

A Name Like No Other

Session 2

December 10, 2023

The Majesty of God's Name

The Point: God is majestic and exalted by everything He does.

Session Passage: Psalm 138:1-8

The setting for Psalm 138. Psalm 138 is the first of the final set of Davidic Psalms (138–145). It follows the “Great Hallel,” Psalm 136, which calls on God’s people to praise Him. Psalm 138 is a psalm of David; however, its setting is at an unspecified time in his lifetime. The mention of the temple in Psalm 138:2 may imply a time near the end of David’s reign, when he planned for the building of the temple, which was fulfilled through his son Solomon.

Psalm 138:1-3

Connection to The Point: God’s name is exalted because of His love and truth.

I will give you thanks (v. 1). This introductory verse is a declaration by the psalmist that he will praise God. The singing or speaking of this psalm in public worship would have been a declaration of will by the worshipers that they would praise the Lord. Even when trials threaten the believer, expressing thanksgiving to God—for who God is, what He has done, and what He will do—is still a good way to display faith and hope in Him.

With all my heart (v. 1). In Old Testament thought, the *heart (leb)* was viewed as the seat of one’s emotions, thinking, and will. The term also encompasses the entirety of a person. The opening verses of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21), a confession of faith of the Hebrews, encouraged the people of God to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Wholehearted praise exceeds rote recitation of psalms and worship songs. Even if the situation a person faces is difficult, wholehearted praise can express trust in the love God has for His children.

Sing your praise (v. 1). The Hebrew word for *sing your praise (zamar)* is usually associated with praising the Lord. It can refer both to vocal singing or the playing of instruments (Ps. 33:2; 98:5). Singing and musical instruments often go together in providing opportunities for people to remember and praise the Lord and express their thanks to Him. Singing is mentioned hundreds of times in the Scripture, so it is a vital expression of public worship for the people of God.

The heavenly beings (v. 1). Various interpretations have been suggested as to the identity of the heavenly beings. Some have taken them to be angels, false gods, or even human rulers such as judges or kings. All these terms are possible translations of the Hebrew term *elohim*. However, the better translation is “before the gods.” This does not imply that these gods are real but serves as a polemic against those who worship false gods.

Bow down (v. 2). The Hebrew word for *bow down (shachah)* describes someone who has prostrated himself or laid flat on the ground. It is an expression of worship with humility. Those in the presence of royalty would never exceed the elevation of the king. Perhaps as David looked toward the future construction of the temple in Jerusalem, he laid himself flat on the ground in submission and surrender to the Lord, his King.

Holy temple (v. 2). Solomon built the temple after David’s death (1 Kings 6), but David planned for the temple by purchasing the land (1 Chron. 21:22-30). David may have been looking toward the place where the temple would one day reside. Another possibility is that David was speaking of God’s heavenly temple (2 Sam. 22:7).

Your name (v. 2). The *name* of the Lord represents His character and attributes. It emphasizes His power, authority, and holiness. The personal, covenant name of the Lord, *Yahweh* (usually indicated by the term “Lord”), emphasizes that He is both Creator and Sustainer. We know God and His name only because He has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity. *Yahweh* is the name by which He chose to reveal Himself to Moses and the Israelites, as well as to future generations (Ex. 3:14-15; 6:3).

Constant love (v. 2). The psalmist thanked God for His *constant love* (*chesed*), a rich word in Hebrew that has led to many different translations of this term. It describes God’s covenantal love which could be expressed as “faithful love” (Ex. 34:6), “love” (Isa. 54:8), “constant love” (Ps. 40:10), “kindness” (Gen. 19:19), “loyalty” (Job 6:14), “goodness” (Isa. 40:6), and “faithfulness” (Mic. 6:8). God is faithful to His people not because they are faithful to Him, but because He is faithful to Himself and the covenant that He has made with them.

Truth (v. 2). This Hebrew word (*emeth*) in this context emphasizes God’s faithfulness. He is characterized by certainty and dependability. God is true to His covenant and His Word. Because God is true, His Word is true and trustworthy. In this instance, David’s thanksgiving was based on God’s faithfulness to His Word.

Exalted (v. 2). To *exalt* (*gadal*) is to magnify, to make great. God has exalted His name “above everything else.” When we exalt the Lord, we proclaim His greatness above all other beings; He alone is worthy of our praise and worship.

Promise (v. 2). God declared the promise of His covenant in His Word. He revealed Himself through His Word, giving His people reason to continue thanking Him and bowing in submission to Him. Again, because God is true, His promises are true and certain.

On the day I called (v. 3). No specific occasion is mentioned as the time of David’s prayer, but he certainly faced his share of dangerous and troublesome times that could have occasioned this call.

Answered . . . increased strength within me (v. 3). As David needed the Lord and called upon Him, God in His love and faithfulness answered David, providing the strength he needed to get through whatever storm of life he was facing.

Psalm 138:4-5

Connection to The Point: God’s name is exalted because of His promises.

All the kings on earth (v. 4). At the time of David, he was probably the only king who gave proper thanks to the Lord for His covenant and His faithfulness. However, this passage and other places in Scripture proclaim that one day *all the kings on earth* will give glory to God (Ps. 22:27-28; Isa. 2:1-4; Rev. 21:24).

Give you thanks (v. 4). David had expressed his own individual desire to give thanks to the Lord, but what had started personally would spread to a communal celebration, even beyond the boundaries of Jewish territory (vv. 4-5).

Lord (v. 4). At the start of the psalm, David did not address God by name, but he did refer to His “name” (v. 2). Here David used the name *Yahweh* (indicated with “Lord”) which God had revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14-16). *Yahweh* is God’s covenant name. When describing the faithful love and truth of God (Ps. 138:2), *Yahweh* is the most appropriate name to use (Ex. 34:6-7).

What you have promised (v. 4). Literally, the Hebrew says that the kings of the earth will give thanks when they hear “the words of your mouth.” This is a reference to the promises of God’s Word. In making His covenant with Abraham, God had promised “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). This promise was ultimately

fulfilled through God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, who accomplished salvation for those who repent and believe in Him (John 3:16-18).

Sing (v. 5). Those who have heard and embraced the good news of the Word of God find themselves singing. The kings of the earth will one day sing of the Lord's actions.

Ways (v. 5). The term (*derek*) comes from a root word meaning "to tread, to walk." *Derek* is used figuratively for "a course of life" or "a mode of action." Many of God's mighty activities are described in the Great Hallel (Ps. 136). God has displayed His wonders both in creation (136:1-9) and in saving Israel through the exodus (vv. 10-26).

Glorify (v. 5). The Hebrew word (*kabod*) literally means "to be heavy or weighty." In relation to God, it describes the "weighty importance and shining majesty that accompany God's presence."¹ To praise the Lord's glory is to honor Him for who He is as well as for His gracious actions on behalf of His covenantal people.

Great (v. 5). The Hebrew word (*gadol*) means something massive or large. It can describe something great in size (like a whale [Gen. 1:21] or a river [15:18]), someone or something of great importance (Gen 12:2), great power (Ex. 14:31; 15:16), great riches (1 Sam. 17:25), or loud noises (Ex. 11:6). By describing the Lord's glory as great, David was expressing the Lord's preeminence. God is infinitely more important than anyone or anything in His created order in the sense that He alone is to be worshiped. One day all the kings of the earth will understand and acknowledge the Lord's greatness (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10-11).

Psalm 138:6-8

Connection to The Point: God's name is exalted because of His care for the humble.

Exalted (v. 6). The Hebrew word for *exalted* (*rum*) means "be lofty" or "rise up high." It can refer to literal height (Gen. 7:17), exalted glory (Ex. 15:2), or in a negative sense, haughtiness (2 Sam. 22:28). Here it is used to describe the exalted glory of God. God abides in heaven from where He looks down on the human race (Ps. 57:5,11) and observes the activities of His creation (33:13). He hears His people's prayers from heaven and answers them (34:15). Even from heaven, He can hear the prisoner's groaning (102:19-20). Another psalm summarizes this thought by saying, "Who is like the Lord our God—the one enthroned on high" (113:5, see vv. 6-7).

The humble (v. 6). The term (*shaphal*) is used to describe those who are modest and/or considered to be of low estate (social status, economic status, and so forth). The kings of the earth may think that they are great, but God is the greatest of all, and yet He sees the plight of the humble. The same God who dwells in the heavens also chooses to live among the lowly (Isa. 57:15). To be of humble spirit "shows itself in several ways: a recognition of one's sinfulness before a holy God (Isa. 6:5), obedience to God (Deut. 8:2), and submission to God (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 34:37)."²

The haughty (v. 6). The Hebrew reader would have seen irony in the choice of words in this verse. David described God as "exalted," which means "high," and then he used a word for *haughty* that also means "high" or "exalted" except in a negative sense. The term for *haughty* (*gavoah*) has the general meaning of "to be tall" or "tower high." A form of the term is used in reference to an eagle that flies high in the sky (Job 39:27), of the heavens being high above the earth (Ps. 103:11; Isa. 55:9), and of an individual who is of great height (1 Sam. 10:23). Figuratively, it describes one who has an attitude of pride or arrogance. Such an attitude is the opposite of what God desires of a person. "Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8; see Ps. 51:17). Pride occurs in the heart, where it festers (Ezek. 28:2,5,17; Ps. 131:1; Prov. 18:12; 2 Chron. 32:25). However, it also has a connection with the eyes (Ps. 101:5; Isa. 5:15), and the lips (Ps. 10:3-7).

From a distance (v. 6). Whereas God dwells with and aids those who are humble, He views the proud and haughty *from a distance*. "Evaluating each situation according to his constant love and truth (v. 2), the Lord opposes the proud and

gives grace to the humble (cf. Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). Within the Lord's domain those who are self-sufficient do not receive his help; but those who are humble enjoy his assistance." ³

The thick of danger (v. 7). Being in *the thick of danger* is to be in dangerous situation which could lead to death, such as facing a wild animal or an invading army. David faced many such dangers in his own life.

Preserve my life (v. 7). The term (*chayah*) can mean "to keep alive" or "revive." David faced the enemies of Israel (Philistines), enemies within Israel (Saul), and enemies within his own family (Absalom). Knowing the truth of Psalm 138:6 assured David that God would *preserve* him from his enemies.

Extend your hand; your right hand (v. 7). The figurative use of both *hand* and *right hand* in relation to God represent the Lord's supreme, omnipotent power and authority. The *right hand* in particular symbolizes salvation and protection.

Save (v. 7). The Hebrew term (*yasa*) refers to being safe or being rescued/freed from something. When used in relation to God, it often has the meaning of the Lord rescuing someone from human enemies (Ex. 14:30; Num. 10:9) or disasters and calamities (1 Sam. 10:19). It is also sometimes used of God delivering someone from sin (Jer. 4:14; Ezek. 37:23), death (Ps. 72:13; Isa. 45:17), and punishment (Jer. 30:11). The God who had first reached out His hand to deliver Israel in the exodus (Ex. 3:20) would again reach out His hand and save David. His knowledge of God's past saving activities (Ps. 138:3) gave David assurance that God would continue to work on his behalf for his good.

Fulfill (v. 8). This Hebrew word translated *fulfill* (*gamar*) occurs only five times in the Old Testament, all of which are in the Psalms (7:9; 12:1; 57:2; 77:8; 138:8). It means "to perfect," "to accomplish," or "to bring to fulfillment." It describes how the Lord finishes or accomplishes His work in the lives of His saints. David was expressing confidence in how God was at work in his life. God's providence, protection, and grace were perfecting David even through the trials he was experiencing.

Faithful love (v. 8). Returning to the powerful Hebrew word (*chesed*) for "constant love" (Ps. 138:2) or *faithful love*, David trusted that God's love would never fail him. David certainly failed God on several occasions, but God would not fail David. His covenantal love toward David would last forever, especially since God had established David's line forever (2 Sam. 7). God would be faithful to David because of the covenant they shared, and in the new covenant established through Jesus's blood (Luke 22:20), God continues to show His faithful love to believers in Christ.

Endures forever (v. 8). The Hebrew term (*olam*) indicates a long time. It is used of the past and the future. Regarding the future, it can have the meanings of "always," "a continuing (perpetual) existence," and "an indefinite unending existence" (eternity).

Abandon (v. 8). The term (*raphah*) means "to leave alone, forsake, or withdraw."

The work of your hands (v. 8). David ended his psalm with a request that God would hold him in the same omnipotent hands that had made him. In other words, David prayed God would not release His grip upon him. God has promised the righteous He would uphold them by His right hand (Isa. 41:10; see also John 10:28-29). Even in times of trouble, David was trusting in the faithfulness, sovereignty, and goodness of God.

1. "Glory," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [HIBD], gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 647.

2. Gary Hardin, "Humility," in HIBD, 777

3. Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73–150*, vol. 13, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 548.

