

Lives Filled with Ongoing Joy

In my previous two articles from Psalm 147, I've emphasized that this Psalm speaks of the corporate/public worship of God by his covenant people. Christians gather together on the Lord's Day to praise God for his wisdom as well as praising God for his works. Today I want to bring out another aspect of our praise of God from this Psalm. Let's look now at:

—Praising God for His *Word*

The theme of this final section is the *word* of God. We see the "word" in verses 15, 18 and 19. We see that God "sends out his *command* to the earth" in verse 15, as well as "declaring his.....statutes and rules" in verse 19. We see his "rules" again in verse 20. We're seeing an overlap between the themes of wisdom, works, and the word throughout this Psalm. For example, God "determines the number of stars" by his *wisdom*, feeds the beasts and birds by his *work*, and "He declares his *word* to Jacob....." In this last section of the Psalm God's word "runs swiftly throughout the earth"; His word melts the "hoarfrost and crystals of ice." This section begins with another command (see vs. 1) for God's people to worship him. Look with me in verse 12: "Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!"

Following this we have a list of reminders that God is worthy of our worship. The phrase translated, "For he strengthens the bars of your gate," may be referencing Nehemiah 3:3, 6 and 7:3 which speaks of the gates in the walls that surround Jerusalem which were often barred for protection. And yet, in the final analysis, it's not walls or gates or bars that protect God's people. Walls can be breached, gates and bars can be compromised, but it's God who "strengthens the bars of your gates" (Ps. 147:13) which is just a metaphor for God's *ultimate* protection. In verses 15-18 we see that all of nature including snow, frost, ice, the wind and the waters must respond to God's "word." But more importantly, God "declares his.....statutes and rules to Israel." Verses 19-20 give us an important contrast in this section. God has given his word to his covenant people but, "He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules." In contrast to all the other nations in the Old Testament, Israel was given the Word of God. Listen to these words spoken by Moses.

"For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? Only take care and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children...." (Dt. 4:7-9)
No other people in all of life are blessed like God's people are blessed!

Along with God's Word given in the Old Testament, when the time was right God sent his only begotten Son, the *Word made flesh*. John writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth."

(John 1:14) The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the “power of God for salvation...” (Romans 1:16) The non-believing world has access to God’s Word in the Bible, but God’s word will only make a saving difference when hearts are made alive by the Holy Spirit. Psalm 147 concludes like it began with the command to, “Praise the LORD!”

Earlier in this series, I said that this Psalm was likely sung at the time of the dedication of the completion of the wall being rebuilt around Jerusalem. If we look in Nehemiah, we’re told that there was a great celebration on that day (Nehemiah 12:27). That section of Nehemiah concludes with these words: “And they offered great sacrifices that day and *rejoiced*, for God had made them *rejoice* with great *joy*; the women and children also *rejoiced*. And the *joy* of Jerusalem was heard far away.” (Nehemiah 12:43) There is great joy in the worship of God! Early in this Psalm we saw that the worship of God is “pleasant.” (vs. 1) The Hebrew word translated “pleasant” can pertain to that in which we find joy, beauty, and delight. Scripture is clear that there’s an interrelatedness between corporate worship and joy! (e.g., Psalm 100) As we grow in our understanding of the Scriptures, by grace, Lord’s Day corporate worship will be for us a source of ongoing joy that will carry over to every other aspect of our daily lives.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.