

January 14, 2009

Psalm 138 (ESV)

**I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,
for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.
On the day I called, you answered me;
my strength of soul you increased.**

**All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth,
and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
For though the LORD is high,
he regards the lowly,
but the haughty he knows from afar.**

**Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life;
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,
and your right hand delivers me.
The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.**

I love to hear a cheerful voice. Too often, we have access to too much sorrow and anger and grief. Every life has its share of these things. But most every life also has its share of blessing as well. No Christian can claim to live outside the blessings of God if we really try to understand who God is and how He cares for His creation.

Even though this psalmist was not a Christian, he sounds like a person of faith whose life is full of praise. If we stroll through the psalms, we run across all sorts of praise. Some is overwhelmingly emotional and exuberant. Some is primarily cerebral. This psalm is both.

The psalmist is full of praise, but his exultation is not groundless; he tells us why he is willing to sing of God's glory and fall down before Him in thankfulness. His joy is based on a God whom he knows as holy, almighty, faithful, responsive to His creation, glorious, transcendent and yet near, righteous, protecting, purposeful, and true to his covenant faithfulness and love. That is quite a God!

Do we know and experience Him in all these ways? It is easy to fixate on only one or two attributes of God and develop spiritual myopia. Some people see only God's justice; others see only His grace. Some imagine God primarily as King while others savor His desire to be called Father. To each his own—the world might say. But Scripture says that there is more. This psalmist has only begun to describe the magnificence of God. To have a God this big and this magnificent ought to drive us to worship and praise. He is worthy.

At the same time, let's not assume that we can ever fully define God. We can lose our joy in an attempt to see all of God in all His splendor. He's too big for that. Thankfully, however, He makes sure that He's not too big for us. Ahh, another reason for cheer!

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