

## Psalm 138

Today I'd like to take a look at Psalm 138. The header text above this psalm tells us that it was written by David. As we'll see as we read through it, this is a psalm of thanksgiving.

David starts this psalm with heartfelt praise to the Lord:

**Psalm 138:1:** "I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee."

This immediately raises a question. What did David mean when he said that he would sing "before the gods"? After all, the Bible teaches us that there's only one God:

**Isaiah 44:8:** "Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."

There are some cults that claim there are many gods. For example, Mormonism teaches that if you live a good life and do all the right things then you can become a god yourself. In fact, Mormonism even teaches that Jesus was once a man like us who rose to godhood by making good life choices! However, those teachings are false. The Bible is extremely clear that there is only *one* God, and *there are no others*. So what is Psalm 138 telling us?

I looked up the word that's translated "gods" in verse 1. It is Strongs #430. It can have a variety of meanings. In its plural form (which is what we see here) "it refers to rulers or judges with divine connections... pagan gods... and probably angels". This means David is talking about people who have a position of

authority. In verse 4 David speaks of kings, so perhaps he's simply saying that he will sing God's praises in front of everyone, no matter how high or lofty their position might be.

There are a lot of psalms of thanksgiving in the Bible. Psalm 75:1 says "Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks". Psalm 107:1 and Psalm 136:1 both tell us to "give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good". Psalm 67:3 says "Let the people praise thee, O God". Psalm 30:4 says "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness". I could go on but you get the point. The book of Psalms is *full* of hymns of praise!

David says that he would praise the Lord with his whole heart. If you stop and think about it, David had a lot to be thankful for. In his early days he was a lowly shepherd that no one cared about. When Samuel went to his father Jesse to anoint one of his children as Israel's next king, Jesse brought all of his children *except* for David. That's how little his father valued him:

**1 Samuel 16:10-11:** "Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither."

Jesse proudly showed all of his children to Samuel *except* for David. When Samuel asked if a son was missing, Jesse couldn't even be bothered to tell the prophet his name! He just said that "the youngest" wasn't there, and made a point of saying that he was a shepherd. Jesse went out of his way to boast about the seven children he liked, while painting David in the poorest light possible.

David's brothers didn't like him any more than his father did. One day Jesse sent David to the front line to bring food to his

brother. As soon as David arrived his brother began berating him:

**1 Samuel 17:28-29:** “And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?”

From verse 29 we can see that David was apparently used to being attacked when he hadn't done anything wrong. Eliab accused David of pride and wickedness, but the only wickedness on display here was from Eliab. David was the one who ended up fighting Goliath and killing him. The only thing Eliab did was falsely accuse an innocent man.

The hits just kept coming against David. After he killed Goliath, Saul took him into his house – and then grew jealous of him and started trying to kill him. David spent years on the run for his life and Saul spent years trying to hunt him down. Whenever David stopped to help people and save their lives from those who were attacking them, the people he helped immediately turned around and betrayed David to his enemies.

But David never lost hope. Whenever he was in trouble he trusted in the Lord:

**Psalm 28:7:** “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.”

David never looked at his situation and decided it was hopeless and all was lost. He didn't accuse God of being unfair to

him. Instead David trusted the Lord. When his enemies were closing in on him and trying to take his life, David looked to God for strength. When he was being attacked he looked to God for a shield. When he was cast down he trusted in the Lord.

In the end God did defeat David's enemies. Saul died in battle and David became king over Israel. All of David's enemies were put to shame. The Lord delivered David in a mighty way, and David responded with hymns of thanksgiving. God had done great things for David and so he praised Him for it. David wanted to tell *everyone* – no matter how high and lofty their position might be – what God had done for him. He wanted everyone to sing God's praises!

God has done great things for us as well. What the Lord has done for us is astonishing:

**Romans 5:6-8:** “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

As Paul points out, there may be some rare cases in history where someone was willing to die for a person who was exceptionally good. A person might be willing to die for his friends – but *never* for his enemies! Yet that's exactly what Jesus did for us. He didn't die for people who were righteous and godly. Instead He died for the *ungodly*. He died to save wicked sinners who were on the road to Hell! He died to save people who *deserved* the wrath of God. He didn't die to save those who were innocent; instead He died to save people who were guilty. He died to save *sinners*.

There was nothing forcing God to save any of us. After all, we were guilty. If God had instead condemned all of us to Hell and saved no one, He would have been justified in doing so.

When the angels sinned God didn't launch a plan of salvation for them. God isn't required to have mercy on those who have rebelled against Him! Yet God chose to love us. He's the one who made the first move:

**1 John 4:19:** “We love him, because he first loved us.”

If God hadn't chosen to love us when we were unlovable – if He hadn't chosen to die for wicked sinners who deserved His wrath – then we would have been lost forever. But that's exactly what He did! He died for the unworthy.

We definitely didn't deserve it. God is of infinite value and we were sinners worthy of death. All of mankind's lives put together are worth infinite less than the value of God! We weren't worthy of the sacrifice He made to save us and yet He made it all the same. He gave His life for people who were worth infinitely less than Him, and He did it with great love and compassion. He chose to love us and die for our sins. He chose to take upon Himself the punishment that we deserved. All those who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus will have everlasting life. They won't face the wrath of God but will instead inherit everlasting joy and peace.

David had a lot to be thankful for – and so do we. David praised the Lord with his “whole heart” and we should do the same. Do you remember what the greatest commandment is? It's to love the Lord *with all our heart*:

**Mark 12:29-30:** “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

We aren't to love the Lord casually, or occasionally. No,

God wants us to love Him with *all* of our heart! The thing about love is this: when you truly love something with all of your heart then you want to tell other people how great it is. You *want* to sing its praises. When you find something that excites you, it's only natural to want to share it with others. When you see something great and awesome you want to run up to the nearest person and say "Did you see that amazing thing?" It's perfectly natural to want to boast about the object of your love and sing its praises!

If we truly love the Lord with all of our heart then we'll *want* to sing His praises. We'll want to make sure that all the people of the world know who God is and what He's done. We'll want to share the great love that we have for God. In fact, it will be impossible to keep it to ourselves!

Our love will result in more than just praise. It will also result in worship:

**Psalm 138:2:** "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word **above** all thy name."

This verse teaches something *extremely* significant. We know that God has given Jesus a name that's above every name (Philippians 2:9-10). At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. No one has a name that's greater than the name of Jesus – and yet this verse tells us that God has magnified His Word *above* His name!

Since God has magnified His Word above His name, that means His Word is binding. If God was greater than His Word then that would mean He could discard it if He chose – but that's not what He said. God has chosen to magnify His Word above His name, which means His Word is binding. The Lord will surely do the things He promised to do, and everything that the Word tells us will surely come to pass.

Do you realize how significant that is? This tells us just

how much God values His Word! It indicates how much the Scriptures are worth – and how much we should treasure them. His Word isn't a light thing we can casually toss aside. Instead it's of indescribable value! We must read it, study it, take it seriously, and obey it. It's extremely foolish to magnify our own desires and thoughts above that of God's Word. Our name is *not* greater than God's, nor are our thoughts greater than His. We should have tremendous respect for the Scriptures, and we must *obey* them as well. If we reject them and do as we please then we're magnifying ourselves *above* His Word – which means we're trying to exalt ourselves above God. That's a serious sin!

There are two different responses that people can have to the Word of God. Some people humble themselves when they hear it. A great example of this is King Josiah. When the Scriptures were rediscovered in the temple and the king heard what they had to say for the first time, he trembled:

**2 Kings 22:10-13:** “And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.”

Josiah immediately realized that the Israelites hadn't been keeping the Law. They had rebelled against God and gone their

own way, and he knew that God wouldn't allow their wickedness to continue. The Word brought great fear and trembling upon him! He immediately wanted to keep the Word and walk in its light. He knew that God would not be mocked, and he didn't want God's wrath to come upon his nation.

God saw his humility and repentance, and told him that he would be spared:

**2 Kings 22:18-20:** “But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.”

Because Josiah feared the Lord, and humbled himself and repented, God told him that He would spare him. Josiah wouldn't face the wrath of God. Instead he would die in peace.

The same is still true today. If we humble ourselves and repent, and if we fear the Lord and tremble at His Word, then we won't face the wrath of God. Instead we will receive mercy and salvation!

However, all those who harden themselves and reject God's Word will face a terrible fate. We can find an example of this in the life of King Jehoiakim. During his reign the tribe of Judah was involved in all sorts of idolatry and evil. They were



about to be invaded by King Nebuchadnezzar and destroyed. God sent Jeremiah to warn the king to repent. If they repented then they would be saved. But look what the king did to the Word of God:

**Jeremiah 36:21-25:** “So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them.”

God commanded the king to repent, because judgment was coming and that was the only way he could be saved. In response the king literally *burned the Word of God in the fire!* The king utterly despised what God had to say. He didn't fear God or repent. Instead he tossed the precious words of God into the flames and burned them.

But God would not be mocked. Since Jehoiakim refused to repent, God said that He would severely punish him:

**Jeremiah 36:30-31:** “Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his

dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.”

God told the king that since he refused to repent, he would be killed and his dead body wouldn't even be buried. On top of that, none of his descendants would ever sit on the throne of David. All of the terrible judgments that God had threatened to send against Judah would surely come – and that's exactly what happened.

Josiah repented when he heard the Word and he was spared the wrath of God. Since he humbled himself, God saved him. Jehoiakim made a different choice: he rejected the Word and literally burned it in the fire. As a result, God poured out His wrath upon both him and his nation.

All those who repent and believe will be saved. All those who do *not* repent will *not* be saved and will instead face the endless wrath of God. People may not take their Bibles and throw them into the flames the way Jehoiakim did, but all those who reject the Word and go their own way will be cast into Hell. The only ones God will save are those who humble themselves before Him:

**Psalm 138:3:** “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.”

If you read through the psalms you'll see that this is what David did when he was in trouble. David had entire armies at his disposal, but when he was in danger he always went to God for salvation. David never trusted in himself! It would have been easy for all of his power and victories to go to his head – after all, he

had killed the giant Goliath. But David believed that salvation only comes from the Lord. He looked to God for help in his time of need because he knew that only God could save him.

The same is still true today. The Lord is near all those who call upon Him. He's the one who watches over us! It's foolish for us to worry about what might happen. Instead of being afraid we should cry out to the Lord and trust in Him for deliverance:

**Psalm 127:1-2:** "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

It's foolish to spend sleepless nights worrying about what might happen. God is watching over us! He knows what's going on in our lives and He knows what we're facing. In fact, He knew what troubles we would encounter long before we were ever born! It's far better to trust in the Lord. We won't be saved by our sleeplessness or our worrying! It is God who will deliver us.

David looked to God for deliverance. When the Lord delivered him he wasn't content to keep it to himself. Instead he wanted to tell everyone what God had done for him! In other words, David wanted to testify:

**Psalm 138:4-5:** "All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words of thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord: for great is the glory of the Lord."

David wanted to tell everyone what God had done *so that everyone would praise the Lord*. David didn't keep God's greatness to himself. He wanted everyone to praise God – even the kings of the earth.

One of the characteristics of kings is that they often aren't

interested in the “little people”. Kings usually spend their time with other kings, or with the great people of the world. Rich people usually spend their days with other rich people. That's the way the world works. Yet we find that God isn't like that at all. Even though God has all power and all authority, and even though He's infinitely greater than we can imagine, God still cares about those who humble themselves before Him:

**Psalm 138:6:** “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.”

The Lord is *tremendously* high. It's amazing that God would give us any of His time and attention. We're less than ants in comparison to Him. Yet God *does* care about us! He loves us and watches over us and delivers us – as long as we're humble, like King Josiah was. But if we choose the route of pride and haughtiness (like King Jehoiakim) then we have a very different fate in store for us. The psalm says that God knows the proud “afar off”. This means God doesn't want to get anywhere near those who are proud! Those who humble themselves will find mercy and salvation, but those who reject God and exalt themselves will face rejection and wrath.

When David was in trouble he chose to trust in the Lord:

**Psalm 138:7-8:** “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.”

It's a wonderful blessing that the mercy of God endures forever. It's extremely reassuring that His love never changes, and that He's faithful even when we're not. Where would we be if we

couldn't cry out to the Lord in times of trouble? Where would we be if we had to depend upon our own might to save us? Imagine for a moment if our future really *did* depend upon ourselves. Can you protect yourself from all of the evils of the world? Can you raise yourself from the dead? Can you grant yourself everlasting life? I think not.

The Lord is indeed worthy of all praise and honor and glory, because He has had pity upon us. He has chosen to love us and save us. He's given us mercy and grace and forgiveness – gifts we never could have earned. The Lord has done great things for us. We should tell the whole world what He's done so that all the peoples and nations will sing His praises!