

A Sermon on Psalm 145: A Universal, Unending Song of Praise to God the King

BRADLEY L. BAUGHAM

Bradley L. Baugham is senior pastor of Emmanuel Bible Church, Mauldin, South Carolina, which he planted sixteen years ago. He received his DMin from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he wrote on the implications of the canonical shape of the Psalter for hermeneutics. Dr. Baugham also serves on occasion as a small group facilitator for Charles Simeon Trust Preaching workshops.

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 145¹

Today's sermon comes as the final message of our series on the Psalter. One goal of this brief series has been to help us see that the Psalter is not a random collection of one-hit wonders from Israel's history. The Psalter does not come to us as a cabinet of unorganized sheet music. Rather, the Psalter presents us with a well-tempered collection, a well-ordered oratorio singing the story of the Old Testament (OT). The Psalter celebrates one grand story across five books: *The God Who Makes Us Sing and Trust in His King*.

Another goal of our brief series has simply been to help us fall in love with the Psalms for the first time, or all over again. The psalmists sing God's instructions (*torah*) to us for every mood and season of life. The one who learns the psalms well, learns to weep and rejoice well. I hope you will make reading the Psalms, even just one a day, a regular part of your Bible reading. The Psalter is the inspired prayer book and songbook of the Bible. In these 150 psalms, God gives us model prayers and model songs that should fill our quiet times and playlists.

As Calvin remarked in his commentary on the Psalms, the Psalter is "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul"; for there is not an emotion of which

anyone can be conscious that is not here represented.”² As Anthony Gilby explained when writing a dedication for a work on the Psalter in the 1500s, “This book of Psalms is most necessary for every Christian . . . While all other Scripture teaches us what God says to us, these prayers of the saints teach us what we should say to God.”³ In every mood and moment, God teaches how to sing the blues or dance an ode to joy—all for his glory.

THE STORY OF THE PSALTER: THE CONTEXT OF PSALM 145

The Psalter opens with a grand introduction of Psalms 1-2. The two psalms sound the opening overture; they belong together. Echoing God’s commands for Adam in the opening chapters of Genesis, God’s requirements for a king in Deuteronomy 17, and God’s promises to King David in 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 1-2 introduce us to the main melodies in the symphony of the Psalter. Namely, we need a blessed man (Psalm 1) and king (Psalm 2) who will treasure God’s word and rule God’s world well.

Books 1-3 of the Psalter provide part one of the story (Pss 1-72). Books 1 and 2 of the Psalter are taken up almost entirely with songs of David, and many of those are songs of sadness. David’s life and experiences in Books 1-2 show us the kind of king we should look for and the experiences we should expect as we wait for the king.⁴ Even though David appears to be the blessed man and anointed king of Psalms 1-2, enemies hound him like a wild animal in Books 1-2. Nevertheless, Book 1 ends in Psalm 41 as David, echoing the grand promises of 2 Samuel 7, praises God for “setting him in his presence forever,” even in the face of suffering (Ps 41:12 ESV). David is the messiah-king to whom and through whom God promised the future Messiah-King would come. David, God’s messiah-king, sings and prophesies of God’s final Messiah-King as early as Psalm 2.

Book 2 of the Psalter records more bitter threats against King David. The songs of Book 2 continue to show us that lament is a common experience of God’s people, and even God’s king. Book 2 (like Book 1 in Psalm 32) also records David’s moral failure in Psalm 51. Alas, as good and righteous as David appears, he cannot be the final blessed man and righteous king for whom we long.

As Book 2 of the Psalter ends with Psalm 72, the songs of the historical King David come to an end (Ps 72:20). David, the son of Jesse, is laid to rest, and his son Solomon sings his father’s final words.⁵ Remarkably, even

as David is laid to rest at the end of Book 2, both David and Solomon know that God's great promises for a future Messiah-King remain alive. Both David and Solomon looked out beyond themselves toward the horizon for the coming of the Messiah-King.

Then comes Book 3 (Pss 73-89). After the death of Israel's greatest king comes Israel's greatest darkness. Book 3 discloses dark song of crisis. The psalms in Book 3 track the demise of Israel and all their kings and follow them deep into the darkness of the exile. Book 3, especially Psalms 88-89, haunts us with the bleak Good Friday of the Psalter's story.

But then comes Book 4. Books 4-5 provide the conclusion and part two of the Psalter. Book 4 opens with the oldest song in the Psalter. Moses, the man of God, writes Psalm 90. This old song by the old prophet reminds us of our old hope—God the everlasting refuge of his people for all generations. David's line and promises may look dead, but the Lord still reigns (Pss 93-99). And, when Book 4 ends, the first hallelujahs anywhere in the Psalter erupt.

What does *hallelujah* mean? It is a command to "praise the Lord." For a book called "Praise Songs" (*tehillim*), one would have thought that the command to "praise the Lord" (*hallu-YAH*) would sound throughout the Psalter. But the command does not appear throughout the Psalms.

The command *hallelujah* appears only twenty-five times across 150 psalms. An editor like Ezra placed all twenty-five appearances of the word *hallelujah* at the end of the Psalter, in Books 4-5. Four appearances come strategically at the very end of Book 4.⁶ The remaining twenty-one occurrences of the *hallelujah* command appear in Book 5. Nearly half of them explode into praise in Psalms 146-150 alone.⁷ A volley of hallelujah fireworks forms the finale of the Psalter. Book 5 gives us the hallelujah book of the Psalter, and the sermon today comes from this hallelujah Book 5 of the Psalter. The sermon passage today is Psalm 145.

THE HALLELUJAHS OF THE PSALTER: THE HOPE OF BOOK 5 AND PSALM 145

Before settling into Psalm 145, I want us to keep thinking about the concentration of *hallelujahs* at the end of the Psalms. Why are all the commands to "praise the Lord" reserved for the end of the Psalter, and almost entirely in Book 5? Because the story will end better than it begins. The concentration of *hallelujahs* at the end of the story of the Psalter shows the movement of

our lives, of Israel, and their king. Our lives move from lament to praise.

Think of the movement of the Psalter's story like this. The Psalter moves from an opening series of five laments by David in Book 1 (Pss 3-7) to a closing cosmic call of five hallelujah songs in Book 5 (Pss 146-150). The final psalm, Psalm 150, even ends with a double *hallu-YAH* that concludes the entire Psalter: "Let all that has breath *praise the Lord, Praise the Lord*" (Ps 150:6).

Thus, the high concentration of *hallelujahs* at the end of Book 5, especially in Psalms 146-150, shows us the slow but certain crescendo of the entire Psalter. What is it? We are made for glory and destined for praise. All of us. We are made for worship. Yet the fundamental problem of the human condition is our failure to worship God through Jesus Christ alone. We are made for praise. But we praise and enjoy everything else but God. That is what is wrong with you and me.

Our lives as believers, like the flow of the Psalter, are moving towards eternal hallelujahs. When the end comes, the hallelujahs of life that seem oft interrupted by the laments of life now will then be sustained forever by an eternal *fermata*. So, if we ask, "How does Book 5 function in the story of the Psalter?", we could say that Book 5 signals the final return to praise after the laments of Book 1-3. In fact, are you in Psalm 145?

Notice the title of Psalm 145. What is the title? The first line of Psalm 145 says what? "A song of praise" (*tehillah*). What other songs in the Psalter do the authors describe as a "praise song" or the like? In the book of Psalms, a book whose name means something like "praise songs," (*tehillim*) how many songs other than Psalm 145 bear a title of "song of praise"? Do you know how many? None. Psalm 145 is the only Psalm in the entire Psalter called a "song of praise" (*tehillah*). The only one.

Think of the significance of Psalm 145 as the only song bearing the super-scription, "a song of praise," in a book whose name means "praise songs." Out of all the places an editor like Ezra could have placed Psalm 145, "a song of praise," he placed Psalm 145 here, near the very end of the Psalter. Why? Because though sad songs dominate the score of Psalter, and our own experiences at times, sad songs are not the final note in the score of the Psalter. Sadness may sound a common chord in our lives, but it is never the root chord in our lives. Our lives, like the story of the Psalter, are moving from lament to praise.

Far from being a misnomer, then, the title "praise songs" (*tehillim*) reflects the appropriate title of the Psalter. Why? Because the title of the Psalter

indicates the invincible and inevitable *telos* (goal) of the believer's life.⁸ The story of the Psalter tells us that "we are [indeed] called to live in a real world of undeniable suffering and pain. Yet [book 5 shouts to us telling us that] lament is not God's final word."⁹

Thus, Psalm 145 bearing the only "song of praise" title (*tehillah*) in the Psalter and coming at the very end of the entire story gives a fitting conclusion to the book of Psalms. Think, then, of what the placement of psalms of praise at the end of the Psalter means. Matthew Henry explains the significance.

That the book of Psalms concludes with psalms of praise, all praise, for praise, is the conclusion of the whole matter ... And it [indicates] that God's people, towards the end of their life, should abound much in praise, ... because, at the end of their life, they ... [go] ... to the world of everlasting praise, and the nearer they come to heaven the more they should accustom themselves to the work of heaven.¹⁰

What a wonderful reality. Psalm 145, the only titled "song of praise" in the Psalter, comes at the end of the Psalter to remind us what will come at the end of our days—praise. One final breath of praise or pain, the eyes close, and then eternal breaths of praise forevermore. Hallelujah.

In the storyline of the Psalter, after the journey from sufferings and lament of Books 1-2 to the dark crisis of Book 3 where God's flickering promises for his king seem snuffed out, Books 4-5 sound the note that God's reign and promises are alive and well. Book 5, in particular, with its concentrations of *hallelujahs* and the strategic placement of Psalm 145 at the end, signals the return to praise, now and forever.

Book 5 not only signals the return of praise, but it also signals the return of the King. Again, look at the title of Psalm 145. What comes after the phrase "a song of praise"? "Of David." If you are following the story of the Psalter in our sermon series, seeing David as an author at this point should make us shout and shiver at the same time. What do I mean? "What is the big deal?" "David wrote most of Psalms anyway." Yes, but do not forget that the Psalter presents us with a well-ordered musical, a story.

Nearly all the psalms that David wrote appear in Books 1-2. Remember this historical David, son of Jesse, was laid to rest in Psalm 72:20. But a few psalms of David appear after Psalm 72. What does this mean as we take in the story of the Psalter? I think the appearance of "psalms of David" after

Psalms 72 indicates that even though the first David died, we are still looking for the final David to come. Such a Davidic messianic logic reflects other places in the OT where prophets still speak of David as the coming king, even though David has been dead for centuries (cf. Ezek 37:24–28). As James Montgomery expresses the desire in his hymn, “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed,” we long for “great David’s greater son!”¹¹

David’s voice has been nearly silent since Book 2, but now suddenly the voice of the King returns in Psalm 145. At this point in the Psalter’s story, we have the dramatic return of the Davidic king and God’s messianic promises through him.¹² After a prolonged silence, we have the return of the king predicting the coming of the final King, Jesus Christ the son of David. Hallelujah, he reigns!

In Psalm 145, at the end of Book 5, King David celebrates God’s eternal kingdom (and King). Psalm 145, at the end of the Psalter, forms a closing frame with Psalm 2, at the opening of the Psalter, where God installs his Messianic-King and Son on David’s throne. Then God commands all to take refuge in him.¹³ Thus, the two psalms form a messianic frame (*inclusio*) around the Psalter calling all creation to sing praise to God and trust the (coming) King. Indeed, the Psalter ends with a climactic chorus of *hallelujahs* in Psalms 146–150, with anticipatory overtones of the final book of the Bible in which “the kingdoms of this world . . . become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Praise the LORD.

This is the God who calls us to sing and put our trust in his King—Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Warren Wiersbe summarizes the hopeful end of Psalter by explaining that “like the book of Revelation that closes the New Testament, [these final psalms] say to God’s people, ‘Don’t worry—this is the way the story will end. We shall all be praising the Lord!’”¹⁴

With the context of Book 5 and the Psalter in mind, we now turn to examine Psalm 145. Psalm 145 is a song by a great king for the greatest king. This psalm points our eyes beyond this world to God the King and his coming King.

SETTING UP THE EXPOSITION OF PSALM 145

Before reading Psalm 145, notice one final matter. Each verse of Psalms 145 begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. David appears blinded by the splendor of God’s goodness and greatness; he does not know where to begin his praise. So, with marvelous poetic imagination, David takes every

letter of the Hebrew alphabet and praises God.

David's method of meditation on God's goodness and greatness provides a model for us. David offers us a way to meditate on God's glory. Sit down and write a line of praise to God based on every letter of our (English) alphabet. In such an exercise, we increase our delight in God and experience the blessings promised to the one who meditates on God's word "day and night" (Ps 1:1–2). Even children can cultivate such a simple way to meditate on God and his glory. If you are hearing this message as a child, write the word "great" on your paper, because God is great. Using every letter in the word "great," write a sentence describing God's goodness and greatness. Such an exercise reflects the precise discipline that David does here. From A–Z, we would say, David shows us how to meditate on the greatness of God the king.

Now let us read this great psalm of praise. I am reading from the *English Standard Version* (ESV). In reading Psalm 145, I will supply some headings, emphasize some repeated ideas, and provide brief explanations.¹⁵

THE (ANNOTATED) TEXT OF PSALM 145

"A Song of Praise." "Of David."

I Praise You (Daily and Forever)

[']¹ I will extol you, **my God and King**, (Here is the purpose of the psalm.)
and bless your name forever and ever. (145:1b, 2b form an *inclusio* with 145:21b)

[b]² **Every** (*kol*) day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.

The Cause of Praise (All to follow in Psalm 145 expands the theme of God's greatness.)

[g]³ **Great** is the **LORD**, and **greatly** to be praised, (Here is the cause and theme.
and his greatness is unsearchable. (We cannot fully search out his greatness.)

Generations Praise Your Works and Character

[d]⁴ One **generation** shall commend your works (*ma'aseh*) to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts (*gevurah*).

[h]⁵ On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works (*dabar*) I will meditate.

[w] ⁶ They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds (*yare'*),
and I will declare your **greatness**.

[z] ⁷ They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and
shall sing aloud of your righteousness

Causes of Praise

[kh] ⁸ The LORD, is
gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and
abounding in steadfast love.

[f] ⁹ The LORD, is good to **all** (*kol*),
and his mercy (*rachamim*, compassion) is over **all** (*kol*) that he has made.

All Your Works & Saints Praise Your Universal Kingdom (Rule)

[y] ¹⁰ **All** (*kol*) your works (*ma'aseh*) shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints (*khasid*) shall bless you!

[k] ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your **kingdom** (*malkhut*)
and tell of your **power** (*gevurah*),

[l] ¹² to make known to the children of man your **mighty deeds** (*gevurah*),
and the glorious splendor of your **kingdom** (*malkhut*).

[m] ^{13a} Your **kingdom** (*malkhut*) is an everlasting **kingdom** (*malkhut*),
and your dominion endures throughout **all** (*kol*) generations.

[[n]] ^{13b} [The LORD is faithful in all (*kol*) his words
and kind in all (*kol*) his works.]¹⁶

Your Universal Provision and Providence are Worthy of Praise

[s] ¹⁴ The LORD upholds **all** (*kol*) who are falling
and raises up **all** (*kol*) who are bowed down.

['] ¹⁵ The eyes of **all** (*kol*) look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.

[p] ¹⁶ You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of **every** (*kol*) living thing.

[*ts*] ¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in **all** (*kol*) his ways
and kind [faithful] (*khasid*) in **all** (*kol*) his works.

[*q*] ¹⁸ The LORD is near to **all** (*kol*) who call on him,
to **all** (*kol*) who call on him in truth.

[*r*] ¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.

[*sh*] ²⁰ The LORD preserves **all** (*kol*) who love him,
but **all** (*kol*) the wicked he will destroy.

[*t*] ²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let **all** (*kol*) flesh bless his holy name **forever and ever**.
(145:21b forms an *inclusio* with 145:1b, 2b.)

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 145

Psalm Title and Sermon Theme

Psalm 145:1-2 and 145:21 provide bookends of the psalm. David ends this psalm as he starts it—telling us what his song of praise is about. In Psalm 145:1, David opens his song by exulting in God the King. In Psalm 145:21, David concludes his song with a summons for universal exultation in God the King: “Let *all* flesh bless his holy name.” The word *all* appears sixteen times in this psalm; twice the word appears as *every* in the ESV (Ps 145:2, 16). Thus, we can say that Psalm 145 provides us with a *universal* (*kol*) praise song to God the King.

But Psalm 145 is also an unending praise song to God the King. Psalm 145:1, 2, and 21 all end the same way. David ends each of those verses by extoling God’s greatness as a theme worthy of unending praise, “forever and ever” (Ps 145:1b, 2b, 21b). Thus, we can land on a fuller title for Psalms 145. Psalm 145 contains David’s universal, unending praise song to God the King. That is our working title: “A Universal, Unending Song of Praise to God the King.” King David summons us all to praise God the King with universal and unending praise. We are made for God’s glory and to rejoice in that glory “forever and ever” (Ps 145:21). In Psalm 145, King David summons us to join him in universal, unending praise to God the King.

The Structure and Outline of Psalm 145

Earlier I mentioned that every line of Psalm 145 begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. David's lovely acrostic structure makes it difficult to divide the psalm neatly, as David riffs on God's greatness one letter of the alphabet after the next. But four times in Psalm 145 David moves from (1) describing the Lord's character to (2) describing the Lord's actions. Look at the four descriptions of his character with me. They all start with "the Lord is."

1. Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised. (Ps 145:3)
2. The LORD is gracious and merciful. (Ps 145:8)
3. The LORD is good to all. (Ps 145:9)
4. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind (*khasid*) in all his works. (Ps 145:17)

For this message, I will take each description of the Lord's great character in these verses as the rough beginning of a new section. Each section opens with (1) a declaration of God's character followed by (2) verses detailing his actions. As Psalm 145:8-9 are similar, I will treat them together. So here is the outline we will use.

1. Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised. (Ps 145:3)
2. (Universal, Unending Praise for Our Great and Praiseworthy King)
3. The LORD is gracious and merciful. (Ps 145:8)
4. The LORD is good to all. (Ps 145:9)
5. (Universal, Unending Praise for Our Good and Gracious King)
6. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind (*khasid*) in all his works. (Ps 145:17)
7. (Universal, Unending Praise for Our Righteous and Kind/Faithful (*khasid*) King)

Universal, Unending Praise for Our Great and Praiseworthy King (Psalm 145:3–7)

After the opening call to praise God the King, praise that must be both daily and unending (Ps 145:1–2), David calls us to sing of our great and praiseworthy king. First, David explains God's unsearchable greatness. David means that God is full of greatness, so deep and running over with greatness, that

you cannot fully fathom his greatness. It remains unsearchable.

Think of trying to capture God's greatness like a happy child who runs down to the ocean with a sand bucket. They come waddling, tottering back, and muscling a bucket with tightfisted hands. You say to them, "What is in the bucket?" They say back to you with confidence, "The ocean. I have the ocean in my bucket!" That sounds like us thinking we have grasped the ocean of God's greatness. But as Charles Spurgeon explains, "There is nothing little about God, and there is nothing great apart from him."¹⁷

Then David explains God's greatness as so boundless that one generation after another will speak of God's mighty acts and yet not come close to exhausting God's greatness. Not even the timeless eternity of heaven will deplete the measureless depths of God's unsearchable greatness. Here is an application for parenting. In parenting, we declare the mighty acts of God to our children, grandchildren, and beyond, should God lengthen our days. We tell our children (as the song for children goes) how big God is; how strong and how mighty God is; how there is "nothing my God cannot do." All the generations passing one after another and then expanding into eternity will not empty our souls of reasons to praise God's greatness.

David insists on meditating on God's mighty acts in Psalm 145. It is like David lest us see the streaming YouTube clips of God's mighty acts playing in his mind as he writes Psalm 145. David replays God's deeds which leave all who watch in awe. God's greatness is truly awesome.

First, we could say that David meditates on God's mighty acts in creation. God created the world from nothing, using nothing but a word. Have you ever done that? Have you have created anything from nothing—with just a word? God has. An entire world—at the microbiological level and the cosmological level. If you look out, untold galaxies surround us. If you look in, your eye under digital imaging looks like a galaxy. The stars above and the cells within all testify to his greatness. God created all of it with such vivid color and clarity that still outpaces digital technology's ability to capture it.

We went to the Columbia Zoo in Columbia, South Carolina, recently. I am approaching the half-century mark in age. I grew up reading magazines like *Ranger Rick* and *National Geographic* and watching the underwater explorations of Jacques Cousteau. I thought I had seen it all. But as we walked through the Columbia aquarium, I saw species of fish, brilliant colors of fish I never knew existed. Spectacular colors. One fish glowed with purple and orange like bright

fluorescent lights. (It was a strange comfort to see the wonderful purple and orange colors of Clemson in the heart of the University of South Carolina territory.) The greatness and beauty of the ocean are unsearchable, but the greatness of God is greater still. God's person, deeper than the bottom of the ocean, plunges with unimaginable delights, for God is not only great, but he is also infinite in all his greatness. God's mighty acts in the ocean testify to his unsearchable greatness.

But there was more to see at the zoo than just the water creatures. We saw tiny monkeys, miniature-looking monkeys, which looked like miniature golden lions. Then around the corner, we saw two hulking Rhinos. They lined up across from each other as if in a football drill and charged toward each other, ending with a loud, percussive thud. Then these massive pre-historic-looking beasts galloped off as gracefully as a thoroughbred.

As we drove down to the zoo, my daughter asked God to "help us not to fall in love with the animals but with You, God, who made them all." God answered that prayer for me on that trip. God spoke beauty in being. Such animals are merely the rays of his glory, but God is the sun. The earth shines with his "mighty acts" and "awesome deeds" (Ps 145:4, 6). Yet such wondrous creatures are but murky reflections of his terrible beauty and power.

David not only meditates on God's mighty acts of creation, but he also meditates on God's mighty acts of redemption. God's "wondrous works" (Ps 145:5) involve his judgment and salvation at the same time. For example, think of some wondrous work of God. In one night, God killed all the firstborn sons in Egypt. He did it without a weapon. No one is safe from the Lord when he comes to judge. No one.

But neither can anyone judge when the Lord determines to save. For in one day, the Lord parted the Red Sea as easily as you part your hair. Then he drowned one of the greatest armies in the known world in a moment. Pharaoh's mighty army sunk to the bottom of the sea like a stone that a little boy chucks into a lake. You cannot save when the Lord determines to judge, and you cannot judge when the Lord determines to save. Behold, his mighty acts!

But we can explore more of his wondrous works in redemption. Think how God brought a nation to its knees and redeemed his people through the blood of a lamb. What a mighty, wondrous work indeed. "Who would have thought a Lamb could rescue the souls of men?"¹⁸

And what of Korah? When Korah rebelled against God's servant, Moses, the desert earth opened wide in wrath like a lion's mouth and swallowed

Korah and his kin alive. This, too, was a wondrous work, a mighty act of God. How about another one?

When the venomous Assyrian King Sennacherib threatened God's people like a coiled and hooded cobra, the Angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 soldiers and left their dead bodies to stink in the morning air (2 Kgs 19:35). Why? Because the LORD had declared, "I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David" (2 Kgs 19:34). You cannot save when the Lord determines to judge, and you cannot judge when the Lord determines to save. Praise him for his wondrous works and mighty acts.

Thus far I have given a short glimpse into David's exultation in God's greatness. God's greatness abounds with his mighty acts of creation and redemption. No one can measure all his greatness (Ps 145:3). Of course, we can sing Psalm 145 in light of all the Lord's mighty acts, not simply those David mentions. If David could praise God for such greatness, have we not much greater causes to praise God? David could look at God's mighty acts of creation or God's mighty acts of salvation at the Red Sea, but what of us?

We see the wonder of his mighty acts not at the Red Sea, but at Mt. Calvary. At the cross, the Word who was made flesh died for human flesh. There, Jesus Christ was judged like Pharaoh's army, drowned in God's wrath, so that we could be saved from that same wrath. Jesus was also the innocent lamb, the final Lamb, who paid the penalty for our sin, died in our place, and came back from the dead that we might pass over into the arms of God's love. At the cross, God forgave us all our trespasses. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Col 2:13–15). God is great and no one can measure his greatness. His greatness summons our praise. Add your voice to universal, unending praise for our great and praiseworthy King.

Universal, Unending Praise for Our Good and Gracious King (Psalm 145:8–9)

In Psalms 145, David also praises the Lord as the good and gracious King. Few verses in the Bible give us so grand a view of Lord's character as these. David has read his Bible. He has meditated on it. Now, in Psalm 145:8–9, he quotes it. David quotes from Exodus 34. In Exodus 34, God reveals himself as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Exod 34:6). With these words, God discloses his name, his essential character. Think how

different the Lord is from us. We are quick to anger and slow to love, but not the Lord. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God gives us a clear view of his loving heart with his words to Moses. But what God reveals most clearly, we doubt most certainly. We do not believe God loves us. John Owen explained, “The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to him, is not to believe that he loves you.”¹⁹

Whom do you think is the greatest sinner in the OT? We could make a case that it is David himself, as God gave him so much. If David were alive today, every one of his psalms might be removed, canceled, and his name could never be mentioned. But David, the great sinner, is an example of the scandal of God’s great love.

God’s justice should not shock you. Hell should not shock you. Heaven should shock you. God’s grace should shock you. David is an example of God’s scandalous grace. Friend, are you shocked by God’s justice or his love? John Newton did not sing “Amazing Justice,” he sang “Amazing Grace.” “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Exod 34:6). That is the scandal of his great love, and David celebrates God’s scandalous, steadfast love in Psalm 145.

The scandal of God’s love provides security for our souls. God chastised David deeply, but he loved David eternally. “My steadfast love I will not take from him” (2 Sam 7:15). Is this not even the lesson of Psalm 89, the darkest psalm in the darkest book of the Psalter (Book 3)? “I may punish him severely, but I will not take my steadfast love from him,” God says in Psalm 89:32–33. No wonder David sings in Psalm 145 of God’s greatness as the good and gracious King. The Lord’s steadfast love was his only hope. Is it yours?

Beloved, if David could sing of God’s steadfast love, how much more can we? Jesus shows us the full extent of the Father’s love. Jesus forgave the woman at the well with her sordid sexual past, and he gave her water (as the old song goes) that “was not from the well.” Jesus filled her thirsty soul with his love.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, including the one who was to betray him. He forgave Peter, who forcefully disowned Jesus three times when Jesus needed love the most. And when it was over, Peter left everything, even Jesus, and went back to fishing. But Jesus loved Peter. “Go tell my disciples, *and Peter,*” Jesus commanded after he arose (Mark 16:7). Oh, how Jesus loved Peter. Oh, how he loves you and me, too.

Have you forgotten the languished cry of the Lord from the cross? Can

you try to hear it again for the first time? In his own dereliction at the cross, what does Jesus cry out? When hell was at its hottest for him, his heart was at its tenderest for us. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). As J.C. Ryle reflected, “As soon as the blood of the Great Sacrifice began to flow, the Great High Priest began to intercede.” Jesus returned their hatred with a volley of his redeeming love. No one can measure his greatness. He is such a gracious and good King.

Even after his death, the wonders of his love continue. In Acts 2, some of the same leaders who crucified Jesus were forgiven. The prayers of the Redeemer resulted in the redemption of his enemies. Peter declared to a gathered crowd that some hearing his voice killed Jesus: “This Jesus . . . you crucified and killed” (Acts 2:23–24). Yet, when the sermon was done, many were “cut to the heart” and believed (Acts 2:37). What love is this? He abounds in steadfast love (Ps 145:8). Richard Sibbes was right. “We have this for a foundation truth, that there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.”²⁰ God forgave those who killed his Son, and the Son willingly, joyfully died, so that they could be forgiven. “The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.”²¹ Add your voice to universal, unending praise for the good and gracious King.

The section of verses following Psalm 145:8–9 also praise the Lord as a gracious and good *King*. David celebrates God’s kingship in Psalm 145:11, 12, 13. Again and again, he sings the praise of God’s rule.

- They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom (*malkhut*). (Ps 145:11)
- They will tell of ‘the glorious splendor of your kingdom (*malkhut*):’ (Ps 145:12)
- Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (*malkhut*). (Ps 145:13)

David does not summon us to praise just anyone. He summons us to praise the King and his glorious kingdom. David’s song of Psalm 145, with overtones of the song of Moses (Exod 15:1–18), surges forward and anticipates the very song we will hear as part of the praise of the new heavens and earth:

Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations! (Rev 15:3).

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty put such kingly thoughts of God to a modern hymn setting:

King of the Ages, Almighty God;
Perfect love, ever just and true
Who will not fear You and bring You praise?
All the nations will come to You.

Your ways of love have won my heart,
And brought me joy unending.
Your saving power at work in me,
Bringing peace and the hope of glory.²²

Come, add your voice to universal, unending praise for the good and gracious *King*.

Universal, Unending Praise for Our Righteous and Kind (khasid) King (Psalm 145:17)

Finally, David exults in God's greatness as the righteous, kind, and compassionate King. In Psalm 145:14-17, God lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all things look to God, and he gives them their food at just the right time (Ps 145:15). God opens his hand and satisfies the need of every living thing (Ps 145:16). What a kind king we have. He is full of power, but he bends his power to bow to our need.

When we were at the Columbia Zoo, we walked through the farmyard area around a big barn. Alpacas and goats strained their necks over their gates begging for a bite of food. My son opened his hand wide with some pellets, and they gobbled up the food. Psalm 145:16 was fulfilled.

O worship the king, all glorious above.
And gratefully sing of his power and his love.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail, in you do we trust, nor find you to fail.
Your mercies, how tender, how firm to the end, our Maker, Defender, Redeemer,
and Friend!²³

Psalm 145 gives us unending and universal praise that fits our king. God is a great and praiseworthy king. He is a good and gracious king. And now recall from Psalm 145:17 that God is our righteous and kind king. “He is righteous in all his ways and kind (*khasid*) in all his works” (Ps 145:17).

I wonder if that word *kind* (*khasid*) could also have the sense of *faithful*. David has already used the word in Psalm 145:10, where *khasid* appears as *saints*: “All your *saints* shall bless you.” The idea carries the idea of “godly ones,” maybe even “faithful ones.” The word translated as *saints* in Psalm 145:10 appears down in Psalm 145:17 as David describes God as *kind*. With the poetic parallelism and pairing of *kind* with *righteous* in Psalm 145:17a, I think the word here could have the sense of *faithful* (NIV 2011 and CSB 2017) That is, the Lord is just and true, or righteous and faithful. David praises the Lord as the righteous and reliable King.

On the other hand, if the word should be translated *kind* as the ESV does, then David’s celebrates how the Lord is righteous and kind, or just and gracious. The Lord not only radiates with justice and righteousness, but he also overflows with kindness and graciousness (Ps 145:17).

Moreover, as David continues to extol God’s greatness in the next verse, he exults in God not only the transcendent King, but also as the King who “is near to all who call on him” (Ps 145:18). David praises God, not as a faceless immensity, or a powerful but distant king, but as the God who is near. Indeed, in the fullness of time, Jesus steps into time as Emmanuel, God with us.

COMING TO THE CONCLUSION OF PSALM 145

Are we not a room full of people who have experienced Psalm 145:19: “He hears their cry and saves them”? Friends, do you think we need saving this morning? There is an old story about G. K. Chesterton, a brilliant British writer who passed in 1936. Reportedly, the editor of *The Times* posed a question to readers and invited replies to the following: “What’s wrong with the world?” Chesterton did reply. So characteristic of Chesterton, his reply was simple and memorable. He wrote:

Dear Sir,

In response to your question of what’s wrong with the world, here is my reply.

I am.

Yours, G. K. Chesterton.²⁴

Do you see yourself as the greatest problem in your life? We all want to be king. We want to be the master and commander of our lives. We want Psalm 145 to be about us. “I extol you, myself, as King. Every day, I will celebrate me, and bless my name forever and ever.” Such estimation reveals our great problem: we want to be the king. We want self to be sovereign. We are deeply religious, each one of us. But the message of this King in Psalm 145 cuts across the cultural obsession with the sovereign self. “If anyone comes after me, he must deny himself,” King Jesus declares (Matt 16:24). Who will be your king? Psalm 145 ends with a word of hope, but also a word of warning.

The LORD preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy (Ps 145:20).

Join your voice of faith to this universal, unending song of praise to God the King. For he has set his King on his holy hill in Zion, and he will give the Son the nations of the earth as his heritage. Therefore, be warned you who see yourself as king and ruler over your life. Give homage to Jesus, God’s King, lest he be angry, and you perish. But blessed are all those who take refuge in this great God and his great King, Jesus (Ps 2:6–12).

A COMING KING

The day will come when a king greater than David will sing and fulfill Psalm 145. King David first sang Psalm 145, but his voice gives way to a greater King. God exalted David and gave him rest from all his enemies (2 Sam 7:11). But a day will come, as God promised to and through David (2 Sam 7:12–18), when God will finally exalt a Son of David *par excellence*, and give him a “name that is above every name” (Phil 1:9). On that day, “every knee [in the universe] shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10–11). And so, Psalm 145 shall be forever true, when all the saints, led by great David’s greater Son, shall bless the Lord, the King, forever and ever (Ps 145:1–2, 21) Then will come the end, when “every day” “we will always be with the Lord” (Ps 145:2; 1 Thess 4:18). Amen.

1. This article is adapted from a sermon I preached on Psalm 145 in 2021. In it, I have tried to demonstrate how canonical sensitivities to the Psalter's final form add christological depth and texture for sermons. As an adapted sermon, I have left in many sermonic stylistic elements (e.g., applications, use of the first person, time markers, exhortations) for the present article. My desire in providing such a sermon is to provide the reader with an example of how a canonical hermeneutic helpfully intersects with the preacher's homiletical task that would, in turn, help the pastor form insights and instincts for his own exegetical process. I preached Psalm 145 as part of seven-part series on the Psalter that I delivered for the congregation of Emmanuel Bible Church in Mauldin, South Carolina. For the sermon series, I selected at least one psalm from each book of the Psalter (a one message overview of the Psalms, plus Psalm 1, 2, 72, 89, 90, and 145). I used the aforementioned psalms to trace the overall melodic flow and metanarrative of the Psalter: the God who makes us sing and trust in his King. The seven-part sermon series, "The Story of the Psalter," may be accessed at SermonAudio, <https://tinyurl.com/4u5e3n79>.
2. John Calvin, "The Author's Preface Upon the Commentary to the Book of Psalms," in *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic edition (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847). Calvin continues this thought in the next sentence: "The Holy Spirit has [in the Psalms] drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated."
3. Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Psalms 1–72* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 3.
4. Of the fourteen psalms in the Psalter that retell historical events in David's life, thirteen of them appear in Books 1–2 (Pss 1–72).
5. I base the exegetical insights of this paragraph in the sermon from Psalm 72's superscription as "Of Solomon." Interpreters need to wrestle with four elements of Psalm 72: (1) the content of Psalm 72, (2) the editorial marker at Psalm 72:20, (3) Psalms 72's title, and (4) Psalms 72's placement in the Psalter and the OT. In working with these compositional factors, I take the superscript to indicate that David's son Solomon wrote this song based on his father's final words. Like many interpretative matters, scholars debate such a view, but the interpretation set forth in this sermon represents an attempt to deal with the depth dimensions of the canonical shape and shaping of the Psalter. If my interpretation is correct, then Ps 72 is a rather dramatic psalm. Solomon takes his father's dying words and puts them into a psalm, a prayer. Such a view finds some warrant in Ps 72's exegetical history. John Calvin explains Ps 72 as a prayer of David, which he "gave utterance on his deathbed [and was] reduced by his son into the form of a psalm ... Solomon ... [has] throw[n] into the style of poetry the matter to which his father gave expression." Calvin, Psalm 72.
6. Occurrences in Book 4 are Ps 104:35; 105:45; 106:1, 48.
7. Occurrences in Book 5 are Ps 111:1; 112:1; 113:1, 9; 115:18; 116:19; 117:2; 135:1, 3, 21; 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6 [2x].
8. Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 3. Gerald Wilson explains: "The clear shift from dominant lament in the first half of the Psalter to predominant praise and thanksgiving in the last half indicates that we are called to live in a real world of undeniable suffering and pain. Yet lament is not God's final word. Thus it is appropriate that the Hebrew title of the Psalter is *Tehillim*, 'Praises.'" Gerald H. Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. Philip Johnston and David G. Firth (Downers Grove: InterVarsityPress, 2005), 246.
9. Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," 246.
10. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic edition., 6 vols. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), Psalm 145.
11. James Montgomery, "Hail to the Lord's Anointed," in *Hymns of Grace*, ed. Philip Webb and Mark Rice (Los Angeles: The Master's Seminary Press, 2015), Hymn 118.
12. Since Book 2, the most explicit Davidic psalms are Psalm 86 (Book 3) and Psalm 101 and 103 (Book 4). Book 5 opens and closes with Davidic collections (Pss 108–110; 138–145) with other Davidic psalms sprinkled in between (Ps 122, 124, 131, 133). For how the psalms in Book 5 indicate the return of the messianic king, see Michael K. Snearly, "The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter," in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2013), 209–18; Michael K. Snearly, *Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter*, LHOTS (London: T&T Clark, 2016).
13. John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 499–510; Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107–145," *JSOT* 23 (1998): 77–102.

14. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Exultant: Praising God for His Mighty Works (Psalms 90–150)*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2009), 219.
15. The letters (transliterations) at the beginning of each verse in Psalm 145 correspond to the respective letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
16. The double and single brackets indicate the textual variant issues in the Hebrew manuscripts regarding the second part of Ps 145:13. The substance of Ps 145:13b appears again in Ps 145:27 and thus nothing is truly lost. The NET Bible contains the following explanatory note: "In the traditional Hebrew (Masoretic) text of Psalm 145 there is no verse beginning with the letter *nun*. One would expect such a verse to appear as the fourteenth verse, between the ... (*mem*) and ... (*samek*) verses. Several ancient witnesses, including one medieval Hebrew manuscript, the Qumran scroll from cave 11, the LXX, and the Syriac, supply the missing ... (*nun*) verse, which reads as follows: 'The Lord is reliable in all his words, and faithful in all his deeds.' One might paraphrase this as follows: 'The Lord's words are always reliable; his actions are always faithful.' Scholars are divided as to the originality of this verse. L. C. Allen argues for its inclusion on the basis of structural considerations (*Psalms 101–150* [WBC], 294-95), but there is no apparent explanation for why, if original, it would have been accidentally omitted. The psalm may be a partial acrostic, as in Pss 25 and 34 (see M. Dahood, *Psalms* [AB], 3:335). The glaring omission of the *nun* line would have invited a later redactor to add such a line." NET Bible text-critical note, Ps 145:14.
17. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms, Volume 2* (Crossway Classic Commentaries; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 373.
18. Eric Wyse and Dawn Rogers, "Wonderful, Merciful Savior," *Word Music*, 1989.
19. John Owen, *Communion with God* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1991), 13.
20. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2005), 13.
21. Fanny Crosby, "To God Be the Glory," in *Hymns of Grace*, ed. Webb and Rice, Hymn 19.
22. Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, "King of the Ages," *ThankYou Music*, 2002.
23. Robert Grant, "O Worship the King," in *Hymns of Grace*, ed. Webb and Rice, Hymn 135.
24. For a brief discussion on the source of this anecdote, see "What's Wrong with the World," *Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, 29 April 2012, <https://www.chesterton.org/wrong-with-world/>.