

Thankfulness for the Word of God

In this series of articles we're looking at Psalm 138, the first of a grouping of Psalms which come near the end of the Psalter and which are attributed to David (138-145). In my first article from this Psalm I noted for us that the word "piety" has almost become a forgotten word. Piety is a word that simply pertains to a "fear (or reverence) of the Lord" resulting in a desire for and seeking after godliness as a pattern of life, by grace. This is exactly what we're seeing in the life of David as he's expressed thankfulness to God from the heart for blessings that God has provided. Last time we looked initially at verses 1-2 and David's praise in the sanctuary. I want to pick up verse 2 again under the heading:

—Preeminence of God's Word

"...for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." (ESV) There's some difference of opinion among scholars as to whether "...your name AND your word" is the best translation. Some suggest that it should be translated, "You have magnified your name IN your word." The problem is that neither "and" nor "in" your word is faithful to the Hebrew text (which may or may not be a copyist's error). The most faithful rendering of the text as we have it would be, "You have exalted (or magnified) your word above all your name" (KJV). Although this may be the best translation, scholars struggle as to whether or not there's a doctrinal problem to say that God "exalts his word above his name." Can those two truths—God's word and his name—ever be in contradiction? Is there any way in which we can say that God's word could ever be above his name?

Some have sought to resolve this problem by noting that God has revealed his character and all that he is in himself ("my name") in more than one way. For example, God has revealed himself in creation, e.g., "The heavens declare the glory of God..." (Psalm 19:1) We also know that the law of God is written on the heart of all mankind, although fallen mankind is very adept at suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18; 2:15). At the fall of Adam, the image of God in man was marred in such a way that sinful mankind does not and cannot—in and of himself—see God rightly as he should. We're turned in on ourselves and only see what we want to see, apart from the grace of God.

So, then, God has revealed himself in nature as well as in mankind made in the image of God. And yet, the word of God in Holy Scripture—special revelation—reveals God, his character and his plan for the redemption of sinners in a way that general revelation shown in the creation or the marred consciences of imperfect sinners could never do. It may be best to see this phrase of David's as "God has magnified his word above all other ways in which he has made himself known." The written word of God tells us who God is in himself as well as his gracious plan of salvation for sinful mankind. Lastly, the revelation of God through his written word cannot be rightly thought of apart from the greatest revelation of God in his Son—the

Word of God Incarnate (John 1:1). Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” (Hebrews 1:3). Let’s move on further now from the preeminence of God’s word to:

—Prayers Answered

Look with me now in verse 3: “On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.” As God’s people regularly do, David is praising God for answered prayer. It may be that he’s speaking of a particular “day” or a particular prayer that was answered. This phrase could also be translated, “You made me bold in my soul with strength...” Some suggest that David is speaking of the “increase of strength” or “boldness in strength” that he received by virtue of knowing that God is always there—whether day or night—and he always delights to answer the prayers of his children. All Christians, if they have lived very long at all, know the experience of having numerous prayers answered over many years of our Christian lives. By God’s grace, this knowledge “increases our strength” to face whatever lies ahead. Old Testament scholar, Derek Kidner, has written, “It is not always the situation which most needs changing; it is, as often as not, the man involved in it.”

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