

MAGNIFY THE LORD

11-18-07
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Ps 34:1-3

- 34** I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and be glad.
3 O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!

INTRODUCTION

Our text has been rolling around in my mind the last few days,

*O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

Just what does it mean to “magnify the *LORD*?” When we magnify something, as with a magnifying glass, it reveals things previously unseen or unnoticed— detail and intricate designs we may not see without it. And, as we increase the magnification in a microscope, even more wonders are revealed that cannot be seen with the naked eye— molecular structures in colorful geometric patterns or the inner workings of cells, a world within a single cell. A snowflake becomes a wonder of lacework, each with its own uniqueness. Under magnification, what often seems rather ordinary and uninteresting becomes extraordinary, causing us to pause in wonder. Moving to the other extreme, we use a telescope to magnify things far away— with the same effect. That star that was a pinpoint of light becomes a vast, colorful, wispy nebula.

Now, with a magnifying glass, microscope, or telescope, are we seeing what isn’t there? No. It only reveals what is *really* there. However, it shows much that we don’t normally see about interrelationships, structure and inner workings.

Let’s apply that to our text now,

*O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

The way we *magnify the LORD* is obvious from the context— it is through praise. So, the more we praise the Lord, the more we begin to see and understand about Him and the wonders of His care for us and our world. We begin to understand His grace, how He has been there when we didn’t notice, and other ways we come to understand His love and care.

We recently saw on the news the fires raging through Southern California, burning 500,000 acres, displacing a half-million people, and destroying 2,000 homes. But in Rancho Bernardo, in a Presbyterian church in which 60 families had lost their homes, worshipers met to give thanks. A reporter noted, “They gave thanks for big things: for lives saved, families, friendships. They also gave thanks for small things: a hug, a shoulder to cry on.” While they had lost so much, as they worshiped, as they “magnified the Lord,” they were seeing what was really important. In

losing many of the things of life, the true gift of what is most essential was revealed. This Thanksgiving season is a time for us to deepen our gratitude and perspective on the blessings of God. I want us to consider three things magnifying the Lord accomplishes:

1. It is a choice that places God in control.
2. It restores peace to anxious hearts.
3. It provides an attitude that unlocks the fulness of life.

“ENTHRONED”

Yet thou art holy,

I heard this phrase often on the lips of my mother as I was growing up, that God was *enthroned on the praises of* [His people]. There was a constant current of praise in her life, sometimes flowing softly, quietly, and at other times bubbling to the surface in vocal praise and worship. Through praise, she kept the Lord continually enthroned over all that was going on— whether in kitchen, doing laundry, shopping, or involved in ministry. I find God *enthroned on the praises* a helpful word-picture. When we praise God in the midst of whatever we are facing, we are affirming His control, that He is over it all— He is Lord. I sometimes imagine Him, as I worship, with outstretched arms presiding over the crisis, the trouble, or whatever difficulty I’m facing. Praise is literally an affirming God is in control even when we don’t feel like it or can’t see it happening. Praise is **faith in application**.

The context of this verse helps us understand this. This Psalm is the one Jesus begins quoting from the cross. It begins with the cry of despair we remember from the lips of Jesus:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer;

and by night, but find no rest.

Then comes the verse we’re considering

Yet thou art holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel. (Ps 22:1-3)

Jesus is modeling for us what to do in our despair, our darkness, and our confusion in the midst of terrible things. Through praise we move from being under the circumstances to knowing God is over the circumstances. Then, as we continue in praise and worship, we begin to stand with God.

In 1989, the Sunrise Presbyterian Church buildings in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, were completely destroyed by Hurricane Hugo. Amidst the rubble, they found the pulpit Bible still intact, open to these verses in Jeremiah 33:10-11,

...there shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness... as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord: “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”

Reading and rereading those words in the rebuilding process kept their hope alive. Today, a plaque with those encouraging words from Jeremiah is displayed in the chancel of their rebuilt church.

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Those words were first given by God to Jeremiah as a promise to give hope to Israel as they stood in the ruins of the temple and Jerusalem. God's promise of restoration kept them going, affirming He was still in control, *for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!* It also encouraged the Sunrise Presbyterians. As they gave thanks to the Lord, *the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness* was again heard.

“CONSIDER”

Last week, we looked at giving as a means to fight the twin problems of greed and anxiety in our lives. The other principal way is through cultivating gratitude. Not appreciating what we have been given leads us to keep seeking more—trying to find contentment and happiness in the next thing. When we are filled with gratitude, we are satisfied, content—no longer driven. Likewise, anxiety is also defeated by getting focused upon the goodness of God. And that's one of the themes of Jesus' teaching in Lk.12:22-31 that we talked about last week. Set in the middle of greed and anxiety, notice how Jesus encourages us to magnify the Lord.

READ Lk. 12:22-31

“*Consider the ravens...*” (24) and “*Consider how the lilies grow...*” (27). These are invitations to enter into the wonders of God's creation—stop, notice, appreciate. In so doing, bathing ourselves in the wonders of this world God has provided, it calls us to give praise to God. We've all felt anxiety melt away in view of such things and faith in God grow as we give thanks to Him.

Unfortunately, in our rushing and busyness, we forget to notice. We take ourselves, our schedules, and our roles too seriously—thinking it all depends upon us. We become the center and forget to keep God in the center.

Joshua Bell emerged from a subway train at Washington D.C.'s Metro station. He was a nondescript man in jeans and a long-sleeved T-shirt. He carried his violin case and positioned himself along a wall. After he removed his violin, he placed the open case in front of him and threw a few dollars in it as “seed money” and began to play. For 45 min. he played Mozart and Schubert as more than 1,000 people passed by, hardly taking notice. In all, 27 people stopped briefly to notice and dropped in a total of \$32. BUT, everyone missed what was really before their eyes. Joshua Bell is a world-renown violinist, playing a \$3 million dollar Stradivarius. Just three days earlier, Bell had sold out Boston's symphony Hall with ordinary seats going for \$100. Bell's playing in the subway station was part of an experiment by *The Washington Post* to see if, “In a banal setting, at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?”

How much do we miss in our busyness and preoccupation with ourselves? We need to stop and “consider.” We need to notice and magnify the Lord. Psalm 8 models it well:

*O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!*

....

*When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;*

*what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?*

*Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor. (Ps 8:1, 3-5)*

Here's a prayer written by my brother that calls us to "notice" and "consider." Let's say this responsively, with you reading the bold portions.

"In my grumbles God, **I miss the grandeur:**

I stub my toe on a rock **and I miss the marvel of rocks.**

I shiver in the rain **and forget the wonder of weather.**

I scratch my hand on a thorn **and fail to smell the rose.**

Teach me to leap and praise **and dance in this incredible creation."** *Amen.*

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

The third component of magnifying the Lord is that it helps us maintain an attitude of gratitude. We look at life differently when there's gratitude in our hearts. Gratitude is more than saying "thank you." It is deeper, more of an orientation toward life itself. It is an acknowledgment that we are not the source— but we are recipients of blessings from the hand of another— and ultimately that "other" is God.

In our former church in Ohio, an AA group met in the church. Danny, was the backbone of the group. He'd stop in the office to visit sometimes. He had quite a testimony. He used to ask me, "Have you ever seen a grateful person getting drunk?" He says he always uses that question at the beginning of his lead. Indeed, gratitude was the key to his sobriety. And, as I thought about it, I thought, "He is right." Most addictions are rooted in our determination to handle life on our own, on our own terms. We become angry when things don't go our way. Usually there is a chip on our shoulder and a "life owes me" attitude. All that "stink'n think'n" fuels the alcoholic. Gratitude cuts through all that. It acknowledges the hand of God in all things. Rather than looking at life to give us what we want, it treats life as a wonderful gift to enjoy.

And, importantly, we have the ability to choose our attitude. We can choose an attitude of gratitude. It isn't something that is either just there or not. We are responsible for our attitude. I read about a German company that even made a good attitude as part of their job requirement. Nutzwirk Ltd, an IT company, has a "good mood" clause in its employment contract. They have a ban on all moaning and grumpiness at work. Too many bad moods can result in firing. One employee said, "It's great that whining is not allowed. If one person is grumpy it makes everyone else feel bad and ruins what could be a good day."

When you think about it, as a Christian, a grumpy attitude is really rebellion against God,

*For this is the day the Lord has made,
let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps. 118:24).*

When the day doesn't suit us or we're not happy with the mood we're in, it's time to magnify the Lord. I do not think you can offer Him praise for three minutes without finding your attitude

becoming one of gratitude.

CONCLUSION

So, *magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*

Let this Thanksgiving season be an intensifying and deepening our understanding of God and His marvelous works. Let your praise move beyond the obvious things of houses, food, friends, health, and nation to the wonders of His greatness and faithfulness in ways we may not have noticed. As we ponder His revelation in The Word, revealed by the Spirit, these truths are magnified to move our hearts into lives overflowing with gratitude.