

The Uniqueness of God **Psalm 147**

Main Idea: It is good and right to praise our incomparable God, the Creator and Redeemer, who delights in His people.

- **Why Praise God?**

- His commands are meant to lead us into joy (1)
- He heals the brokenhearted (2-3)
- He creates and rules nature (4-5)
- He lifts and punishes (6)
- He provides (7-9)
- He takes pleasure in His people (10-11)
- He blesses His people (12-14)
- He commands the weather (15-18)
- He instructs His people with His Word (19-20)

This hymn in Psalm 147 (probably written after the exile, see verses 2, 13-14) magnifies the uniqueness of God. Yahweh alone is God. He's in a category by Himself. He stands alone. The Psalmist weaves two main themes together, which magnify God's incomparable nature: (1) God's power over creation, and (2) His redeeming love for His people. Reflecting upon God as Creator and Redeemer, the Psalmist speaks of God's power, wisdom, and transcendence. And he also speaks of God's care, compassion, and generosity. God is majestic and merciful; kind and King; powerful and gracious. The Psalmist gives many illustrations of these wonderful truths.

As a result of God's unrivaled glory, we should praise Him! The Psalm gives an exhortation to praise God three times:

Hallelujah!
How good it is to sing to our God,
for praise is pleasant and lovely. (147:1)

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
play the lyre to our God, (147:7)

Exalt the Lord, Jerusalem;
praise your God, Zion! (147:12)

In between these exhortations, reasons to praise God are provided. These reasons highlight the character and works of our Creator and Redeemer. I simply want to walk through the Psalm and highlight nine reasons why we should praise God wholeheartedly.

Why Praise God?

His commands are meant to lead us into joy (1). In verse 1, the Psalmist exhorts us to praise God (1a), and then says, "How good it is to sing to our God, for praise is pleasant and lovely" (1b). Over and over in the Psalms, we're called to praise God. Why? Is God narcissistic? No. God is worthy of praise. So we should praise Him. But in addition to this truth, in commanding us to praise Him, God is inviting us to experience true and lasting joy. For our

greatest good and highest joy comes in praising God. God's commands are always for our good and our joy.

The Psalmist reminds us in verse 1 that not only is God good, but it's also good to praise Him. It's fitting. It's right. It's pleasurable. It's beautiful.

Do you feel this way about worship? Do you delight in both personally and corporate worship? Compare it to entertainment. Do you enjoy sports, movies, or recreation more than the praise of God? Can you say, "It is good to praise God! There's nothing like being with God's people singing God's praise?" I used to not say that. Not at all! It was drudgery to assemble at a local church on a Sunday before Jesus changed my life. Of course, it's fine to delight in gifts like sports and food. But our greatest delight will be found in God himself, since the more valuable the object, the more intense the delight there is (Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 46). Because God is the most valuable of all sources of joy, we will not find the depth of delight that we find in Him anywhere else.

The true believer knows that to release your affection God-ward in worship is more satisfying than anything this world has to offer. Knowing that the Spirit of God is working in our lives, in our midst as a church, is beautiful, powerful and pleasurable (cf., Ps 133:1).

And God commands us to experience this pleasure! What a God to command what we most desire! We're made for beauty, for delight, and for community. And in worshiping God we find what we were made for. Lewis says, "In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him" (Ibid., 41).

So don't reject God's commands. John says, "His commands are not burdensome" (1 Jn 5:3, ESV). The true saint delights in the law of the Lord. They delight in praising the Lord. To our non-Christian friends, we need to remind them that if you turn to God, you aren't giving up pleasure, but rather, you will find true and lasting pleasure. The pleasures of sin are "fleeting" (Heb 12:25), but the pleasures of worshipping God are fulfilling.

He heals the brokenhearted (2-3). Who is this God that we worship? The Psalmist begins by saying, "The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; He gathers Israel's exiled people" (2). This verse suggests that this Psalm was written during the rebuilding of Jerusalem, after the exiles returned home from Babylon (cf., Neh 12). God in His grace brought His people, the outcasts, back home (Isa 40:1 ff).

Verse 3 highlights the condition of the people's hearts prior to this restoration, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (3). The broken hearted reentered a broken city. And God cared about his people's brokenness. While our context is different today than Israel's, it's still a fact that the Lord cares for the brokenhearted (Ps 145:14; Ps 34:18).

The Lord heals the wounded (Hos 6:1, 7:1, 14:4; Jer 30:17). In His kindness, He rebuilds broken lives. He restores families. He heals bodies. If you're grieving, the Lord knows. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted. Don't run from Him in grief, but run to Him. Look to Him for healing. If you're crushed in spirit, look to the One who was crushed for you.

In Isaiah, we see the Suffering Servant of the Lord accomplishes this healing work. We read, "He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners (Isa 61:1b). Jesus took this text up to announce His ministry in Luke 4:18. Jesus knows suffering. He knows brokenness. Not simply because He knows all things; but because He entered into it. He can sympathize with the weak. He can bring healing, and one day He will bring ultimate healing. Because Jesus was wounded for us, we can have our wounds mended.

We're quick to care for physical injuries. And rightly so. We need to treat broken legs, open wounds, and other injuries. But what if we had that same concern for spiritual injuries? What would happen if we would go to the Great Physician when we experience despair, bitterness, guilt, shame, anxiety, desertion, bereavement, apathy, and so on? Don't neglect to care for your inner man. The writer of Proverbs puts the priority there, "A man's spirit can endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?" (Prov 18:14). The Lord restores the crushed in spirit. Don't go another day without looking to the Savior. There's no deficiency in Him. He stands ready to restore the broken.

He creates and rules nature (4-5). The Psalmist reminds the brokenhearted of the Creator's glory: "He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them" (4). Spurgeon says that He counts them like a merchant counts coins! (*Treasury*, 415).

Israel would have encountered astrologers in Babylon. The Psalmist says Yahweh, not some Babylonian astrologer controls the stars (Williams, *Kindle*).

Scientists can't give us an accurate number of the stars (cf., Gen 15:5). But God knows them all. He even gives names to them! (see Isa 40:26). To name them implies that He rules them, and that He cares for them. Further, these stars are intended to give glory to God. Job says, "the morning stars sang together" (Job 38:7, ESV). In Psalm 19, we read that the heavens are proclaiming the glory of God.

The fact that God rules nature witnesses to the following affirmation: "Our Lord is great, vast in power; His understanding is infinite" (5). God is all mighty. God's wisdom is infinite. Truly, there's no one like Him. Since this is true, then His people shouldn't fear. We shouldn't despair. We shouldn't become anxious. We should rest in His power and wisdom. We should align ourselves with His ways.

The God who knows the stars by name is the God who restores the broken. He is the One who renews our strength like the eagles (Isa 40:26-31). Listen to Spurgeon:

What a change is here from the preceding verse [verse 3]! Read the two without a break, and feel the full force of the contrast. From stars to sighs is a deep descent! From worlds to wounds is a distance which only infinite compassion can bridge. Yet he who acts a surgeon's part with wounded hearts, marshals the heavenly host, and reads the muster-roll of suns and their majestic systems. O Lord, it is good to praise thee as ruling the stars, but it is pleasant to adore thee as healing the broken heart! (*Treasury*, 415)

The next time you see the stars, remind yourself not only of God's power and wisdom, but also of His care for the broken. Truly, there is none like Him.

He lifts and punishes (6). This great God is gracious to the needy. But He's also just to the wicked. He will punish the unrepentant. The Psalmist says, "The Lord helps the afflicted ["humble," ESV] but brings the wicked to the ground. This verse resembles the previous Psalm, "The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin" (146:9, ESV). The Lord sustains, blesses, and upholds those in need (cf., Ps 145:20; 146:8; 113:5-9). What grace!

This passage should remind us that to imitate God (Eph 5:1), we too should seek to lift up the afflicted. Just as the Lord watches over the sojourner, the widow, the fatherless, the afflicted, the prisoners, the blind, and the hungry, so His people should put His care on display with practical acts of mercy and justice (Mic 6:8; Jam 1:27). One may look at the hurting around the world

today and wonder, “Where is God?” But the question we should ask is, “Where are God’s people?” God’s plan has always been to use His people to display His love and righteousness in this broken world. Let’s be quick to be about the Father’s business. Look for opportunities to lift up others, and supply basic needs to the hurting.

God’s grace and justice were put on full display in Christ. He humbled Himself as an act of grace. He died for the wicked, they we may be declared righteous. And now, one day we know that He will bring perfect justice to this broken world. We who have experienced this grace, and share this hope, should seek to put God’s love on display.

Deep within the human heart is a desire for justice. Remember this: Our longing for justice is ultimately a longing for Jesus. He will set all things right one day. So look to Him now for grace. Humble yourself before Him and confess Him as Lord. You will not only experience the joy of knowing Him now, but also the promise of a peaceful and just world to come.

He provides (7-9). The second exhortation to praise God appears in verse 7. The Psalmist exhorts the people to “sing to the Lord with thanksgiving” (7a). In light of all that’s already been said in verses 1-6, how could we not give him thanks? If the Lord has saved you, restored you, and drawn near to you, then the appropriate response to Him is gratitude. The Psalmist urges God’s people to “play the lyre to our God” (7b). With this stringed instrument much like a harp, they are to praise God. Praise God, and make it beautiful!

In verses 8-9, the Psalmist gives us further reason to praise God by speaking of how God provides for creation:

who covers the sky with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
and causes grass to grow on the hills.
He provides the animals with their food,
and the young ravens, what they cry for. (147:8-9)

Notice that God feeds both birds and animals (cf., Ps 104; Job 38). “Baal” doesn’t cause the rain. “Mother Nature” doesn’t supply the earth with rain. But God does. Mother Nature doesn’t cause the grass to grow for animals, but God does!

N.T. Wright says of these verses, “God feeds the animals, then, and is kind to those who call upon him. God may be building up Jerusalem (147:2, 13), but he is also out there in the wild, making the grass grow on the hills and feeding the young ravens when they call to him” (Wright, *The Case for the Psalms*, 147). Indeed, God is in the wild! Marvel at the Creator’s wisdom, power, and grace when you behold the existence of His creatures scattered around God’s earth.

He takes pleasure in His people (10-11). The next awe-inspiring truth about God is that He delights in His people. He’s not impressed with the power of this world. The mighty empires of this world do not impress him. His deepest delight doesn’t come when He watches horse racing or football! This awesome God who names the stars, and feeds all creation, actually takes delight in *us*. Those fear Him receive His particular attention. The Psalmist says:

He is not impressed by the strength of a horse;
He does not value the power of a man.
The Lord values those who fear Him,
those who put their hope in His faithful love. (147:10-11)

God takes joy in His people! He loves His people! He delights in His people!

Tim Keller says: “This unimaginably immense God is given *pleasure*, real joy and delight, when human beings put their life’s hope in his gracious love” (*The Prayers of Jesus*, 360). Keller goes on to pray this prayer:

Lord, it is astonishing that I can bring *you* delight. And this delight does not wax and wane depending on my performance but is unvarying because I am in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3-4). Let me start every day from the platform that “the only eyes in the universe that count are delighted in me.” Amen. (Ibid)

Let that sink in. The Lord does delight in you – if you’re in Christ Jesus. Why? Because the Father has perfect delight in His Son. Through our union with Christ, the Father is pleased with us. We have been caught up in this divine delight. And let this fact free you from trying to please people. The one that matters most takes pleasure in you. He hates sin. But He takes pleasure in His people. Now, out of this assurance, let us pursue a holy life for His glory.

How does one enjoy such a relationship with God? You come to God humbly. God rejects the proud and powerful that rely on themselves. But He receives all who “put their hope in His faithful love” (11b). His faithful love has been displayed in Christ Jesus. Look to Him to begin this relationship.

He blesses His people (12-14). The third exhortation to worship comes in verse 12, “Exalt the Lord, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion!” (12; cf., Ps 132:13-16). Why should God’s people praise Him? More reasons are given in verses 13-14:

For He strengthens the bars of your gates
and blesses your children within you.
He endows your territory with prosperity;
He satisfies you with the finest wheat. (147:13-14)

Consider these blessings that the Psalmist reminds the people of on this particular occasion. He says that God makes the city secure with steel bars (13; cf, Neh 3:3, 6, 13-15; 127:1b). God defends and protects His people. He uses just governments and officials to oversee matters. Next, God blesses His people with children; here, increasing the population of the gathered exiles (13b). And then, we see that God grants peace along Jerusalem’s borders, and provides His people with the finest of wheat (14). So peace, provision, and prosperity all come from God. In this season of blessing and abundance, the people are exhorted to exalt the Lord.

In passing, we should not that this Psalm helps us understand not only the doctrine of *providence*, but also the doctrine of *vocation*. Luther used Psalm 147 to help Christians understand how God uses various vocations to accomplish His work in the world (Luther, *Exposition of Psalm 147*). God doesn’t always drop manna from heaven! Food doesn’t miraculously appear on our dinner plates each night. So how does God provide ordinarily? Notice that God provides for creation in verse 8-9, but man has to do the work of cultivation in order to live. In verses 13-14, God provides security, but man has to make the steel bars, and set up government, order, rulers, etc. Luther writes:

God could easily give you grain and fruit without your plowing and planting. But He does not want to do so. . . . What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child’s performance, by

which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things... We have the saying: 'God gives every good thing, but not just by waving a hand.' God gives all good gifts; but you must lend a hand and take the bull by the horns.... Make the bars and gates, and let Him fasten them. Labor, and let Him give the fruits. Govern, and let Him give His blessing. Fight, and let Him give the victory. Preach, and let Him win hearts. Take a husband or a wife, and let Him produce the children. Eat and drink, and let Him nourish and strengthen you. And so on. In all our doings He is to work through us, and He alone shall have the glory from it." (Ibid)

God works through our works. God provides for our civic work needs through the civic work of people. God provides food for us by using farmers, bakers, truck drivers, retailers, and computer programmers! (Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, kindle).

How should this affect our perspective of work? It should help us in at least two ways. This reality *dignifies* work. Even small work matters. Think about it. Cleaning your house doesn't require a Master's degree. But if someone doesn't clean the house, you may very well die (Keller, "Our Faith and His Work"). Even small jobs matter.

An implication of the dignity of work for the local church is that we should not be snobby toward people who may have a "lesser job" in the eyes of the world. God uses all kinds of people to sustain His creation. They matter to God and they should matter to us.

Second, seeing the relationship between God's providence and our human labors provides additional *meaning* to work. Most Christians think that the only way they can honor God at work is by being good witnesses. And they should be good witnesses. Their co-workers need the gospel. But in addition to this mindset, you should also see that your work is an expression of *neighbor love*. You're an agent of God's common grace to the world. So make good food. Make good products. Dig good ditches. Pave good roads. Land the plane every time! Your work matters. If you're a lawyer, God wants to work His justice through you. If you're a farmer, God wants to provide daily bread to people through you. If you're a builder, God may use you to create security and peace for others. See all your work in view of God. Do your job for the good of people and the glory of God.

He commands the weather (15-18). These verses pick up the previous thought of God's power over creation (4-5, 8-9). When God speaks, creation obeys. The Psalmist says:

He sends His command throughout the earth;
His word runs swiftly.
He spreads snow like wool;
He scatters frost like ashes;
He throws His hailstones like crumbs.
Who can withstand His cold?
He sends His word and melts them;
He unleashes His winds, and the waters flow. (147:15-18)

God throws the snow like confetti. He says, "Let there be frost!" and there's frost. The hail falls at His word. He can cause the temperatures to rise and fall. In the book of Job, Elihu says:

For He says to the snow, "Fall to the earth,"
and the torrential rains, His mighty torrential rains,

serve as His sign to all mankind,
so that all men may know His work.
The wild animals enter their lairs
and stay in their dens.
The windstorm comes from its chamber,
and the cold from the driving north winds.
Ice is formed by the breath of God,
and watery expanses are frozen.
He saturates clouds with moisture;
He scatters His lightning through them.
They swirl about,
turning round and round at His direction,
accomplishing everything He commands them
over the surface of the inhabited world.
He causes this to happen for punishment,
for His land, or for His faithful love. (Job 37:6-13)

God can make things freeze or thaw, the winds to blow, and the waters to flow. God commands the weather (cf., Job 37-38; Isa 55:10-11). The Psalmist and Elihu help us look at the weather and marvel at God's sovereignty, majesty, power, justice, and love. Spurgeon says, "It is wise to see God winter and in distress as well as in summer and prosperity" (419).

As I write this commentary, the northeastern part of the United States is enduring winter snowstorm "Jonas." The effects of this storm have reached our home in North Carolina. Schools are canceled. Games are canceled, as ice and snow continue to fall. How do you respond to such snowstorms? There are various ways we should respond. Obviously, we should pray for people who find themselves in desperate situations. We should help the homeless and the needy. But we should also marvel at the power of God. We should stand amazed by His authority. He can send the freezing ice, and He can then melt it. And we should see our need for His mercy.

He instructs His people with His Word (19-20). Finally, the Psalmist speaks of God's written word:

He declares His word to Jacob,
His statutes and judgments to Israel.
He has not done this for any nation;
they do not know His judgments.
Hallelujah! (Ps 147:19-20)

God revealed His Word to His people (19). God did this for no other nation (20). God chose Israel to be the first recipients of His Word. As such, they were recipients of great grace. With that privilege came the responsibility of making His Word known. Now, by God's providence the nations can know His Word – and indeed, we should desire for the world to hear it and know it!

God didn't program us like computers. Instead He addresses us relationally through His Word (Kidner, 486). We open up the Scriptures daily because the Father speaks to us. There's nothing in the world like this gift.

One of the best things we could do for our unbelieving friends is to invite them to study Scripture with us. God speaks people, and draws people to Himself through the gospel.

When my friend Kevin (now a pastor) was in high school, he couldn't understand the Bible. He was a bright student. In fact, he was accepted into Yale. But a friend invited him to read through the gospel of Matthew with Kevin. Kevin says, "By the time I got to Matthew 28, I

believed.”

What a privilege to have a copy of the Bible. What a privilege to understand who God is. In fact, if we didn't have it, we wouldn't be able to look at this particular Psalm – which tells us so many important truths about God! Don't take Scripture for granted. Read it. Mediate on it. Treasure it. Spread it.

In light of all these wonderful truths about God, the Psalmist ends where he began, “Hallelujah!” (20b). No one is like our God. No one is like our Savior. He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve. Instead of judgment, He has given us saving grace. Exalt Him with thanksgiving!

Reflect and Discuss

- Why does God command us to praise Him?
- How does this chapter encourage the brokenhearted?
- How is God's power and wisdom described in this Psalm?
- How do we see both God's justice and grace in this passage? How do these attributes of God point to Jesus?
- Why do you think the Psalmist includes the exhortation to praise God with the “lyre?”
- What does this passage teach us about God's providence? How do our vocations and God's providence work together?
- According to Psalm 147, in what does God *delight*?
- What does this Psalm say about the weather? How should we respond to the types of weather conditions described in this Psalm?
- How should we respond to the privilege of having God's Word?
- Take a few moments to pray through this Psalm.