

THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD

Psalm 145

— **Intro:** It is wonderful to be back again after five Sundays during which time Lucille and I have both spent time in the hospital. The chaplain at Mt. Hood Medical Center told me that it was not all that unusual to have both a husband and wife as patients at the same time – but it was really unusual for us! We received the best of care from our doctors, and the nurses at Mt. Hood were superb! The same was true of the other members of the staff at the Mount Hood Medical center served us, both paid and volunteer. We couldn't have received better care than they gave to us, and we will always be grateful to them. Some of the nurses even suggested that they might dedicate a room to us there in the hospital

— Lucille and I left the hospital on the same day, July 10, and we had hoped that we would both be back at church on the same day, but Lucille is not quite ready to come back yet. Ever since her last surgery she has had a terrible time with pain in her left leg. We hope that as she continues to heal the pain will finally go away, but at the present time it very severe at times. We both appreciate the way all of you have supported us by prayer, and we trust that you will continue. My recovery has been routine up to now, but my dear wife has had a terrible time. My joy in being back could only be more complete if Lucille were here, and free from pain. Her trouble has been a very trying time for both of us, and I know that many of you have shared in her trouble by your love, your prayers, the cards which many of you have sent, and the delicious meals which many of you dear ladies have prepared for us. We have been overwhelmed by your love and by your support in every way, and we are grateful to the Lord for the way you have stood with us. I am deeply grateful to for the men who have preached each Sunday I have been away. And there have been many other ways that men have stepped in to help during these weeks, and for each one I am deeply grateful. Lucille and I hope that we can be as faithful to all of you as you have been to us.

I ask for your continued prayers for Lucille, and we both hope that, with the blessing of the Lord, she will be back enjoying the fellowship which has meant so much to her through our years together with all of you.

— But we are not the only ones who are in need, and so, as we usually do, we want to spend some time together in prayer remembering all who are in need of the Lord's blessing in a physical way. Please turn to the back page of your Tableau. (Prayer.)

Message

Most of us know that physical trials not only affect us physically, but they also affect us spiritually. They are times when our faith is tried. And Lucille and I wouldn't be perfectly honest with you if we did not say that this has been a real testing time for us – and I am sure that this has been a testing time for many of you as you have prayed for us. My own surgeries have not given me the concern that I have had for Lucille. It has probably been one of the hardest times in our marriage to see how she has suffered with pain. Several times since we got home from the hospital she awakened me with her prayers as she was asking the Lord to relieve her. And yet the pain has continued. There have been many, many ways in which we have seen the hand of the Lord, and yet the seemingly endless nature of her pain has been a great trial.

As I have told you many times before, I have the practice of reading a Psalm every day. During my surgeries, and the same has been true for Lucille, I got behind in my Bible reading. But as I was able, I gradually got caught up. Those of you who are reading through on our schedule know that our morning readings just now are in the Psalms. And I have read with renewed interest of the struggles of King David as he faced the ridicule and treachery of his enemies, which seem to have been the main reason for his suffering. Again and again in his Psalms you see the struggles of his soul, which undoubtedly most of you have experienced at one time or another. They are recorded in Scripture by the Spirit of God for us so that we will know that those we look up to in Scripture as men and women of God, had their times when their faith needed strengthening because of the assault of the enemy. We don't know who the writer of Psalm 42 was, but one thing he wrote in verse 3 of that Psalm, was this:

My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

Probably one of the best known passages along this line came from the heart of Asaph who has written a number of the Psalms. This is what he said during a special time of testing in his life:

7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more?

8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?

9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (Psa. 77:7-9).

Psalm 22 was written by King David, and while it is prophetic of our Lord Jesus Christ as He suffered and died on the Cross, yet it reflects David's experience as well. Listen as I read his familiar words:

- 1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?
- 2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent (Psa. 22:1-2).

There are other passages I could mention where this same kind of note is sounded. And if this were the only reaction that we were to find in those OT passages, it would be better for us not to read the Psalms. But I have an admission to make. I have just lifted these verses out of their context. If you will go to these Psalms and read them through, you will find that in each case the Psalmist, overwhelmed with discouragement at one point, went on to find peace and blessing in the Lord through truth that brought him not only peace, but actually filled his heart with praise to God.

When I was a child growing up in Tacoma, we had a man come to our church who had written many Gospel songs. His name was Robert Harkness. He brought a message during which he played and sang some of the songs he had written. During the course of the service, he offered to write a chorus if someone would suggest a verse they would like for him to set to music. Several suggested verses, but the one he chose was Psa. 119:165,

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

He wrote a simple chorus which used the entire verse twice. If I were a singer, I would sing it for you. But the Lord used that time to impress upon my then young mind the truth of this verse which I never had really noticed before. *It is the statement of a truth, followed by a promise.* "The law" has to do with all of the Word of God. So if we love the Word, the promise is not only that we will have peace, but that nothing we go through will make us stumble or fall. It is through the Word, the revealed Word of God, that we can have peace, and that means peace which holds us whatever our circumstances might be.

So, whenever we are tried, the place to go for peace is the Word of God.

Now I will tell you a mistake that I have made more than once, and perhaps you have made the same mistake as well. *It is our tendency to try to understand God by looking at Him through our circumstances instead of looking at our circumstances through what the Bible teaches us about*

God. And the people of God in Bible times, OT and NT, were inclined to do the same thing. Over and over in Scripture we see that the one thing that God wants us to do through all of the experiences of our lives, is to trust Him. And the faith to trust the Lord through the tough times in our lives, as well as at all other times, can only come through Scripture where our minds are directed to God, and to His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Isaiah said many, many years ago, but his words are just as true to today as ever before. Listen to his words. Most of you know them by heart.

3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (Isa. 26:3-4).

In the remaining time to us in this service, I want to illustrate what I am saying by looking at a group of Psalms. We don't know what led to the arrangement of the Psalms in every case, but it is very interesting to see how the Psalms end.

Please turn with me to Psalm 140. The Psalm begins with an earnest request for help.

The same is true of Psalm 141, 142, and 143.

In Psalm 144 you see the beginning of a change as the Psalmist is beginning to see all that he has in the Lord, but he still seeks deliverance as we learn from verse 11.

However, when we come to Psalm 145 we find that the Psalmist is walking in new territory. His heart is filled with a new realization of the greatness of the Lord. I want to come back to this Psalm in just a moment.

But then notice how the Psalms end. Psalm 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150 all begin and end with the same words in English, just as they do in the Hebrew language. "Praise ye the Lord" is the translation of the Hebrew word, *Hallelujah!*

We learn from the arrangement of these Psalms that to get from the first four (140-143), you must go through 144, and into 145, and then you will come out praising the Lord with *Hallelujahs!* This does not mean that all trials are past. Nor does it lessen the blow that some trials bring. But it does mean that if we are feeding upon the Word of God, our trials will

press us closer to the heart of God instead of causing us to turn away in disappointment, and often in rebellion, from Him.

Now look with me at Psalm 145, and let us begin with verse 3. Here the Psalmist declares that the Lord is great, and that His greatness is unsearchable. This means that God is so great that it is absolutely impossible for any of us to discover how truly great the Lord really is. Man is so proud that he feels that there is nothing that he cannot know. But the Lord is completely beyond His ability to comprehend. He is so majestic, so glorious, so sovereignly powerful, so infinitely wise, that man is totally without the capacity to discover God or to know God. And those of us who have come to the knowledge of God, because He had made Himself known to us, are limited to what He has revealed of Himself in His Word, and in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But look at the Psalm and let us see some of the wonderful aspects of the greatness of the Lord.

In verse 5 the psalmist mentioned the Lord's "wondrous works," and in verse 6, His "terrible acts." There is nothing impossible with God. He even brought the universe into being by merely speaking the word.

In verse 7 we have two more features of the greatness of the Lord – His goodness, and His righteousness. Verse 9 tells us that "the Lord is good to all," and verses 14 through 16 illustrate just a part of His goodness.

"Righteousness" in verse 7 is followed by what we read in verse 17. God is always right. He never does the wrong thing with any of us. Sometimes the way is hard, but all that He does is designed not only for His glory, but for our good. By His grace we always come out of our trials better in His sight than we were when we went in.

Verse 18 speaks of the presence of the Lord – and this truly goes beyond, far beyond, what we are capable of understanding.

Contrary to what we often experience when our prayers are not immediately answered, the Lord does hear us, and deliver us. See the latter part of verse 18, and all of 19.

And finally, He keeps us. See verse 20.

This is a Psalm which we all should commit to memory, and then we need

to review it, and meditate on it, every day of our lives, but especially in times of testing. When we think about God, we need to begin with the Word. And then we will see our trials in their true light. But if we look at God through our trials, we will be cast down and discouraged and defeated. My circumstances may seem to tell me that God does not hear my prayers, nor does He care about my trials. My circumstances may make me feel that God is going to leave me at the mercy of my circumstances. But the Word tells me that He loves me, and that He is faithful to me, and that He is working through all of the circumstances of my life to fulfill His purposes in me, and that the result will be glory.

But let me close on one very important note.

Concl: Have you noticed how this Psalm begins? Listen to verses 1 and 2. Would you think that the Psalmist was happy with the Lord, or unhappy? And if the Psalmist declared that he was going to praise the Lord "every day," then what does that tell you about "every day." The Psalmist's days were just like ours: some he would like, and some he would rather skip. But knowing the Lord as He did, and being assured of His love, His goodness, His mercy, His power, and His wisdom (just to mention a few of His glorious attributes, He knew that when things are good, and when things are not good, He is always worthy of our praise.

Verse 21 confirms the way the Psalm begins, only here he is not satisfied until "all flesh" will "bless" the Lord's "holy name for ever and ever."

I will confess to you that I have a lot to learn about praising the Lord as I should, even in the midst of trials. Sometimes it is easier to do it when the trial falls on us than it is when it falls on the people who are the dearest of all to us. But let us all be praying for ourselves, and for each other, that in sunshine or rain, in happy times and in sad times, in easy times and in hard times, we will always remember that whatever our circumstances might be, there are always many reasons why we should be and must be praising our God for His greatness in our lives.

And then have you noticed how the Psalm ends? Listen to verse 21.