

Praise the Lord

Do we sing in church because we are happy in the Lord or to become happy in the Lord? Yes, or both, is the best answer to this question. Psalm 147 begins and ends with the exhortation for God's people to praise the Lord. We should do this when we feel joy in God but also until we feel joy in God. The reason we should sing is because "it is good to sing praise to our God", also because "it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting."

There are two themes that run through this Psalm and one thing said in this Psalm that make it fitting for God's people to praise their God. The first theme that is repeated is: God's graciousness is shown to his people. This is seen in verses 2-3, and 6. In them we are told that God does these gracious things for his people: He builds up, gathers, heals, binds up and lifts up. Notice particularly that God "gathers the outcasts" and "heals the brokenhearted" and "lifts up the humble". These kind acts foreshadow God's work in Jesus of dying for the sins of his people while they were scattered and brokenhearted. Often God uses human brokenness to bring us to humbly see our need for his forgiveness and to turn from our sins. In verse 6 we see there are two kinds of people: the humble who the LORD lifts up and the wicked whom He casts down. This same theme is also seen verses 13-14. Here we see God's promise of security, blessing, peace and abundance for his people. This also points to the spiritual blessings which are ours in Christ. In Christ we are secure. Jesus spoke of the security of his sheep, "I give to them eternal life and they will never perish". He also promises peace, "My peace I give to you", and he said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." Finally, the theme of God's tender graciousness to his people is seen in verses 19-20, where the Psalmist says that God's people have an undeserved privilege that others don't have, they know God's word, statutes and rules.

The second theme woven into this Psalm is this: God's greatness is known by his people. They know him as the gracious Savior, but also know him as the great Creator. In verses 4-5, 8-9, and 15-18 we are reminded of God's great power and understanding in relationship to creation: He determines the number of the stars and gives them all their names; He causes clouds to form, then rain to fall, then grass to grow, in order to feed the beasts and birds; He gives the snow, scatters the frost, hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs, and no one can stand before his cold. But, he also sends his word and melts them and the waters begin to flow again. The stars, the showers, and the seasons are all created and controlled by our great God's word and will.

There is one more thing revealed in this Psalm that explains why it is fitting for God's people to sing songs of thanksgiving to the LORD: God's gladness is found in his people. In verses 10-11, we see that God doesn't take pleasure in physical power, but in his people. This is astounding. God finds delight in his people. In verse 11, those who God delights in are described as "those who fear him...those who hope in his steadfast love." Normally we do not fear the one we hope in and we do not hope in the one we fear. Certainly, we don't fear one whose love is the basis of our hope. How is it possible to fear and hope at the same time in regard to the same one? The fear of God is partly the result of remembering what should have been and would have been if God treated us as we deserve instead of saving us by grace. The other basis for God's people fearing him is his love. Our greatest love and our greatest fear are always connected. The fear of God is not like the fear of provoking one who abuses you, but like the fear of grieving one who loves you. We love him because he first loved us, and we fear displeasing the one whose steadfast love is basis for our hope. God's people fear God and hope in his love because God's graciousness is shown to us, His greatness is known by us, and his gladness is found in us.