

351 “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised”

As Britain passes through times of unprecedented political and constitutional tension it is tempting for us to turn away in weariness or disgust from all that is going on, and just concentrate on our own concerns. But as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ we must not do that - indeed, we do not have permission to do that - for we are appointed to be salty, light-bearing “ambassadors for Christ” (from Matthew 5.13-18 and II Corinthians 5.20a). This appointment applies not only when “the livin’ is easy” as the old song puts it, but when “the livin’” is filled instead with dangers and forebodings, be these real or imagined, as is happening right now in all the headlines. How important it is that we stand tall, firm, cheerful and involved, “ready always to [give] an answer to every man that asketh [you] a reason of the hope that is in you ...” (I Peter 3.15, KJV).

To maintain our ambassadorship in good shape we keep to the old, trusty, spiritual rhythms in our daily lives – steady Bible reading, heartfelt prayers, humble worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4.23-24), and warm Christian fellowship. For some spiritual sustenance we now turn this time to Psalm 145, to seek out afresh in its words what the Lord is telling us of Himself and His ways through His servant David.

The theme of the psalm is set from the start - “I will extol thee, my God, O king: and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised ...” (vv.1-3a, KJV).

As the psalm proceeds we see within it two simple lists. The first list involves how the Lord God in His loving provision is unconditionally good to everyone on this planet. “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies [are] over all his works” (v.9). “The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (vv.14-16).

Herein is a wonderful reminder of the gracious love and provision of Almighty God our Creator for all mankind. Sadly we have to distinguish between His nature and wishes as revealed here, and the reality on the ground in some parts of the world, where human sinfulness in its many guises ensures that God’s provision is sometimes blatantly blocked. And oh that “the eyes of all”, from v.15a, would indeed recognise that ultimately “we wait upon thee” – upon Almighty God Himself – for all our needs, rather than on any of the fashionable, God-excluding substitutes

of the modern age, such as politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs or “media personalities”.

Then we come to the second food-for-thought list to be found within Psalm 145, concerning God’s particular response to some, rather than to all. “The Lord [is] nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy” (vv.18-20). Verse 14 is also best understood in this same context of His gracious response to those who call upon Him, “The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all [those that be] bowed down”.

Of course God requires our response to His call. We are reminded from these words that He does not just shower the fullness of all His blessings on everyone, (notably the ultimate blessing of salvation by faith in His Son Jesus Christ), irrespective of human reactions to those blessings. He calls; He bids response; He enables response where wills are yielded and hearts are open; and He then blesses further in response to our cries. Those receiving His particular, extra blessings, (His nearness, His satisfying, His saving, His preserving), are the ones who call upon Him, who fear Him, and who love Him (egs., Matthew 7.7-8 & 11.28-30).

We must also take note that those who reject His gracious call face destruction at His hand (v.20b), a solemn truth that is set aside by some these days but which remains a key part of God’s holy and righteous Gospel mercies in Christ (eg., John 3.35-36 / I Timothy 2.4-6).

So we have every reason to keep to our ambassadorial tasks in good heart! – for truly, “the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (v.17). As we continue to ask for God’s mercy on this nation, we join with David in his great acclamation at the end of the psalm - “My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever!” (v.21).

Yes indeed, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised”.

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