

God cares for us

Psalm 147

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It is about time to close the books of the year 2017. What have we accomplished? What went wrong? What troubles did we face? How has God blessed us? If we look back, we have reasons for sadness, for gladness, and reasons for praising God.

And what can we expect of the New Year 2018? Ups and downs, ofcourse. We worry about politics in Europe; we worry about our work maybe; our health and the health of those we love. Will God keep us safe?

The one who carried us through 2017 and who carries us in his arms into 2018, is our Lord God. That is why we can be optimistic. He is always with you, taking care of you - even when things do not seem to go right. This why Psalm 147 says that He is worthy of our praise.

Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! (Psalm 147.1)

Before turning to particular reasons for praising God, the psalm starts with considering the delightfulness of praise itself.

Praising God is pleasant; it is liberating because it turns our eyes away from ourselves, and from our problems, even from this world, to God.

Let us turn our mind and our heart to God. He is worthy of our praise!

1. God is our helper and our mighty Creator

Why is God worthy of our praise? Psalm 147 is clear about this. It is because:

The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. (Psalm 147.2)

The fact that this psalm praises God for bringing Israel back from exile suggests that it was composed when Israel began to return from its exile in Babylon; this was around the year 500 before Christ.

The people of God had been in deep problems for 70 long years; enemies had beaten them and taken over their land, destroyed their temple, even taken them into exile. Where was God?

In Babylon, in that strange land, the people of God must often have been staring at the heavens, looking at the millions of stars in the sky. Where is God? The answer in the Psalm:

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. (Psalm 147.4)

Does the psalmist remind the Jews in Bbaylon of the promise of God to Abraham, that his posterity would be blessed and as numeorus as the stars in the sky?

The stars reminded Israel of Gods promises. But the same stars of heaven, the sun and the moon were seen as gods by the Babylonians.

The Creator of heaven and earth laughs about all gods. He is the one who created the stars and gave them a name. If we want to know the future, it is useless to gaze at the stars. They are just created blocks of stone or burning gas... No need to take those Babylonian gods seriously.

God laughs about all false religions, even about atheism. All human inventions. Only our Lord God is great and mighty and only He knows all things.



Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. (Psalm 147.5)

But sometimes you hear people argue: ‘Such a big God, why should he be interested in my small affaires?’

Derek Kidner, a British Old Testament scholar, wrote a commentary on the Psalms and he has some wisdom for us:

The one who marshals the host of stars is certainly able to solve the problems of his people. This Psalm turns upside down the familiar argument that in so great a universe our small affairs are too minute to notice. This majestic Creator cares about us. [Psalms 73-150, (1975, 2008), p. 523]

The Psalmist makes this clear by pointing to God’s provision for us.

Sing to the LORD with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp.

He covers the sky with clouds;
He supplies the earth with rain
and makes grass grow on the hills.
He provides food for the cattle
and for the young ravens when they call. (Psalm 147.7-9)

This great God is our God. He made sun, moon and stars, and He ensures that nature actually exists for you - to give you food and drinks. Is that not the best proof that He really cares for you?

God cares about your small problems, and He is powerful to help. This Creator of heaven and earth promised to be with you always and that includes 2018. So stop worrying and trust in Him.

2. God is the keeper of his people

The Psalm rejoices in how this great Creator cares for his people – both collectively and also individually. He builds up the city that was destroyed; He cares for the walls of the city; He cares for the Church. But He also cares for his people individually.

See how tenderly God ‘heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds’. (Psalm 147.3).

Church father Cassiodorus (c. 485–c. 585), Roman statesman, writer and later a monk, says:

Much like a medical doctor, God binds up the battered hearts of the penitent with the bandages of his love in order to restore them to their original condition. (Exposition of the Psalms 146.3)

Have you had a difficult year? God comes to you – to heal your wounds. To bless you and care for you. The powerful God who created the universe – He cares for you. ‘He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds’.

This reminds us of Isaiah 61.1-4, which was probably written about the same time as Psalm 147:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of joy instead of mourning.
They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

God comes to heal those who are devastated and to restore them fully. And Jesus claims that He actually is the one fulfilling these words. To Him all power in heaven and on earth is given, to sustain His own people. To sustain you. Yes you.

You may think that the powerful God likes powerful people, successful people. That He is close to people who are strong. “Look at me, why would he support me...” The opposite is true.

The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. (Psalm 147.6)

Not the powerful, but the humble may expect God’s support in 2018. This idea we see throughout the Holy Scriptures.



If presently you feel less than able to cope with issues in life, you qualify for God's help. He sustains the humble.

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of the warrior; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. (Psalm 147.10-11)

The strength of a horse, or the strong legs of a man, these are words about warfare. But warfare, powerplay, that is not how we save ourselves from our problems.

Weapons, or clever tricks, or strength, will not help us. What helps us – is God himself.

If 2017 was not so good, will 2018 be better? Who knows. But God promises to sustain the humble. Humble people are those who fear Him and who put their hope not in their own strength, but in the unfailing love of God.

No wonder the Psalmist encourages the people of God to praise Him.

Extol the LORD, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion.
He strengthens the bars of your gates
and blesses your people within you.
He grants peace to your borders
and satisfies you with the finest of wheat. (Psalm 147.12-14)

We get a very idyllic picture here of the future of the people of God, of their city Jerusalem, of peace, and of a great meal with the finest of wheat. This promise goes far beyond what we will ever experience on earth; the ancient church therefore read in these words the promise of eternity with God.



Many of the Church Fathers think that the 'finest of wheat', promised in this psalm is a pointer to the eternal meal we will celebrate in heaven, but also to our present Holy Eucharist.

In our Holy Eucharist today God again comes to us, in our present world, to give us a fortaste of the eternal meal.

He comes to you today to give you strength and help and courage as we enter into the future of 2018.

3. Through the Word

How did God create our world? And how does he sustain the universe? How does he sustain us, small people? The last part of the Psalm focuses on the Word of God.

He sends his command to the earth, his word runs swiftly. [...] He sends out his word and melts the snow. He makes his wind blow and the waters flow. (Psalm 147.15, 18).

The powerful word of God is clearly personified here. God speaks, and his Word becomes an effective agent of God. That is why some see a Trinitarian aspect in this Psalm: it speaks of God, of His Word, and even of the Spirit, or the Wind of God – in verse 18: ‘He makes his wind blow and the waters flow’.

And just as God sustains his creation through His Word, so He also sustains his people through his Word. Read Psalm 147.19-20:

He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel.
He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws.

Here we see how unique our relationship with God is. We have his word in our hand, in our mind, in our heart. And this word is incarnated and personified in our Lord Jesus Christ.

God gave his Word to his people, his written word that guides us and helps us. He even came personally to his people, in his eternal Word, Jesus Christ who came to us with Christmas.

Because we have celebrated Christmas, we can look now with confidence to the future. Our God came to us; He cares for us. Through his own Son He sustains us. He is with you, in the year ahead of us.

Conclusion

What a reason to praise him! Let us therefore with our mouth testify to the goodness of God! But not only with our words.

St Augustine in his Commentary on the Psalms (146.1), writes:

Your tongue gives praise for a while; your life should give praise to God all the time.

Not only with our words, with our whole life we praise our Lord. With his love He covers and forgives what was wrong in the year behind us. And with his outstretched arms, He welcomes us into 2018, without fear. “See I am with you all days of your life”.

Your eternity is secure. The eternal meal is awaiting you.

And while we are pilgrims on the way, on the road with God, God the Father gives his Word to us, Jesus Christ, to heal our broken hearts.

And the Spirit of God enables us to hold on to Him, to love God and to put our hope in his unfailing love.

May God bless us all in the year ahead of us!

+ Amen