

Good morning everybody and welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church at Bethesda Chapel here in Galligreaves.

I see I am speaking to the visible and to the invisible church here this morning which is both a great privilege and an honour.

You know, God has not changed. Yesterday, today and forever Jesus is the same.

God has not changed. But we have.

We do not need to pretend that we have not had a real struggle, genuine fears and frequent doubts.

We do not need to hide the pain, the hurt and the heartbreak that we have gone through and are still experiencing.

We need neither to ignore nor to cover up the conflicts and uncertainties that have threatened our peace and assurance, both individually and as a fellowship of believers.

Very frequently I was in phone or zoom conversations hearing others saying how wonderful it is that we are able to take advantage of technology to share together in Coffee Zoom after the online presentation on Sundays, to pray together on Thursdays, to meet together as youth leaders and helpers, to discuss together in our weekly Monday evening deacons` meetings, to hold pastors` meetings, to watch countless internet services from different churches. Well that is all true. And it is truly wonderful.

But after one such conversation I put the phone down and said to God. This is awful. This is really awful. Because it was. And for many of us it still is. Really awful.

In Jeremiah 20:13 we read, "Sing to the Lord.

Give praise to the Lord."

But in the very next verse 20:14 we read, "Cursed be the day I was born."

A number of theologians say the text has been manipulated. That at least one of these verses has been misplaced. But it hasn't.

In his HEART Jeremiah longs to sing to the Lord and give praise to Him just like I believe each one of us does today.

But in his SOUL there is such a deep feeling of anguish that he wishes he was never born.

He is real!

Let us not pretend.

We may be mistakenly thinking that our places on the earth are booked for ever and ever. But they are not. Returning to my golf club example of last week`s message we are on the golf course somewhere between the first tee and the eighteenth green and the clubhouse is waiting for us. We are not all subject to the same conditions. We do not all have a fair wind. We do not all possess the best golfing equipment. Some of us have been or are bunkered. Some of us have been or are in the rough. Some of us are on the fairway. But not one of us can expect to be on the golf course for ever. In that sense we are all equal.

Do not let your hearts be troubled says Jesus. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; I am going there to prepare a place for you.

Do you remember the words of the song we sang on July 5?

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Look full, in his wonderful face

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of his glory and grace

This world is not our home. It is temporary; it is transient; it is momentary, it is makeshift, it is provisional, it is short-lived.

If Jesus lives in us and we in Him we will be going home to Him one day soon.

Many of us do not like taking risks

Many of us avoid taking risks

In recent months we have learned I am sure to go out of the way of risks

But there is a risk that we may take

There is a commitment that we may make

There is something that we are unable to fake: praising God.

This morning I have chosen Psalm 145 for my message. It is an amazing Psalm. It was David's last Psalm. It is one of eight acrostic Psalms each verse beginning with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet in the correct order. That is why my message carries the title "THE ABC OF PRAISE". Praising God for who He is and for what He does. It is the only Psalm with the Hebrew title tehillim meaning praises. It is a praise of David.

David, the King of Israel, the man chosen by God to lead His people

In and through his struggles with sin and doubt

In and through his battles against the enemies of the King of Kings

In and through his isolation and fight against fear and loneliness

David learned who God is and what God does.

James Boice said, "Psalm 145 is indeed a monumental praise psalm, a fit summary of all David had learned about God during a long lifetime of following hard after the Almighty."

Psalm 145 is so to speak David's crown jewel of praise. It is David's very own, David's favourite Psalm. It is a Psalm of a man of experience, of a man of sincerity, a man of calm deliberation, and of a man with an intensely warm heart.

Let us look at verses 1 and 2:

"I will exalt you, my God the King;

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever."

David is firmly resolved to praise God. Three times he says I will.

Imagine that at a wedding the presiding pastor asks the bride and the groom three times to say "I will". I think that would surprise more than one couple and probably without fail all the assembled guests. Everybody would get a little restless. Some might think it was a bad joke.

But when David says "I will" three times it is not a joke, neither is it a PR trick to enable him to gain an advantage; this is a firm commitment by David. Our wills are weak. Our wills are fickle. Our wills are often divided. But that is not so with David.

He resolved to praise God. He decided to extol God's Name. He committed Himself to praising the King of Kings.

And you and me? It is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose.

In really awful times. In a continuously difficult situation. In our struggle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms God is with us, working in us to will and to do according to His good purpose.

David speaks to and praises God directly. He speaks to God personally. He had surrendered, he had given his heart to God. He praised God without giving up.

Let's turn to verses 3 and 4.

"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;

His greatness no one can fathom.

One generation commends your works to another;

they tell of your mighty acts."

One generation shall praise your works to another: David looked for God's people to encourage each other in praise. An older generation might inspire a younger generation to praise by remembering God's mighty acts in the past. A young generation might stir praise in an older generation by declaring the fresh and new things God was doing.

Let those of us who know who Jesus is and worship Him for who He is and what He does, let us never be negligent, not one of us, in forgetting to welcome children and their parents who may not yet even know who Jesus is.

One generation shall praise your works to another.

In verses 3, 8, 9, 13b, 14 and 17 David praises Yahweh, the Lord. Strictly speaking "Yahweh" is the only "Name" of God isn't it.

The LORD is great and most worthy of praise.

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,

Slow to anger and great in mercy.

The LORD is good to all,

And His tender mercies are over all His works

The LORD is faithful to all His promises

And loving to all He has made.

The LORD upholds all who fall,

And lifts up all who are bowed down

The LORD is righteous in all His ways,

Gracious in all His works.

The LORD is near to all who call upon Him,

To all who call upon Him in truth

What a great God He is! What a great God we have!

Hallelujah!!

In these few moments this morning I have introduced us to a psalm which in Jewish practice was recited twice in the morning and once in the evening service. The Talmud, the central text of rabbinic Judaism, commends all who repeat Psalm 145 three times a day as having a share in the world to come. In one rather limited sense I think that may just be true.

For us all it is an encouragement, an exhortation and a challenge to go back home and read this Psalm through again and again for ourselves. To read it to those in our households, to read it over the telephone or in an internet conversation to a friend, to read it alone with the Lord.

We are gathered together this morning as God's church visible and invisible to praise the Name of our God for who He is and to say thank you to Him from our hearts for all He has done and is doing for us in these difficult times.

May God continue to bless us all richly. Individually and as a fellowship.

Amen.