

Exalted Above All Things

Psalm 138

I often find two aspects of my personality in conflict with one another.

On one hand I am someone who can be easily distracted.

That is one of the reasons why I find reading and writing to be such a challenge.

If I am reading and someone sits down beside me with a snack it is complete sabotage and any hope of getting something out of what I'm reading goes out the window.

Any kind of noise can be a struggle.

I've learned that when there are other things going on the best thing to do is put in some ear buds and listen to classical music.

If only it were outside noises that can derail me, but it is more than that.

I am often astounded at how a random thought can pop into my head while I'm trying to concentrate.

Sometimes it can be something of some value like remembering to pick up something on my way home, or needing to pick my kids up somewhere, something that someone needs me to do for them.

Other times it can be completely unimportant.

I can be working away and all of the sudden I'll be trying to remember the name of a character in a movie.

A sporting event might come to mind or an advertisement jingle might get stuck on repeat in my mind.

Does that ever happen to you? It happens to me more often than it should because I can be easily distracted.

While that is true, it is also true that my mind can get locked onto something that seems to take up most of my attention.

That usually happens when I am fixing or building something especially if there is a problem.

I'll be doing something else or wake up in the middle of the night and have that project on my mind.

I start trying to think of solutions and run through what trying this or that might look like.

If I come up with something that I think will work then all I think about is getting some time to try it.

Often times having that kind of focus and determination can be good as many problems get solved, but it can also take my focus off of things that are more important.

When I think about those to aspects of my personality both remind me of the importance of priorities in life.

It is worth fighting against distraction for things that are important and it is worth setting aside something that is taking up my attention for something of greater value.

Can you relate to that? I think if we are honest most of us will say that keeping the right priorities is something we fall short on sometimes.

While that is true for us it is never true of the LORD.

[It is good for us to be reminded of the fact that God always has the proper perspective on things. Our text this morning Psalm 138 tells us about what the LORD has exalted above all things and how that relates to us. Turn there in your bibles if you would with the goal of seeing and delighting in what God sees as most important. There are three lessons for us from this text all related to what God has exalted about all things. First we see that...]

Point #1 – Whole hearted worship ought to be our highest goal because it is God’s highest goal. (Verses 1-3)

When we sing and speak our highest praise to the LORD out of genuine affection for His majesty we are both acknowledging what is true and willfully joining in His plans and purposes.

The first half of verse 1 sets the tone for the psalm (Verse 1a).

The Hebrew verb tense here is challenging to bring across into an English translation.

Most modern translations use the words “I will praise you” which gets at the psalmists desire for the certainty of this statement.

For him there is no option here, there is a complete rejection of being passive or lazy when it comes to worship.

He is determined to be fully engaged in the exaltation of the LORD.

He wants absolutely every part of his inner most being to all in for the praise of God.

This is an absolute kick in the face to a religious philosophy of obligation.

That is the philosophy that thinks of worship as momentary act to get God off our backs.

This is a philosophy that wants to go through the motions of saying some words and singing some songs and then move on with the rest of life.

As I have said in the past, worship is absolutely the obligation of every creature capable of praise, but if we offer words and songs only out of obligation then we are missing the mark.

This psalmist wants nothing to do with that kind of worship.

He is all in and we should be too.

To his desire for wholehearted praise he adds this...(Verse 1a-2a).

Commentators are divided on how to understand the words “gods” in the second part of verse 1.

It can either refer to angelic beings, statues of false gods, or earthly rulers.

While we would need some more context to be certain, there is something that all three have in common.

All three are perceived by significant groups of people as being powerful.

Whoever of whatever power these “gods” may possess he will sing the praises of the one true God right in front of them.

Can we say that? Are we willing to wholeheartedly offer worship in front of others regardless of who they may be?

Along with desiring to wholeheartedly praise the LORD he tells us that part of his worship is to set his face towards the temple in Jerusalem.

Why? Because prior to Jesus coming that is where God had caused His glory to appear.

It is a way of saying He wants to be in the presence of the LORD.

As he does this, it says, he will praise God for His love and faithfulness.

We should ask, “Why does God love His people and why is He faithful to us?”

Shear grace!

God’s love is no reason to think highly of ourselves, it is every reason to wholeheartedly praise Him.

After this powerful statement of complete devotion he gives us the reason for his great desire (Verse 2b).

His all-consuming desire for worship is motivated by the fact that God has placed above everything else His Name and His Word.

The Name that the psalmist has in mind here is God’s proper name Yahweh.

It literally means “I am” and tells us about God’s self-existence. If you have never meditated on what it means for God to exist in and of Himself I strongly commend you to devote some time to that pursuit.

This is bigger than the literal meaning of God’s name this is intended to point us to the entirety of Who God is.

He has exalted Himself above all things.

When did that happen? In all eternity past because God in His very nature is above all things.

Listen for God to be above everything is not vanity it is necessary because it is reality.

When we realize that, then the exaltation of His Word also makes complete sense.

If God Himself is above all things then what He says outweighs the authority of everyone else.

Now, how in the world do we live like that in a world filled with opposition to the exaltation of God? The answer comes in **verse 3**.

That is tremendous. He knows the importance of wholehearted praise.

It is the only right response to knowing and delighting in the fact that God's highest goal is Himself.

He also knows that He needs God to strengthen His heart to do it.

How amazing would it be if we prayed that prayer on a regular basis?

Prayers coming from hearts deeply desiring the supremacy of God in all things asking our all-powerful God for the capacity and courage to live that out.

[How's your heart this morning? We should be asking ourselves if we are all in for the LORD or are our hearts far from Him? Either way we should be consistently pleading with God to give us hearts in line with His plans and purposes. It is foolish to do otherwise. That is obvious from the second lesson of this text. In verses 4 and 5 he turns his attention towards kings/rulers upon the earth and shows us that...]

Point #2 – Every ruler and power in all creation must give way to the greatness of God. (Verses 4-5)

Because God's power is far greater than any other, He without a doubt has the power to bring everything in all of creation into submission. His reason for doing so, however, is greater than the fact that He has the power, He does it because it is right.

The language of these next couple of verses is a combination of desire and command.

If the psalmist were standing before any king or ruler in the world or all of them put together he would tell them that they must do these things, it is their obligation.

As I said earlier, however, it has to be more than an obligation it has to be a delight.

That is what he wants when he writes this in **verses 4-5**.

Notice here there are no exceptions. This is a message for "all the kings of the earth."

I believe the right way to read this is to see the word "kings" here as including every position of authority in every earthly governments.

In other words everyone who has anything to do with making decisions over a civilization.

May they "praise you O LORD when they hear the words of your mouth."

That is a radically different perspective than what we are used to operating under.

If I were writing something about the rulers and authorities in our world today I would be writing a question.

My question would be, “Are there any kings of the earth that praise the LORD when they hear the words of His mouth?”

Let’s face it, for the majority of believers our bar has become extremely low.

We get excited when even just one person in politics says something even remotely in the ballpark of biblical values.

That is true even when the individual themselves shows little fruit of Christian character.

If there is even one who shows evidence of good character and stands for biblical values we are absolutely thrilled.

To say that is nowhere near what this psalmist is longing for and commanding is an immeasurable understatement.

His thought is even if there is one governing authority on the whole planet, no matter how lowly, who doesn’t give praise to the LORD at the hearing of His word than it is not good enough.

Wow! Now, it is important to note that the political situation at the time this was written was fairly similar to our own.

Nearly all the kings of the earth in those days were godless.

Even the majority of the kings of Israel were godless and yet he writes this.

He is willing to say that the way the world is run now is wrong.

He is willing to say that everyone both from the greatest to the least should praise God and sing of His ways.

Do you see the reason why at the end of verse 5?

“For the glory of the LORD is great.”

[Artwork is an illustration of this. Have you ever seen a painting that is made by randomly flicking different colours of paint on a canvas? It is just random blots of paint all over the place. Now compare that to a drawing that is so good it is like a photograph or a vivid painting of a landscape, or a famous portrait. There is no comparison and I would have no problem telling everyone that they should say that the higher level artwork is better.]

It is the same idea here with the LORD.

Every ruler on the earth must acknowledge that God is better and failing to do that is an infinite offense against God and an enormous moral failing of society because the LORD is objectively greater than anything else in all creation.

I am fully convinced that our society is under God’s wrath, that wrath being the giving of people over to their sinful desires (Romans 1).

We have godless leaders and even those who may be slightly less bad have almost no desire for God.

The psalmist faced a similar situation and in the face of it was willing to say that every ruler on the earth should praise God.

Doing so does two things for us. First, it kills the idea of being easily satisfied by less bad politicians.

Second, it encourages us to look to the coming of Jesus.

Yes we should vote and make the best choice we can in a bad situation, but the heart cry of this psalm will not be complete until Christ comes and establishes His perfect rule at every level of society forever.

[That is what we should long for as the people of God. What about the meantime though? Is there any hope for us in the present when few if any in governments acknowledge the glory of the LORD? The last few verses in this psalm give us tremendous hope for today. They show us this third lesson from Psalm 138, which is that...]

Point #3 – God’s glory is always for our highest good when we delight in His exaltation. (Verses 6-8)

God’s purposes never fail because He cannot fail and because that is true when our hearts are in line with His heart we can trust that there is a good purpose for everything that happens in our lives.

Verse 6 tells us what kind of attitude is necessary for us to delight in His exaltation.

If we are thinking about God rightly as this psalm would have us do, then we will see God as above all things.

When it says here that “the LORD is on high” it means that He occupies the highest possible place.

There is no one greater than God.

Now it is easy to observe in our present world and in its history that being in a high position often results in a person disregarding people in lesser positions.

You and I will likely not be getting an invitation to supper at Buckingham palace.

Thankfully, it is very different with the LORD.

Even though His power and majesty is infinitely greater than the highest position on earth, it says here that “He looks upon the lowly.”

It is really clear here that he means more than God simply observing the lowly.

It means watching over and caring for the object of His gaze.

By lowly he means humble, we know that from the contrast of the lowly with the proud at the end of the verse.

He still knows the proud, He knows everything, but there is a relational distance between the LORD and the proud.

You see, what keeps people from God is not the greatness of God!
 What keeps people from God is whether or not they
 acknowledge their need of Him.

That is the difference between the proud and the humble.

The proud person focuses their attention on themselves. That can take all kinds of forms like self-esteem, and attitude of entitlement, believing we are the reason why we accomplish things, and a thousand other ways.

Pride is simply thinking and focusing on yourself.

Humility on the other hand is thinking of yourself with sober judgement which leads to understanding our great need of the LORD and turning our thoughts towards Him.

That is exactly how we come to accept salvation in Jesus Christ.

We accept the fact that we have violated God's commands and deserve His judgement.

We recognize that we can do nothing for ourselves to earn God's forgiveness.

We realize that we need Him to save us and that He has made a way for our salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We put our trust fully in Christ alone by faith alone and we are saved.

That takes humility and if we exercise that kind of humility God almighty will look on us with kindness and mercy.

To that he adds this in **verses 7-8**.

I like the fact that he speaks of trouble in a general sense here.

If we knew the exact difficulty that he faced we might narrow the meaning of the text, we might think this only applies to a certain kind of trouble.

Leaving it open ended means that this applies to every trial and every hardship.

So the way to read this is no matter what happens the LORD preserves the life of those that belong to Him.

You say, "Wait a minute Christians die don't they?"

Yes it is true that our bodies will cease to function unless Jesus comes back first, but that is not how things stay.

When Christians die their souls go immediately to heaven and their bodies await the resurrection of the dead at the return of Christ.

True the physical part of who we are will decay to the point of a tiny bit of dust if enough time passes, but that is no problem for the LORD.

He made Adam from dust and He is more than capable of remaking you and me from dust as well.

It is with this kind of confidence the psalmist can say, “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me.”

What is that purpose? It is where the psalm begins. It is the wholehearted worship of the LORD.

If you are a Christian you need not wonder any longer the reason God put air in your lungs today, the reason why He saved you, the reason why He will raise you from the dead to live with Him forever.

He does all of those things so that we can glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

That is the purpose of our lives and that is the purpose God is working toward in all that happens in our lives.

[Have you ever seen the movie the karate kid? I’m talking about the original movie made in 1984. In the movie a teenager named Daniel wants to learn karate from a guy named Mr. Miyagi. For the first several days Mr. Miyagi has Daniel wash cars, sand floors, and paint fences. At first Daniel starts out enthusiastically but he quickly loses patience and gets to the point of quitting that is until Mr. Miyagi shows him that he has been learning karate all along.]

It can be like that in the Christian life. At times we can be left wondering why things happen.

While God doesn’t always give us a particular explanation of how a particular situation is accomplishing His purposes, He does tell us what His purpose is.

His purpose is to make Him our greatest treasure which is an eternal gift of the highest possible joy.

Now we certainly are not going to understand everything, but if it is our desire to delight in the exaltation of God above all things, then we can be sure that whatever happens to us is for our highest good.

That is an absolutely wonderful reality of being a Christian.

Where are we at this morning? Is wholehearted worship our goal? It should be because it is God’s goal.

It is a goal that everyone no matter how small or great will come face to face with one day.

The day will come when everyone regardless of how powerful they may be will give way to God.

Because that is true believers can rejoice because desiring God’s exaltation above all things will always work out for our highest good.

Brothers and sisters there is no one like our God may we know and delight in that both now and forevermore.