

“Our God is Praiseworthy”
 Sermon for 15 May 2022
 Text: Psalm 147

The book of Psalms ends with a cataract of praise. Psalm 147 in particular, celebrates God's *almighty and gracious rule* over his people, and over the world of nature—His creation providence— but mingles with this a special commemoration of his goodness in bringing back his people from their captivity, and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem—His historical providence. Not only is God praiseworthy for His providence, He has made us capable of praising Him—both are glorious. God is almighty in the material universe. God is all-good as well as almighty and omniscient. All of this can be gathered under three headings: 1. praise for providence, 2. praise for provision, or preservation and 3. praise for plan of perfection.

Providence. This belief, or conviction, about divine providence has been in circulation for a long time. Eusebius, in the early 4th century (c. 260-339AD), extolled God's providence *for producing an “unshakeable hope;”* “How can someone doubt God's presence and help (or power) who has experienced various dangers and been saved from them by His simple nod?,” he wrote. A calmed sea—something Jesus did? Deliverance from spiritual oppression, or relief from satanic attack—both of which the apostles did frequently, if not routinely? A forestalling, or the diversion of temptation? God exercises corrective discipline, an escape from trials sometimes inadvertent, or hidden? How about the larger issues, say: forgiveness, redemption, security and/or liberation? There is in the divine cupboard an enormous array of diverse providences, or “spices.” All these are “performed miracles” which, when experienced, build a foundation of faith resulting in a believer's holy confidence, *an unshakable hope*. Such hope as is expressed in Psalm 147. It is good to praise God.

If you know you are loved by God, the challenge is to daringly extend that love to those either least likely, or least deserving—very like yourself!

Praise for Jerusalem's Restoration and Prosperity.

147 [a]Praise [b]the Lord!

For it is good to sing praises to our God;

For [c]it is pleasant *and* praise is becoming.

2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;

He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

“We dare not limit the truth of God” because our reach of mind, our reach of mind, is rather like a time capsule. The information is incomplete; and the state of the science is unsettled. Yes, “crude, partial and confined.” It has no capacity to transcend itself. **Yet, the revealed word is for all time.** It is outside of time clearly, definitely. So we take from v. 2 something relevant for the age of the church (not just the post-exilic Israelites!) and take confidence in the fact that God builds up the church. God continues the work of provision begun by Jesus, growing the church by ingathering the outcasts. It is a certainty. It is real in both the present and the future; it cannot be relegated to the past. What you see, what you experience is inside the box. God however is neither confined by the box, nor limited in any way as we are. This is so hopeful!

**3 He heals the brokenhearted
And binds up their [d]wounds.
4 He counts the number of the stars;
He [e]gives names to all of them.**

And now we hear that God is most intimate and close in provision—healing the brokenhearted and counting stars . . . binding up wounds and bestowing names on stars are as far as here is from there. Meaning that the love that tends to us, also births stars. He ministers in the microcosm of our hearts and shapes galactic forces; he tends them as sheep with all their immensity of material. He creates, names, calls forth and governs all of them all at once. And we think we are doing well if we manage to drive the car to our doctor's appointment . . . on time.

He is both outside the in, and inside the out.

Everywhere expresses, proclaims his presence, power and personality thoroughly and fully. We are born, we march through life and we are, in the end, absorbed by grace into that eternity which belongs most to himself.

**5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength;
His understanding is [f]infinite.**

Christ, being divine, is exalted at the right hand of God, *the right hand of power*, the Almighty One, whose wisdom is as infinite as that power. God is vast, perfect. God is generous and magnanimous. I take that “infinite” to mean “without number,” insurmountable, and/or victorious. Numerous as the stars! And I also take that to mean His truth is unfalsifiable; it cannot be gainsaid. Therefore all glory, honor and praise is due Him . . . the oracles of heaven, even the word of the Lord accomplishes all that it is sent forth to do. Immediately, entirely and completely as well as correctly, or precisely.

**6 The Lord [g]supports the afflicted;
He brings down the wicked to the ground.**

He liberates the oppressed (“out of the dust”), sometimes by political deliverance and sometimes by deposing tyrants. Bullets, disease, warfare and old age will suffice to topple a despot. Humbling the proud and exalting the meek, or humble, the underclass has a liberator in God. God can take a man out by hardening his heart like Nabal whose ungrateful folly congealed his heart—he died of pride.

**7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
Sing praises to our God on the lyre,**

The “our” is critical here, a possessive pronoun that declares a relationship—our majesty, our glory, our covering, our holiness . . . our everything.

**8 Who covers the heavens with clouds,
Who provides rain for the earth,
Who makes grass to [h]grow on the mountains.
9 He gives to the beast its food,
And to the young ravens which cry.**

What the world ascribes to nature, and nature's law, the Scripture attributes to God: God covers, God prepares rain, God makes grass to grow, God cares for the beasts and the birds. He is His own park ranger; He manages all living things of the land, air and the sea. He delights in so doing. The commissariat of the entire universe is in His hand.

**10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse;
He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.**

There's a host of sensual pleasures that hold no attraction for God—they're a gift to His creatures for them to revel in.

**11 The Lord favors those who fear Him,
Those who wait for His lovingkindness.**

God prefers to delight in spiritual things and to show mercy to all, especially those who are weak, who reverence Him . . . who can worship and adore Him. Leave it to a zoologist to usurp God's plan for human sexuality! Kinsey saw us as animals is it any wonder that his findings were animalistic?! Of course not.

**12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!**

Let whole cities join together in praise, even as Jerusalem once did—so should London, Berlin, or New York do! And if not whole cities, how about districts, zones, or neighborhoods? When so many praise God, more will inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" And multiplied grace will yield multiplied praise, ever increasingly. Revival are festivals unto God . . . the more celebration the better.

**13 For He has strengthened the bars of your gates;
He has blessed your sons within you.
14 He makes [i]peace in your borders;
He satisfies you with the [i]finest of the wheat.**

God makes peace and sends peace . . . it is like a harvest time of wheat. It a perfection of all things created that we should experience all this!

**15 He sends forth His command to the earth;
His word runs very swiftly.**

To establish peace, to grant us full harvests, the Lord in our clime sends snow. It is a warm blanket spread between tender shoots and avalanches of frigid air, lethal in their extended extremes. Modulating sub-zero air as an insulation. Ice caps the

earth and gives plant life rest. It settles things before the resurgence of warmer weather. It acts like wool—indeed is often poetically alluded to as such. But it comes from Him. Not from vagrant, accidental weather fronts which appear to strike as if both are random and purposeless. God worketh all things and is everywhere at home. The elements are His to make gifts of both to man, and to all creation. And they serve as certain as His word to do His bidding. All is arrayed in a chain of command. Whiteness and softness and warmth attend water's changes of state—not to mention rivers and lakes and steam. Snow serves a modulating purpose, moderation within the zone of living beings on earth. The ancients used to call snow *eriwdez udwr* or “wooly water.” Martial called it *densum villus aquarum*—a thick fleece of water. And Aristophanes calls clouds “flying fleeces of wool!” “The whole vast realm of winter, with its strange phenomena, is but the breath of God—the Creative Word—as it were congealed against the blue transparency of space, like the marvelous frostwork on a window pane.” (Joseph Caryl)

**16 He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes.**

Snow resembles ashes as they whiten the ground being dispersed.

**17 He casts forth His ice as fragments;
Who can stand before His cold?**

Rivers turn to tongues of hard, cold iron. They grow and push, grind and heave over mountains. Glaciers form U-shaped valleys and rivers flow when thawed to round them into canyons. Snow bulldozed the land forms of earth and then topped depleted into the surging sea, where sea salt and sunlight do their dissolving magic. . . then evaporating into vapor rejoin the hydrological cycle, at His command.

**18 He sends forth His word and melts them;
He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.
19 He declares His words to Jacob,
His statutes and His ordinances to Israel.**

It is as if all of nature forms one seamless garment with the sacred history of mankind. It is as if they are twin volumes of one author whose word informs and shapes them both. Parallel dynamics—not opposing, but mutually reinforcing. And, yet in written form, His ordinances are revealed for all the sentient world to see. We, being most blest, have eyes to see and read. We become interpreters and translators by virtue of the written word . . . schooled in all to sing His praises.

**20 He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And as for His ordinances, they have not known them.
[k]Praise [l]the Lord!**

Psalm 147 in particular, celebrates God's *almighty and gracious rule* over his people, and over the world of nature—His creation providence. All of this can be gathered under three headings: 1. praise for providence, 2. praise for provision, or preservation and 3. praise for plan of perfection as we have heard, shared and believed.

Amen