

# PSALM 135

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!

Praise the name of the LORD; give praise, O servants of the LORD,  
<sup>2</sup> you that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God.  
<sup>3</sup> Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to God's name, for God is gracious.  
<sup>4</sup> For God has chosen Jacob for God's self, Israel as God's own possession.

<sup>5</sup> For I know that the LORD is great; our Lord is above all gods.

<sup>7</sup> God it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth;  
the Mighty One makes lightnings for the rain  
and brings out the wind from God's storehouses.

<sup>8</sup> It was God who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both human beings and animals;  
<sup>9</sup> God sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants.

<sup>10</sup> God struck down many nations and killed mighty kings—

<sup>11</sup> Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan—  
<sup>12</sup> and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to God's people Israel.

<sup>13</sup> Your name, O LORD, endures for ever, your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages.

<sup>14</sup> For God will vindicate God's people, and have compassion on God's servants.

<sup>15</sup> The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

<sup>16</sup> They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see;

<sup>17</sup> they have ears, but they do not hear, and there is no breath in their mouths.

<sup>18</sup> Those who make them and all who trust them shall become like them.

<sup>19</sup> O house of Israel, bless the LORD! O house of Aaron, bless the LORD!

<sup>20</sup> O house of Levi, bless the LORD! You that fear the LORD, bless the LORD!

<sup>21</sup> Blessed be the LORD from Zion, the God who resides in Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

This psalm is a psalm of praise to God and it describes some of the big ways God has blessed the people. Its goal is to inspire praise to God by offering worshippers reasons to be thankful to God. Let's set aside for a moment some of the offensive parts of it (vs 8-18), especially the idea that God would instigate the slaughter of people and bless any conquest of land as a "heritage" (sadly, this psalm has been read that way by the western "Christian" colonial mindset as a mandate to conquest, as it is so read by right wing religious fundamentalists and settlers in Israel and the U.S. today). Anyhow, stripped of that distorted mindset, let us recognize the voice of the psalmist as part of a people who have known enslavement and have fought for freedom and for entry into a land to call home as refugees.

With this in mind, then, this psalm offers us at least two things that may benefit us if we put them into practice.

First, the psalm challenges us to praise God from whom all of life's great blessings flow. Sometimes praise to God comes easy for us. Life is good, wonderful and happy, and for all we've been through we're feeling life's fullness. We are on a journey toward wholeness and we feel the positivity and the progress. But life changes all the time and things come our way to bring us down. There is failure and hurt, things we regret, things that frustrate and things that disappoint. We can fear for our future or the future of someone we care about deeply. It can be hard to praise God sometimes and it can feel like a lot of work the energy for which is hard to find. But here's the thing with praise. It actually changes the brain chemistry. Praise activates parts of our heart and soul and opens up pathways for empowerment, joy, acceptance and fullness.

So many of the psalms in our psalter incorporate praise, and I believe this is because the Hebrews struggled often with discouragement and despair. For all the good things they could point to in their past, their present was often difficult and the future seemed anything but hopeful. Worship of God that incorporated lots of praise was a way to get empowered again and righted again. Why not try it yourself? Incorporate some time at specific times and days of your week to praise God. Pick a psalm of praise if you like, or a song or hymn of praise, or any piece of music or a reading that may serve to open your heart and voice to praise. Pray it to God and see what it manifests within you.

Second, the psalm offers reasons for the people to praise God. God has chosen them as a people, God provides the people with nourishment and life through nature and creation, God liberated them from cruel slavery and God helped them defeat their enemies who opposed their entry as refugees into a new land they could claim as their own. God has vindicated them as a people and God is alive to them over against the gods of many other nations that are just pieces of wood and stone and, therefore, dead.

OK, but we must also confess that the language used in vs 8-18 is not Christ-like. The idea that God simply murdered Egyptians and those nations and peoples who threatened the Hebrews is not the picture of God we get from Jesus in the sermon on the mount, namely a God who even forgives the wicked and unmerciful. Why does God do this? Because God is always seeking the kind of justice that can energize healing and reconciliation rather than vengeful destruction. OK then, taking Jesus as our standard, what reasons do we find to praise God?

The regular exercise of thinking and then enumerating reasons for which praise to God is fitting and deserving is also a beautifully liberating and empowering spiritual exercise. Just like the praise of God in good times and in bad is transformational, so too, digging deep and taking the time to enumerate reasons to be thankful before God is also transformational. What would

your reasons be for thanksgiving to God? What ways may you praise God, whether through words, silence, a walk through nature savouring the gift of it, or a caring act as the hands, feet and heart of Jesus? Psalm 135 is a call to praise and thanksgiving, and it invites creativity. What do you think?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God... there are many reasons... Inspire my reflection over the next week. Give me a heart, a voice, a desire and the energy to praise you. Open my heart where it is closed. Give me words where there is only silence. Give me courage where there is fear. Give me freedom where I am trapped, stuck and in chains. Open me up to joy if I am struggling with sadness. And if I am on the other side and feeling the goodness and the love, O God, may I never take for granted the gift of it. Thank you! In Jesus' name; Amen.