people were behaving whilst he was away collecting them. (see Exodus 31: 18 to 32:19)

> The reading I chose is of Moses being given the replacement set and then:
“The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, ‘The Lord.’ The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,
‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin

> ‘The name’ by the way is “YHWH” but it was considered too Holy to write or say out loud and is replaced by “The Lord”.

> We read of God's love that remains steadfast for thousands of generations – just as thought about last week.

> And this ancient proclamation from God is then picked up in Psalm 145 with close parallels between

Exodus 34: 6

to

Psalm 145: 8

'The LORD, the LORD,
a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast
love and faithfulness



The LORD is gracious and
merciful, slow to anger and
abounding in steadfast love

Exodus 34: 7

to

Psalm 145: 13

keeping steadfast love for
the thousandth generation,
forgiving iniquity and
transgression and sin,



Your kingdom is an
everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures
throughout all generations

> They are a reminder of that continuum of faithfulness and praise.

> This brings us to a unique feature of Psalm 145 as it is the only one to have the designation “Praise”. Its overall theme is a song praising God's kingship.

> It is also a Psalm of David – but this doesn't necessarily mean he wrote it – it's more like the king giving voice to the praise of the whole people.

- > The words of the psalm help us too, as we join that continuation of praise of God's wonders and faithfulness.
- > As the current generation, we find ourselves in a rare position with a precious opportunity that is emerging out of the tragedy of the whole world having paused the old normal because of the pandemic.
- > Psalm 145 is much more than just praise – it contains ideas too – ones that we can pick up today and use to reshape our community in the near future as we gradually emerge into the “new normal”.

- > We are God’s people – we are the one who lift up praise on behalf of all humanity – and that is the second point I wish to highlight from Psalm 145.
- > The word “all” crops up many times in the verses we are looking at – and it has profound significance. Here are some of the occurrences:

The LORD is good to all (v9)
 all your faithful shall bless you (v10) and
 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
 and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
 and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. (vv 11&12)

- > Praise is a task for all of God’s people (so this cuts across denominational difference and any other churchy label) – however we set about praising God it is of equal value and import.
- > But praise is not to be kept to ourselves, because God’s steadfast love is for *all people*.
- > God’s love reaches everyone, not just those in a particular church or a particular country or those who look or behave like us – God’s love is for all people – it’s right there in the words of scripture.
- > And this brings me to two of the important ways in which we can help re-build our society.
- > First is ‘justice for all’ that I spoke about a couple of weeks ago.
- > Secondly, we read in verse 14 of the Lord who upholds those who are falling and raise up those who are bowed down. That’s’ such a powerful image don’t you think?
- > In lockdown times, one of the positive aspects to emerge has been that of people helping people – what you might describe as ‘the community spirit.’
- > This is treasure that I hope we, in our churches, can find ways to maintain and develop. It has been such a marked contrast with people getting together after the polarising, damaging, effects of the Brexit debates.
- > People have been able to come together, to help each other to literally help those bowed down or in need.
- > Let’s work on ideas of how we can enhance this community spirit for the benefit of all and, in so doing, share and expand God’s Kingdom.

- > The importance of “all” has a scope in Psalm 145 which also reaches beyond just people.
 - > Just look at verse 9:
“The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”
 - > There are many creation narratives in the Bible and the common theme of each one is that God created everything – and not just people.
 - > It is a clear reminder to us of the climate emergency that continues whilst our attention may have been taken over by the pandemic.
 - > But in some regards, the drastic reduction in travel has also thrown a bit of a life-line to our environment too. For example, here in Britain, we have gone the longest time on record so far without generating any electricity from burning coal.
 - > Until we had to shut down and then got swamped with regulations for planning to reopen, Ipswich Rd was looking at become a ‘green church’.
 - > This strange time of lockdown has given us all another opportunity to reshape our society as we reach toward whatever the ‘new normal’ will be.
 - > Again, as church and as Christians we have this opportunity to do what we can to cherish the recovery of our planet’s balance and to enable further healing of the damage that is being caused to our God-given home.
 - > These are sentiments that we will be able to express in our next hymn.
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- > Before we sing, just to conclude:
 - > Psalm 145 has reminded us of the heritage of praise that we carry forward and of our task to share that with all people. And justice equally for all is a part of God’s kingdom values.
 - > I think we also have two opportunities to be actively involved in shaping the new normal by finding ways to help raise people up and also to make an effort to continue to heal our bruised and battered planet.
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- > Lastly comes how we are to find the resources to carry on doing all these things. We rely on God’s grace.
 - > Psalm 145 expresses the A to Z of praise and the reason we can do this – the way that we are equipped to share God’s love is spelled out in verse 18:
“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”
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- > And that is what we do as a community of worship called church.

Amen