

Psalm 145
Greatness
September 2, 2018

Main point: There is and always has been a battle for greatness. Based in a longing for recognition and accomplishment, it is driven by something deeper – the fear of judgment, the fear of rejection and the fear of death. But, if you know that you are accepted, then the one who has accepted you, brought you in, recognized you – that is the one who gets the glory and the greatness. And this, in turn, gives freedom from all our fears.

SI: Greatness – This Psalm is about greatness. And where it is placed in the collection of 150 psalms – this is a great psalm. It is David's last psalm. It is a high-water mark demonstration of David pouring out all he has testifying to God's greatness. It is a literary masterpiece – an acrostic poem where each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

What is great about being great?

The Greatest Show on Earth... > entertainment

Make America Great Again. > politics

I Am The Greatest – Muhammad Ali > competition (tie these in with conclusion)

Alabama football – currently ranked # 1

A great longing to be great. Greatness has great appeal. It touches something deep within our humanity.

As the lyrics to the theme song for the 1980s show "Fame" go: "I'm gonna live forever, I'm gonna learn how to fly, high. I'm gonna make it to heaven..."

Or Lady Gaga > Fame lyrics "We live for the fame b/c we have a taste for champagne and endless fortune... Don't ask me how or why, but I'm gonna make it happen this time"

All humans have a longing for value, worth, esteem. To have impact.

Let's press this... a longing for greatness is driven by a deep desire for acceptance. To know that I am ok, secure, safe, protected, provided for. And b/c this world is filled with sorrow upon sorrow, I look to something to feel that I am ok, something that makes me feel that I am great.

David is saying – look to God for this. Look to God for He alone is great, and His greatness is unsearchable. And b/c He is great, He is good. His goodness defines His greatness. The greatness and goodness of God. His greatness is not separated from His goodness.

So two points: God is Great, and God is Good (let us thank Him for our food...)

Trans to 1 >

1The Greatness of God Vs 1-7 (Only God is Great)

Sit in David's exulting in the greatness of God. His Magnificence.

It is the thrill of David's life to write poems and songs about the wonder of God. To meditate on His awesomeness, to be overwhelmed by His greatness.

Not to go through them, but there have been several high profile falls of Christian pastors, churches, and organizations. This psalm has a lot to say about that. If God alone is not great and becoming greater, then something else is. Especially with the churches and organizations, there were systems in place that exalted men, protected the powerful and abused the weak.

Scott Sauls blog quote from seasoned pastor – When I was a seminary student, an older, seasoned pastor spoke in a chapel service and said, “Some of you are very gifted. You aspire to do great things in ministry one day. God have mercy on you.”

And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.

(Jeremiah 45:5)

Recent visit to a celebration event for a Christian ministry (not affiliated with our church). The organization has over the last many years become more and more successful. It has a Christian mission. The smell of something funny, something off. It did not have the smell of humility, but of accomplishment, of awesomeness, of the humble brag. I pray God has mercy on them.

Greatness is a great battle. Who will be Great? Don't underestimate the power of greatness and personal awesomeness to become enmeshed, and intertwined with the mission of God. So that protection of the furtherance of success becomes what the organization is about. Reliance upon a person or a system leads to strategic protection of that power.

Accomplishments sell. Effectiveness sells. Expansionism is not spiritual transformation. Otherwise Israel would have been the most powerful of nations. And Jesus would have been born into the aristocracy, not into poverty.

Is God becoming great, or is the organization, the ministry, the church, becoming great? Well can't both happen? Yes, as long as greatness is defined according to the Bible, and not according to the culture. Can a church or ministry or family or person be seen as great and influential so that the world recognizes it as such. Yes! Most definitely! But what, or better who, is being exalted?

Look at who this is who is writing this. King David. A king is writing about how great another king is. What king, what leader does this? One who knows he is wholly dependent upon the King and is in awe that he is part of His kingdom.

Why this is so dangerous and toxic of a virus that can easily spread...

The mission of the organization or institution or person can supersede the over and above mission of God.

You can actually put God in your debt... that God owes you something b/c you are doing so much for His kingdom. This thinking then justifies the building of power structures that give rise to all sorts of abuses of power in order to protect those in power.

If you are a leader in a church or in a ministry, do you have somebody who is brutally honest with you? Do you seek out people who are good surgeons – meaning they are willing to cut you after they examine you? Are you an approachable leader willing to hear critiques? Are you quick to defend or quick to listen? Will you pray for me in this?

What about on a **personal** level? The virus of “I am Great” applied to individuals – my own worth and value is if you think I am great, I have worth and value, I am accepted which is tied to fear of rejection and fear of death. David knows and the Spirit wants us to know the greatness and goodness of God. For if we have that, we are delivered from all these fears.

Do you meditate on the greatness of God? The greater He is to you, then the less you will be tempted to be great.

See *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness*- The gift not of thinking less of yourself, but of thinking of yourself less.

For David, This kind of exalting in the greatness of God is not just because God is great, but because of David’s experience of God’s goodness. This is the antidote from the poison of self-exaltation or institutional exaltation. (trans to 2)

2The Goodness of God Vs 8-21

God is Great, So what? This is the question David is answering...

God’s greatness is seen, is experienced, is known through His goodness.

ILLUS of how you describe someone. What makes someone who they are? What defines them? ‘Who is he?’ – 2 choices – describe what he is or who he is. ‘Well, he’s 6’2” with dark hair and he wears t shirts and jeans every day.’ OR ‘He’s this strong, gentle, guy who has a great sense of humor and works with disabled orphans.’

Physical characteristics don’t matter near as much as personal characteristics, right?

Greatness Displayed Through Love

He loves all He has made (see Keller) - v. 9

He is drawn to the weak, to lift them up – v. 14

Redeeming love for those who fear Him – v. 18-19

The wicked resist surrendering to His love - v. 20

V. 8 is repeated over and over in the OT, especially by David in the Psalms. They come from Exodus 34:6. “The north star of the Bible” – ESV GTB on Ps 86 – These verses define who God is.

And David is saying that we are absolutely desperate for His goodness.

A longing for greatness is a longing for acceptance. If thinking about myself, I can’t allow another to be great b/c that diminishes my opportunity for greatness. Jealousy, envy, comparison, competing for recognition, for dollars, for support. What’s the solution?

Acceptance by who matters to you. Bringing you in, on the inside, so that you feel welcomed, safe, secure, significant, valued, worthy, that you belong. Then you can rest. No more accomplishments needed. No more working, testing, seeking approval.

Once you have this acceptance, and you know it, it is happily ever after. Regardless of what happens to me, I have this! I am accepted. I am protected. I am provided for. This is vs. 18-19. And this is what pleases God, this alone is what pleases God – your acceptance of Him, your love for Him (v. 20).

Tie back in with vs. 1-7 – His greatness, majesty, His wondrous works.

How Jesus defined greatness – humble servanthood. Serving out of acceptance, not for acceptance. Serving from acceptance, not to gain acceptance.

Some of you suffer doubts that you can really be loved for who you are and not for what you do. You think, you feel, that you have to keep going, you have to keep doing in order to be accepted.

If that were true, then why send Jesus? If acceptance before God was based on what you did or didn't do, then there is no need for a Savior. We could save ourselves, thank you very much. God would need us, not us needing Him. We really would be great and worthy of praise.

So we have then David exulting in, being overwhelmed by
The beautiful, wonderful, glorious, stupendous, scandalous work of God.

So Jesus would say in John 6 in response to the question: "How do we do the works of God?"
The work of God is this, that you believe in He whom God has sent.

See Jesus – His Greatness used to display His goodness. His power to raise the dead, to heal the sick, to teach as no one had taught before, to accept and receive the broken sinner – not to condemn him but to love him and heal him.

This is Your Savior. Let His greatness and His goodness overwhelm you so that you are delivered from your fears of rejection, your fears of not being accepted. Receive His love for you, as un-great as you are, and glory in exalting Him.

Questions for Small Groups:

(Leaders: Consider reading all the questions and picking 3-4 that are most relevant for your group.)

Can you think of ways that our society emphasizes greatness? What is it about greatness that is so attractive?

What do you think about the idea that greatness is a longing that is present in all people?

How is God great? What makes Him great?

How can well-intentioned Christians who believe in glorifying God be drawn away into glorifying themselves or their institutions above God?

What other areas besides ministries or institutions are prone to the virus of self-exaltation? Think of a specific area and talk about that one area (such as parenting styles or work choices).

The sermon argues that a desire for acceptance is at the root of a desire for greatness. What is it about a drive for acceptance that can cause all sorts of symptomatic problems such as jealousy and fear?

How does receiving the goodness of God as seen in His loving acts of grace and mercy solve the problem of self-exaltation?

What are some ways your group can help one another to identify barriers to receiving God's love and acceptance?

What are some ways your group can help one another to see Jesus' greatness and goodness as the remedy to fear of loss?