

“Let Echoes Become Songs!”

(Psalm 145)

November 21, 2010

Pastor John Bronson

Order of Worship for November 21, 2010

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: Psalm 33 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“Blessed Be Your Name”

Overhead

“For the Beauty of the Earth”

Song # 793

“Let All Things Now Living”

Song # 794

Offering and Offertory

Special Music

Message: “Let Echoes Become Songs!” (Psalm 145)  
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song “Give Thanks”

Song # 170

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening Studies:  
Hebrews: A Letter for our Time  
5:30 – 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

October 21, 2010

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Joel and Virginia Cook, AWANA missionaries to Northern California and Northern Nevada:** for travel mercies as they visit clubs and personnel; for clear communications with their ministry partners; for solid financial and prayer support
2. **President Obama:** that the Spirit will attune his heart and mind to the truth; that he will understand his role as a servant of the people and defender of the Constitution; that humility will replace pride and thankfulness before God replace presumption
3. **Deacons and Deaconesses:** that they will know the compassions of the Lord for the needy and the stranger; that they will have the joy of the Lord in all they do; that they will have an expanding understanding of God’s call on their lives as servants for His people
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Sgt Jonathan Sweetman** (son of Catherine, brother of Bethany Sweetman):
5. **College Student of the Week: Anne Lundberg at Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA** (daughter of Mark and Susan Lundberg):

To make the Thanksgiving Feast even richer please turn with me to Psalm 145. That is what we are going to be looking at today. Let David the Psalmist of Israel instruct us. This psalm – though you cannot tell this in the English – along with Psalm 34, right after the Psalm we read as a call to worship this morning, and all of Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the whole Bible, these are each one an acrostic. In other words, every single either verse or stanza begins progressively with another of the Hebrew alphabet, all the way through. That is worth thinking about. David did not dash off the top of his head all these thoughts. Rather, in each of the three cases that I have mentioned, and certainly in others as well, what we have given to us here is the fruit of very deliberate time and effort spent carefully pulling together thoughts and remembrances and writing them down in a specific manner in order that it would convey the meaning to any who would read thereafter. So we might ask ourselves this question: When I think about giving thanks, am I thoughtful the way David was thoughtful? Should or could I write a psalm, a poem or a song of praise? Just keep that in your mind as we go on and look at what David has to say.

I am going to read Psalm 145 and you follow along in your own scriptures or just listen as I read. There are five sections or stanzas to the psalm, for the last one is really just a statement in v. 21. The first, second and fourth of those stanzas speak of our response to God; the third and fifth – and we will look at these in succession – speak about God’s response to us, and His care of us.

I want to begin by just lifting up the verbs in the psalm, the actions that are referred to. In verse 1 the actions are “extol” and “bless”. In verse 2 the verbs are “bless” and “pray”. In verse 4 the verbs are “commend” and “declare”. In verse 5 the verb is “meditate”. In verse 6, “speak” and “declare”. In verse 7, “pour forth” and “sing aloud”. (By the way, this is where I got the title of the message, “Let Echoes become Songs”: pour forth, sing aloud). Verse 10, “give thanks” and “bless”. In verse 11, “speak” and “tell”. In verse 12, “make known”. In Verse 21, “speak” and “bless”. Isn’t there a lesson here, a lesson for God’s people! How are we to respond to God? [We are to respond] with our lips being filled and spilling forth into the world around us all of the truths that we know about Him, all the goodness that He has done for us. But of God this is what David says – and [here] these are the verbs and [adjectives] from the two stanzas that talk about God. God is “gracious”, “merciful”, “slow to anger”, and “abounding in love”. God is “good to all”. In verse 13, which I think really ought to be part of the fifth stanza, David speaks of God’s “enduring reign”. In verse 14, “the Lord upholds all who are falling” – think about that, “...the Lord upholds all who are falling”. He “raises up all who are bowed down”. In verse 15 He “gives food”. In verse 16, He “...opens [His] hand” and “satisfy...desire”. In verse 17 He is righteous and kind. In verse 18 He is near. In verse 19 He fulfills desire and hears and saves. In verse 20 He preserves, but He also will destroy. So now we have a little picture of the action of God to reflect upon.

What words would describe the way we remember God? As we ourselves anticipate giving thanks to Him, what list of verbs would we want to put to use in thinking about our God? We will look a little bit more at what David has to say. We will move through [the psalm] verse by verse. Beginning with verse 1, David begins with a general statement, an introductory declaration that he will extol and he will bless the name of God always and forever. David begins with a promise. It is a promise of unceasing devotion and unlimited commitment. What follows is how David proposes to fulfill the promise. That is the rest of the psalm.

Verse 2: this is what he says: every day I will bless you. He will not just do it on the Sabbath day, the day of rest. He will do it on the work days, the days when the many pressures of ruling are pressing in upon him. Extolling and blessing God, blessing the name of God, is not to be limited by matters of convenience or of busyness. The greatness of God and the character of God – His name - are not to be set aside from our consciousness or our awareness, or diminished in any way by the practical demands of daily life. Every day! It is no compliment to us that we often choose to be too busy even on Sunday to pray, bless and thank God. And rarely do any of us give a whole day to the Lord.

Furthermore, giving praise, extolling God, is not a matter of emotion; it is not governed by the emotional state of the believer. This takes us back to the literary quality of the psalm. The psalm was not written, could not have been written, as an impulse, a getting up and saying, “I feel great this morning; I am going to write God a psalm.” I was thinking about this. As you can imagine, my experiences with Nini have dominated my awareness over the past while. I was thinking about this in Menlo Park in my mother-in-law’s home. I was thinking on the morning after Nini’s surgery. Tuesday, the day of her surgery, had been a very long day: we arose at 4:00 am as we normally do, and had to be at the hospital by 5:00 am and then the day just goes on as you wait and wait and wonder what’s happening in there. As it turned out, Nini’s mother on that same day was developing bronchitis: if she dies, she will die of pneumonia, that is a given with the condition of her health. She coughed through the whole night before. So we had the anxiety of anticipating this surgery in the morning and the difficulty of Nini’s pain and then her mother’s coughing in the room next to us. We were trying to get ready for the day. The day after that, at Tuesday’s end I was exceedingly tired at least as much from the emotional stress as the physical. On Wednesday morning I found that I did not feel like praying. I woke up, I lay in my bed, and I wondered about that. I was mentally ready to get up and start the day because I am in the habit of getting up and starting the day: that is what I do. But I had no emotions. I had no impulse of eagerness for the day, no psalm of gladness, no upwelling of thanksgiving for what I already knew had been a successful surgery. I had no anticipation of going home and taking up and recreating a normal life.

So I opened my heart to the Lord about it and I reflected: this is what distinguishes faith from other dimensions of the soul’s life. Faith is determined by its object, not by the person who is exercising the faith. We are not inclined to operate by faith pure and simple. We need help. We will look in a moment to Hebrews 10:25. We live by faith “supported”. We live by faith “supplied”, faith nurtured by secondary experiences and encouragements. This is what we are told in Hebrews 10:25. It says don’t neglect getting together with others of the body of Christ. Why? So you can encourage one another to love and good deeds. Do you know how I would have responded on Wednesday morning if my wife had walked through the door of that bedroom, or any one of my children, or any one of you, and you had said, “John, what good news; your wife has been remarkably healed through the surgeon’s [skill].” I would have not stayed inert upon the floor. My mind would have leapt instantly, becoming alive to the reality of your grace, and I would have been greatly encouraged in my faith, and giving thanks and praise.

We have need of the supplements for the strengthening of our faith. But it is important for us to remember that these supplements are not faith itself. We are told this in Romans 8:24-25. There Paul speaks of hope, but the words are directly applicable to faith. Faith and hope are two sides of the same coin. This is what Paul says, *“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”* We are saved by grace through faith. Hope is the same as faith here. Paul says we do not hope for what we see. What he means is that the tangible presence of what is seen fundamentally alters the dynamic of the soul. How is this? Well, faith in its pure or proper sense is acting on the promise of God alone. Ultimately, faith is not even in the promise; ultimately faith is in the One who gave the promise, so that the eye of the heart needs to be focused on the promise giver, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Him that we find our strength. It is in Him that we find the wisdom that we need to cope with the adversities and diversities of life, to silence the distractions and to give our minds and our spirits and our hearts the focus that is necessary to persevere when all other supplements are absent. We do not see God, but we have faith in Him. We have faith in His promises. The obedience of faith is to act, trusting God. When David said he would give praise daily, he was saying he would take up the promises of God by faith, not because he was sensing or enjoying the thrill of God’s power pulsing through him, or because he felt a song of joy rising up within him, but because he remembered the promises of God and trusted that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. The joy and the song follow the remembering; indeed, it is in remembering that we call up the joy and give thanks.

Moving on to verse 3: David there says “great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. His greatness is unsearchable”. The English Standard Version translation indicates that there is a break, by the way, right here between this verse and the next. This is the first of the paragraph breaks or stanza breaks. Some Bibles show this, others don’t. The breaks are these: v. 7, v. 9, v.12, and v.20 with v.21 a closing statement. We can see therefore that verse 3 is the conclusion of the introduction. David will extol and bless the name of God the king. He will concentrate on the greatness of the Lord, and he says that this greatness is unsearchable. Now when he says it is unsearchable he obviously is not meaning to tell us that it is obscure or hidden from view. If that was his point then he would have absolutely nothing to say; it would be unknowable. Rather what he is saying is that we can know some things but not all things about God’s greatness. We might say it this way. We might say that the distant stars and galaxies are unreachable, there is no way we can get to them, but that does not mean that we do not know that there are there. Indeed, we can know a fair amount about them simply by studying the light radiation and frequencies that come from them. Hebrews 11:3 says this, “*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*” [It is] by faith, so that when I stand out [side] and look at the heavens, I look at the stars that are scattered across the sky: by faith I know that these were made by God. Indeed we now know from our telescopes that there are more galaxies in the heavens than there were even visible stars [in David’s day]; by faith I know that these things were made by God. Just because we cannot know everything about those stars doesn’t mean that what we do know about them is a guess. It is not a guess. We can know some things truly without knowing everything completely. The same is true in our knowledge of God. We cannot know God. It is impossible to know God. He is a being of infinite dimensions. But we know some things about God and we know them truly. We have no doubt about them at all.

Verse [4] begins the eight line stanza. [In this stanza] the voice of the psalmist moves back and forth between David’s “I” and the “generations” or “they”. Notice how it is written. He says in the fourth verse, “*One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might...*” [We have here] “I”, “they”, “I they”: David refers first to the generations speaking to one another, passing on the record and the praise of God’s mighty acts. What would David have thought about? Well, David would probably have thought about the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan, the mind numbing events at Mt. Sinai when the Law was given. The passing on of the record was commanded by God. You can see it in Deuteronomy 6, in Deuteronomy chapter 11; you can also see it in Exodus chapter 20. Fathers were to instruct their sons and those sons were to instruct their sons. It is important for us to recognize that God’s grace was Israel’s identity. Who are we? Oh, we are the people who have been saved by God. Who are we? Oh, we are the people who have been led by God. Who are we? We are the people blessed by God and led by God. Who are we? We are the people who are cared for by God. When Israel forgot, when Israel stopped passing on that record, soon Israel forgot both God’s identity and her own. She fell quickly into idolatry.

We should pause and consider: What have I, what have we, received that we want to pass on? What have I received from the generation before me, and what do I want to pass on to the generation after regarding God’s grace in my own life?

In the fifth verse seemingly in response to the notion of one generation passing on to the next, David says that he will meditate both on God’s works, which were called wondrous, and on the glorious splendor of His majesty. We need to pause here. What David proposed to do here is something we rarely if ever do. What does it mean “to meditate”? To meditate is not to grab a quick moment of inspiration. To meditate is to remain fixed and focused. Indeed it is to mull over or to slowly chew, like a cow its cud. More than simply examining something as a scientist does, to meditate is to take up the object of thought and not only seek to evaluate its inherent qualities, but to reflect on the implications of what I am thinking about for the whole of the rest of my life. In the hurriedness of our lives we do not often meditate. We tend to skip quickly from thing to thing and we tend to assume that we are

meaningfully engaged in life because we are busy. We assume as well that the course of action we are pursuing will get us to where we hope to arrive, and if it doesn't, well, at least we were busy! Now and then we will tell each other to slow down and smell the daisies. However, nobody thinks that smelling daisies is going to tell us anything very helpful about the nature of the journey we are on, or about the nature of the destination to which we are headed, or about the nature of the world we actually live in, or about the nature of the God that we worship. We are often too busy to give thought to any of these. There is a consequence that flows out of this: Don't we find that sometimes we work hard in order to live well and then find out that we have ended up working instead of living, moving with preoccupied minds to an uncertain conclusion, hoping it will be all right. But the scriptures say, “Stop, be quiet, and meditate on the truths of God.”

What David says is that he will meditate on the wondrous works and the glorious splendor of God's majesty. What are wondrous works? One of my favorite [scenes] is in Judges 13:15-20. I love this story because it is just so riotously funny, in a sense. Manoah was the future father of Samson the judge. An angel had come and spoken to Manoah's wife, informing her that she was going to have this remarkable child. She comes and tells Manoah. Manoah says, who was this guy? She says, I don't know who he was. So they have a second meeting, and now Manoah is looking at this angel, and this is what [the scripture says]: *“Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, ‘Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you.’ And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, ‘If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord.’ For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord. And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, ‘What is your name, so that when your words come true, we may honor you?’ And the angel of the Lord said to him, ‘Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?’ So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching.”* You have got to get this right in your mind. Here they are, a couple of peasants, they are watching, and here is this angel, and they sense something about this guy that isn't normal, sort of off the edge. They put their offering on the rock and what we are told is that the angel takes his staff and [touches] the rock and the entire offering goes up into a cloud [of smoke], and so does the angel! How would you respond? You would think, Wow! Wondrous! But notice, the angel had already said, “My name”, “My name”. In the Bible what He is talking about is “my character”, who I am. Don't get trapped in the small things when the great thing is standing right in front of you. The great thing is God Himself. He wants us to meditate upon Him, who He is, what He has said, what he does.

God's wondrous works make you gasp. They prompt you to fall on your face. They transcend the limits of your understanding. They alter your sense of what is real. They remind you that God is not bound by the boundaries that limit us, and therefore they encourage us and give us hope. Every baby is a source of wonder. Every human face is a source of wonder. Every person converted from sin and death to life eternal is a wonder! We need to have our minds changed.

David said he would meditate on the glorious splendor of God's majesty. I think we face an even greater difficulty in grasping or following David here. There are in fact many wonders in the world and we encounter them now and then even if we rarely meditate on them. The effects of sin, both personal and general, lie as a thick dust over everything, muting the colors and texture of life so that we are rarely pulled out of our narrow preoccupations with getting and doing. Every now and then we catch a glimpse of beauty or goodness and we are reminded that the world is God's creation and we are His creatures. Sunsets, cloudscapes, sunrises: when I had the opportunity to be up in Ken and Lorna's “Well-House”, there is a place up there by Little Grass Valley Reservoir where the trees have got to be between 250 and 300 feet tall. And when I walk there, I feel as if I am in a cathedral that God has created. It is a place of such glory and the trees soar up to heaven and the ground is covered with this soft loam and these beautiful plants are growing, and you just feel like worshiping God because His sense of nearness is so strong in the midst of such splendor: glory, beauty. It is a wonderful place to go! Majesty, however, is another matter. This is less general, it is more particular in its manifestation. Majesty has as its core the presence of great power.

However, power alone can be awesome, like a volcano, but not majestic. Power must be joined to a form of excellence which has inherent goodness in it, and includes the qualities of both kindness or mercy and justice in order that there would be majesty. It is often associated with nobility of spirit. This is why kings were supposed to be majesties. David says of God’s majesty that it has glorious splendor. There are few in the world today who have majesty.

For the Hebrews the concept or notion of glory was great weight, massivity, an overwhelming sense of presence. Splendor is like the radiance of the sun or a super-nova exploding against the infinite depths of black space, or perfection amidst all the broken forms and pieces of lesser things, as a perfect bud amidst faded blooms, or a polished gem amidst uncut and unpolished stones, or perhaps a laughing child amidst those wearied and hardened by sin: glory. Think for a moment: what is it in the world that grabs your heart and lays hold of your imagination, that stirs your soul in a longing for what is good and true and lovely? Seeing and remembering God’s wondrous acts are disciplines of the soul. They are part of the obedience of faith. Could you write words of praise and thanks, if you took the time to notice and to try?

In verse 6, David does not think of himself as an isolated individual. Notice again what it says in verse 6: “*They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.*” There is this rhythm: I-they, I-they. David thinks of himself as a part of the generations of the chosen people of God: fathers, sons, sons, sons. His meditations include things of which they have spoken through long-stretching years. He is with them, a part of their remembering and worshiping. They shall speak, he says, I, he says, shall declare. Take a minute and consider the words of this hymn. We rarely every sing it. I think I have tried it a couple of times. It is “For All the Saints”.

“For all the saints who from their labors rest, who Thee by faith before the world confessed, Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed: alleluia, alleluia!”

(How many can take a blank piece of paper and write down the name of fifty saints that have affected your lives for which you give thanks to God?)

“For all the saints thou wast their Rock, their fortress, their Might, thou their Lord, their Captain in the well fought fight, . . .”

“O may Thy soldiers faithful true and bold, fight as the saints who nobly fought of old, . . .”

Some of you who are in the Constitution Class know that a huge infamy has been perpetrated on the American people, that men and women who were deeply committed in the Christian faith and stood fast upon the Rock of Jesus Christ have been systematically misrepresented and presented to us as if they did not believe. How can they get away with that? Because we don’t know. Because we have allowed ignorance to replace knowledge. Because remembrance has been forgotten and we let new voices speak false things and we don’t know how to say they are wrong. Someday all who believe will be gathered in one place. Revelations 4 and 5 tell us where that place will be. It will be at the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ, in heaven. And there, all the generations through all the reaches of time will be gather in a single, incredible assembly saying “Glory to the One Living God, and to His Son, the Lamb of God Who died for our souls.” Let me emphasize that: for our souls. Why our? Because it is the purpose of God through His Son Jesus Christ to unite all who believe into the one body of Jesus Christ, and the “I” will become blended into the glorious “We are the people of God! And He is our Savior and King forever!” That is remembrance, and that is praise. As you prepare to worship God on this coming Thursday, perhaps you could have spent some time meditating and written something of your own psalm or song of thanksgiving and praise and share it with the others who will be around your table, that He will be glorified.

May the Lord’s grace rest upon each one; may you go in peace with thankful hearts. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What prevents me from writing a psalm of praise, thanks or petition to the Lord?
  
2. How does praise differ from thanksgiving? How might praise become a larger part of your prayer life?
  
3. If you were to give a record or history of God’s acts in your life for the next generation, what would you include?
  
4. How might meditation be a benefit in your life?
  
5. Have you experiences of wonder? Have you experiences of majesty?
  
6. Other perhaps than reciting the Lord’s Prayer, how often do you use plural pronouns when praying to God? Why is this a weakness in prayer? How might this be changed?
  
7. Do you think God is grieved by the destruction of the environment? Do you think God is pleased when even non-believers enjoy good harvests and peaceful lives?
  
8. Can you make a list of God’s general blessings, which you enjoy along with everyone else in your community and nation, God’s covenantal blessings which you enjoy along with all who are saved, and God’s personal blessings which you enjoy particularly as your own?
  
9. Which troubles you more, that God will destroy the wicked or that the wicked prosper and cause much grief in the world?