

Psalm 147

Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat. He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down hail like crumbs- who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow. He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the Lord!

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Why... Why do we worship God? Not how do we worship God, we will talk about that next week with the Westminster Catechisms. But Why? Why do millions and millions of people around the world, going back all the way to the beginning of creation, spanning the entire world and maybe even beyond, worship God? What makes God so special?

The answer is simple really. Because God is who God is!!!

Scripture is full of stories revealing the nature of God in such a way that the people of God couldn't question why someone would worship God. We have just read two:

The story from Deuteronomy Roberta just read, is contained in what is known as the “second law.” The authority that underlines the book is that of Moses, but the presentation is of a report of a law originally spoken to Israel, subsequently being written down, and then shared by judges, teachers, and other public officials. The context of the story is that of Israel being called to remember forever the true knowledge of God.

It begins with a warning: in a time after you have children and your children have had children, don't become complacent and act corruptly by making an idol other than God, thus doing evil and breaking the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me (Ex. 20:3)." At that time, you shall remember the ages long before you all the way back to God's creation of humanity. No act on earth is as great as creation; no act can compare to the voice of God speaking out of a fire as God did to Moses to call him into action; no act is as impressive as the going and taking of a nation for himself from another nation by trial, by signs and wonders, by war, by mighty hand and outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power as God did to deliver the Israelites, God's chosen people, out of slavery.

The people are asked "Who did these acts?" It was the Lord your God and God did them right before your eyes!!! The people are reminded again that these acts were done so that they would acknowledge that the Lord is God and there is no other besides him. So, wrap your head around it and take heart, the Lord is God in heaven and on earth, there is no other like him. Therefore, you should keep his statutes and his commandments.

Another great example is Psalm 147. In its entirety, Psalm 147 radiates attributes of God's sovereignty as well as God's personal care for humanity and creation. Why Praise the Lord? Because it is right, it is good, and it is fitting. God counts and names stars, is great, has abundant power and understanding beyond measure, provides, grows, feeds, strengthens, blesses, grants peace, illustrates steadfast love, and manipulates nature causing the wind to blow and waters to flow. Personally, God is gracious, builds up, gathers, heals, binds up, casts out, and lifts up. Because of who God is and what God does, Praise the Lord!!!

With a firm biblical foundation, The Westminster Confession of Faith picks up in many ways where scripture leaves off. The Westminster Confession affirms God's work from its beginning in creation to its end in resurrection and last judgment. God is first, last, and preeminent in all things. Because of who God is, we as God's people are to understand and bring our lives into accord with God's wondrous ways and magnificent will.

After highlighting the important nature and role of scripture in the first chapter, the Confession begins with God's self-revelation in scripture: God is the "one living and true God, infinite in being and perfection, invisible, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute."

Highlighting who God is as the foundation of the Confession was crucial to the overall role the Confession would play. In 1643, the English House of Commons adopted an ordinance calling for the "settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of

England (in a manner) most agreeable to God's Holy Word and most apt to procure the peace of the church at home and nearer abroad." After the ordinance passed the House of Lords, an assembly to accomplish this work convened in Westminster Abbey. (Are you starting to see that by forming a committee to do certain work things get done and decently and in order?)

A nominated group of 151 persons met in 1,163 sessions over the course of the next 6 years. The assembly conducted its work in a crisis atmosphere. Internal conflicts had nearly torn apart both England and the English church. Political and religious problems were inseparable. Who should rule the church? Who should rule the state? What power should the king have? What power should the Parliament, local councils, and assemblies have? The Anglican party stood for royal rule with the sovereign head of the church. The Presbyterian party wanted authority in elected representatives of the people both in Parliament and in church. A third party came along that wanted local autonomy for churches and limited powers for both king and Parliament.

While all of this is going on, in 1647, the Scottish General Assembly adopted the Westminster Standards for use in the kirk (the church), replacing the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Heidelberg Catechism. With the immigration into New England, in 1729, these standards became the confessional position of the newly organized Presbyterian synod and have played a formative role in American Presbyterianism ever since. These standards had important implications for political thought and practice, reminding both ruler and people of their duties to God and to each other. (Book of Confessions)

The banner hanging before us, which is also the cover of the bulletin, was made in representation to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The three long panels and the triangle symbolize the trinity.

The eye is a symbol for God's providence and control of all life and history which is a dominant theme throughout the confession.

The crown symbolizes God's rule.

The open bible symbolizes the authority of the written Word which is also basic to the confession's teachings.

The alpha and the omega, or the A and Z of the Greek alphabet, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, symbolize Christ and his death for us as central to our faith.

The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks clearly, as recorded in scripture, two things: 1. "Who" God is and 2. "Why" we, as God's people, should worship God. The answer to "why" is found in the "who." In other words, it is precisely because of who God is that we worship God.

In who God is, we recognize God as loving and just as well as sovereign and personal.

Shirley Guthrie writes “The one living God is always truly loving and just, truly just and loving.” How? Firstly, God is love. God is not sometimes loving and sometimes unloving, today some people and tomorrow others. Love is not just something God does, but God is a loving God. At the same time, God is just- “righteous.” God judges in order to help, not to pay back, get even, seek retribution, and wipe out. God’s justice is loving justice and God’s love is just love.

In both the Old and New Testaments we witness God both discipline and reprove those whom God loves. The greatest example of God’s loving justice and just love at play is the death of Jesus Christ. The Christ, who is God with us, God incarnate, takes on death himself and comes to stand with and for us even in the sins we bring upon ourselves, paying the ultimate price so that you and I may be free- free from sin and therefore free to love God and others in the same way God has shown love to us through Jesus Christ. It is through God’s loving justice and just love that we break the bread and pour the cup, remembering the sacrifice made so that we may have hope and be strengthened for God’s purpose to live eternally.

God’ sovereignty is revealed in God’s nature to be omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal, and unchangeable.

In God’s infinite and almighty power, God is more than a train powering down the tracks. What God’s omnipotence means is that God can do anything and everything consistent with God’s love and goodness. God is for us and not against. You see, God can be God in weakness as well as in strength, in defeat and suffering as well as in victory, in the form of a lowly Servant as well as in the form of an exalted Lord.

In God’s omnipresence, there is no place God is not and cannot be present. We don’t have to ask God to be present, we don’t have to take God someplace, for God is already there. We just get to open our eyes and ears and hearts to God welcoming us wherever we go. This also means that with God inside us, there is no place we can go to escape God or to separate ourselves from God’s love for us or God’s call for us to be who God has created us to be.

In God’s omniscience, we are an open book to God. God knows us. God knows even things we cannot admit to ourselves or talk about to others: our deepest fears and anxieties; our most ardent hopes; all the thoughts, words, and deeds we are or should be ashamed of; the good and evil desires we yield to or repress; our hurts and failures and the way we have hurt or failed others; the hunger to love and be loved that we express or are afraid to express.

In God's eternity, we are assured of the eternal presence of God in time; that God has time for us and for our endeavors. We don't have to wonder whether God has time for our prayers, our needs, our requests, for God is always available and always there.

In God's unchangeability, we are assured that God is always stubbornly, consistently, dependably, faithfully the just and loving God we come to know in scripture.

The Biblical Christian faith is not just faith in a sovereign God, like we have just defined, but faith in a personal God. God is not just something beyond our reach or our understanding, but someone; not just a "spiritual force" that defies all scientific reason and logic but a person. God acts, speaks, knows, wills, decides, loves, rejoices, regrets, pleads, judges, rules, suffers, and triumphs. The God in heaven is also God on earth.

In knowing God personally, we should be careful not to look at God too personally. In other words, we must be careful not to anthropomorphize God. "God is a person, but God is not a human person, not even a very big, very old, or very perfect one." Related to this, we should also recognize that God shouldn't be reduced to a gender qualification. Scripture paints many images of God as Father, king, husband and warrior, but also as a mother and wife teaching, giving birth, and comforting. God is very personal, face to face with us in life, yet can't be contained to the same human attributes we have.

God is boundless. God has no borders and no limits. God is above us and yet with us, distant yet near, mysterious yet familiar, powerful yet loving, at the same time. God is mind-blowing.

Would we worship God if we felt as though we could grasp or understand all of who God is and what God does? I am not so sure. I think we worship God because of our inability to grasp and understand; the mere shock and awe of God's ability to be all for all.

Friends, because of who God is, for all the reasons that far exceed that of which can be included in a sermon or a lifetime of sermons, perhaps the better question to ask ourselves instead of 'why worship God' is 'why wouldn't we?'

Let all God's people say... Amen.