

Exposition on Psalm 145

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of praising God for His greatness, faithfulness, and mercy, and encourages believers to trust in God's promises and acknowledge His righteousness and holiness.

Scripture: Psalm 144:1-145, Romans 1:20

Topics: "Praise And Worship", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the importance of praising God continually, recognizing that praising David in the Psalms ultimately refers to praising Christ Himself. He emphasizes the need for daily praise and blessings to God, regardless of circumstances, as a way to transition from strength to strength. Augustine highlights the beauty and greatness of God's works, encouraging every generation to praise and tell of His excellence. He also delves into the balance of God's mercy and severity, urging believers to trust in His faithfulness and righteousness in all His works.

Transcript

1. ...The title is, Praise, to David himself. Praise to Christ Himself. And since He is called David, who came to us of the seed of David, yet He was our King, ruling us, and bringing us into His kingdom, therefore Praise to David himself is understood to mean, Praise to Christ Himself. Christ according to the flesh is David, because He is the Son of David: but according to His Divine Nature He is the Creator of David, and Lord of David. I will exalt You, my God, my King; and I will bless Your Name for the age, and age upon age Psalm 144:1. You see that the praise of God is here begun, and this praise is carried on even to the end of the Psalm....Now then begin to praise, if you intend to praise for ever. He who will not praise in this transitory age, will be silent when age upon age has come. But lest any one should in any otherwise also understand what he says, I will praise Your Name for the age, and should seek another age, wherein to praise, he says, Every day will I bless You Psalm 144:2. Praise then and bless the Lord your God every day, that when single days have passed, and there has come one day without end, you may go from praise to praise, as from strength to strength. No day shall pass by, wherein I bless You not. And it is no wonder, if in your day of joy thou bless the Lord. What if perchance some day of sorrow has dawned on you, as is natural in the circumstances of our mortal nature, as there is abundance of offenses, as temptations are multiplied; what, if something sad befall you, a man; will you cease to praise God? Will you cease to bless your Creator? If you cease, you have lied in saying, every day, etc. But if you cease not, although it seem to you to be ill with you in the day of your sorrow, yet in your God it shall be well with you....

2. Great is the Lord, and very much to be praised Psalm 144:3. How much was he about to say? What terms was he about to seek? How vast a conception has he included in the one word, very much? Imagine what you will, for how can that be imagined, which cannot be contained? He is very much to be praised. And of His Greatness there is no end; therefore said he very much: lest perchance thou begin to wish to praise, and think that you can reach the end of His praises, whose Greatness can have no end. Think not then that He, whose Greatness has no end, can ever be enough praised by you. Is it not then better that as He has no end, so neither should your praise have end? His Greatness is without end; let your praise also be without end....

3. For how great things besides has His boundless Goodness and illimitable Greatness made, which we do not know! When we lift the gaze of our eyes even to the heaven, and then recall it from sun, moon, and stars to the earth, and there is all this space where our sight can wander; beyond the heavens who can extend the eyesight of his mind, not to say of his flesh? So far then as His works are known to us, let us praise Him through His works. Romans 1:20 Generation and generation shall praise Your works Psalm 144:4. Every generation shall praise Your works. For perhaps every generation is meant by generation and generation....Did he perchance mean to imply two generations by that repetition? For we are in this generation sons of God, we shall be in another generation sons of the Resurrection. Scripture has called us sons of the Resurrection; the Resurrection itself it has called Regeneration. In the regeneration, it says, when the Son of Man shall be seated in His Majesty. Matthew 19:28 So also in another place; For they shall not marry, nor be given in marriage, for they are the sons of the Resurrection. Luke 20:35-36 Therefore generation and generation shall praise Your works....And they shall tell out Your excellence. For neither shall they praise Your works, save in order to tell out Your excellence. Boys at school are set to praise, and all such things are set before them to be praised, as God has wrought: a mortal is set to praise the sun, the sky, the earth; to come to even lesser things, to praise a rose, or a laurel; all these are works of God: they are set, they are undertaken, they are praised: the works are lauded, of the Worker they are silent. I desire in the works to praise the Creator: I love not a thankless praiser. Do you praise what He has made, and art silent of Him who made? In that which you see, what is it that you praise? The form, the usefulness, some virtue, some power in the things. If beauty delight you, what is more beautiful than the Maker? If usefulness be praised, what more useful than He who made all things? If excellence be praised, what more excellent than He by whom all things were made?...

4. They shall speak of the magnificence of the glory of Your Holiness, and shall record Your wondrous deeds Psalm 144:5. And the excellence of Your fearful works shall they speak of: and Your greatness, they shall relate it Psalm 144:6. The remembrance of the abundance of Your sweetness they shall pour forth Psalm 144:7: none but Yours. See whether this man, meditating on Your works, has turned aside from the Worker to the work: see whether he has sunk from Him who made, to the things which He made. Of the things which He has made, he has made a step up to Him, not a descent from Him to them. For if you love these more than Him, you will not have Him. And what profit is it to you to overflow with the works, if the Worker leave you? Truly you should love them; but love Him more, and love them for His sake. For He does not hold out promises, without holding out threats also: if He held out no promises, there would be no encouragement; if He held out no threats, there would be no correction. They that praise You therefore shall speak also of the excellence of Your terrible deeds; the excellence of that work of Your hands which punishes and administers discipline, they shall speak of, they shall not be silent: for they shall not proclaim Your everlasting kingdom, and be silent about Your everlasting fire. For the praise of God, setting you in the way, ought to show you both what you should love, and what you should fear; what you should seek, and what you should shun; what you should choose, and what you should avoid.

The time of choice is now, the time of receiving will be hereafter. Let then the excellence of Your terrible things be told. Unlimited as it is, though of Your greatness there is no end, they shall not be silent about it. How shall they recount it, if there is no end of it? They shall recount it when they praise it; and because there is no end of it, so of His praise also there shall be no end.

5. The remembrance of the abundance of Your sweetness they shall pour forth. O happy feasts! What shall they eat, who thus shall pour forth!...So eat, that you may pour forth again; so receive, that you may give. Thou eatest, when you learn, you pour forth again, when you teach, you eat, when you hear, you pour forth again, when you preach, but that you pour forth, which you have first eaten. Finally, that most eager feaster John, to whom the very table of the Lord sufficed not, unless he leaned on the Lord's breast, and of his inmost heart drank in divine secrets; what did he pour forth? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. John 1:1 How is it that it suffices not to say, Your remembrance; or, the remembrance of Your abundance? Because, what avails it if it be abundant, yet not sweet? So also it is annoying if it be sweet but too little.

6. ...By pouring forth this, His preachers shall exult in His righteousness not in their own. What then have You done unto us, O Lord, whom we praise, that we should be, that we should praise, that we should exult in Your righteousness, that we should utter forth the remembrance of the abundance of Your sweetness? Let us tell it, and, as we tell, let us praise.

7. Merciful and pitiful is the Lord; long-suffering, and very merciful Psalm 144:8. Sweet is the Lord to all, and His compassions reach into all His works Psalm 144:9. Were He not such as this, there would be no seeking to recover us. Consider yourself: what did you deserve, O sinner? Despiser of God, what did you deserve? See if anything occur to you but penalty, if anything occur to you but punishment. You see then what was due to you, and what He has given, who gave gratis. There was given pardon to the sinner; there was given the spirit of justification; there was given charity and love, wherein you may do all good works; and beyond this, He will give you also life everlasting, and fellowship with the angels: all of His mercy....Hear the Scripture: I will not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn, and live. Ezekiel 33:11 By these words of God, he is brought back to hope; but there is another snare to be feared, lest through this very hope he sin the more. What then did you also say, thou who through hope sinnest yet more? Whenever I turn, God will forgive me all; I will do whatsoever I will. Say not then, Tomorrow I will turn, tomorrow I will please God; and all today's and yesterday's deeds shall be forgiven me. You say true: God has promised pardon to your conversion; He has not promised a tomorrow to your delay. Sirach 5:7

8. Sweet is the Lord to all, and His compassions are over all His works. Why then does He condemn? Why does He scourge? Are not they whom He condemns, whom He scourges, His works? Plainly they are. And will you know how His compassions are over all His works? Thence is that long-suffering, whereby He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good. Matthew 5:45 Are not His compassions over all His works, who sends rain upon the just and upon the unjust? In His long-suffering He waits for the sinner, saying, Turn ye to Me, and I will turn to you. Zechariah 1:3 Are not His compassions over all His works? And when He says, Go ye into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41 this is not His compassion, but His severity. His compassion is given to His works: His severity is not over His works, but over your works. Lastly, if you remove your own evil works, and there remain in you nought but His work, His compassion will not leave you: but if you leave not your works, there will be severity over your works, not over His works.

9. Let all Your works, O Lord, confess to You, and let Your saints bless You Psalm 144:10. How so? Is not the earth His work? Are not the trees His work? Cattle, beasts, fish, fowl, are not they His works? Plainly they too are. And how shall these too confess to Him? I see indeed in the angels that His works confess to Him, for the angels are His works: and men are His works; and when men confess to Him, His works confess to Him; but have trees and stones the voice of confession? Yes, verily; let all His works confess to Him. What do you say? Even the earth and the trees?...But there arises the same question in regard of praise, as in regard of confession. For if earth and all things devoid of sensation therefore cannot confess, because they have no voice to confess with; neither will they be able to praise, because they have no voice to proclaim with. But do not those Three Children enumerate all things, as they walked amid the harmless flames, who had leisure not only not to fear, but even to praise God? They say to all things, heavenly and earthly, Bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever. Behold how they praise. Let none think that the dumb stone or dumb animal has reason wherewith to comprehend God. They who have thought this, have erred far from the truth. God has ordered everything, and made everything: to some He has given sense and understanding and immortality, as to the angels; to some He has given sense and understanding with mortality, as to man; to some He has given bodily sense, yet gave them not understanding, or immortality, as to cattle: to some He has given neither sense, nor understanding, nor immortality, as to herbs, trees, stones: yet even these cannot be wanting in their kind, and by certain degrees He has ordered His creation, from earth up to heaven, from visible to invisible, from mortal to immortal. This framework of creation, this most perfectly ordered beauty, ascending from lowest to highest, descending from highest to lowest, never broken, but tempered together of things unlike, all praises God. Wherefore then does all praise God? Because when you consider it, and see its beauty, thou in it praisest God. The beauty of the earth is a kind of voice of the dumb earth....And this which you have found in it, is the very voice of its confession, that you praise the Creator. When you have thought on the universal beauty of this world, does not its very beauty as it were with one voice answer you, I made not myself, God made me?

10. For when Your saints bless You, what say they? They shall tell the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your Power Psalm 144:11. How powerful is God, who has made the earth! How powerful is God, who has filled the earth with good things! How powerful is God, who has given to the animals each its own life! How powerful is God, who has given different seeds to the womb of the earth, that they might make to spring up such various shoots, such beautiful trees! How powerful, how great is God! Do thou ask, creation answers, and by its answer, as by the confession of the creature, you, O saint of God, blessest God, and talkest of His power.

11. That they may make known to the sons of men Your power, and the glory of the greatness of the beauty of Your kingdom Psalm 144:12. Your saints then commend the glory of the greatness of the beauty of Your kingdom, the glory of the greatness of its beauty. There is a certain greatness of the beauty of Your kingdom: that is, Your kingdom has beauty, and great beauty. Since whatever has beauty, has beauty from You, how great beauty has Your whole kingdom! Let not the kingdom frighten us: it has beauty also, wherewith to delight us. For what is that beauty, which the saints shall hereafter enjoy, to whom it shall be said, Come, you blessed of My Father, enjoy the kingdom? Matthew 25:34 Whence shall they come? Whither shall they come? Behold, brethren, and, if you can, as far as you can, think of the beauty of that kingdom which is to come; whence our prayer says, Your kingdom come. For that kingdom we desire may come, that kingdom the saints proclaim to be coming. Observe this world: it is beautiful. How beautiful are earth, sea, air, heavens, stars. Do not all these frighten him who considers them? Is not the beauty of them so conspicuous, that it seems as though nothing more beautiful could be found? And

here, in this beauty, in this fairness almost unspeakable, here worm and mice and all creeping things of the earth live with you, they live with you in all this beauty. How great is the beauty of that kingdom where none but angels live with You! There is a greatness of a certain beauty; let it be loved before it is seen, that when it is seen, it may be retained.

12. Your kingdom. What kingdom mean I? a kingdom of all ages. For the kingdom of this age too has its own beauty, but there is not in it that greatness of beauty, such as in the kingdom of all ages. And Your dominion is in every generation and generation Psalm 144:13. This is the repetition we noticed, signifying either every generation, or the generation which will be after this generation. Faithful is the Lord in His words, and holy in all His works. Faithful is the Lord in His words: for what has He promised that He has not given? Faithful is the Lord in His words. Hereto there are certain things which He has promised, and has not given; but let Him be believed from the things which He has given. We might well believe Him, if He only spoke: He willed not that we should believe Him speaking, but that we should have His Scriptures in our hands:...as though a kind of bond of God's, which all who pass by might read, and might keep to the path of its promise. And how great things has He already paid in accordance with that bond! Do men hesitate to believe Him concerning the Resurrection of the dead and the Life to come, which alone now remains to be paid, when, if He come to reckon with the unbelievers, the unbelievers must blush? If God say to you, You have My bond: I have promised judgment, the separation of good and bad, everlasting life for the faithful, and will you not believe? There in My bond read all that I have promised, reckon with me: verily even by counting up what I have paid, you can believe that I shall pay what still I owe. In that bond you have My only-begotten Son promised, Whom I spared not, but gave Him up for you all: Romans 8:32 reckon this then among what is paid. Read the bond: I promised therein that I would give by My Son the earnest of the Holy Spirit: reckon that as paid. I promised therein the blood and the crowns of the glorious Martyrs; let the White Mass remind you that My debt has been paid....He sets before the eyes of all His payment of His debts: some He has paid in the time of our ancestors, which we saw not: some He has paid in our times, which they saw not; throughout all generations He has paid what was written. And what remains? Do men not believe Him, when He has paid all this? What remains? Behold you have reckoned: all this He has paid: is He become unfaithful for the few things which remain? God forbid! Wherefore? Because the Lord is faithful in His words, and holy in all His works.

13. The Lord strengthens all that are falling Psalm 144:14. But who are all that are falling? All indeed fall in a general sense, but he means those who fall in a particular way. For many fall from Him, many also fall from their own imaginations. If they had evil imaginations, they fall from them, and God strengthened all that are falling. They who lose anything in this world, yet are holy, are as it were dishonoured in this world, from rich become poor, from honoured of low estate, yet are they God's saints; they are, as it were, falling. But God strengthens. For the just falls seven times, and rises again; but the wicked shall be weakened in evils. Proverbs 24:16 When evils befall the wicked, they are weakened thereby; when evils befall the righteous, the Lord strengthens all that are falling....And lifts up all those that have been cast down: all, that is, who belong to him; for God resists the proud. James 4:6

14. The eyes of all hope upon You, and You give them food in due season Psalm 144:15. Just as when you refresh a sick man in due season, when he ought to receive, then You give, and what he ought to receive, that You give. Sometimes then men long, and he gives not: he who tends, knows the time to give. Wherefore say I this, brethren? Lest any one be faint, if perchance he has not been heard, when making some righteous request of God. For when he makes any unrighteous request, he is heard to his punishment: but when making some righteous request of God, if perchance he have not been heard, let

him not be down-hearted, let him not faint, let his eyes wait for the food, which He gives in due season. When He gives not, He therefore gives not, lest that which He gives do harm. 2 Corinthians 12:7 ...You give them meat in due season.

15. You open Your Hand, and fill every living thing with blessing Psalm 144:16. Though sometimes You give not, yet in due season You give: You delay, not deny, and that in due season. Righteous is the Lord in all His ways, and holy in all His works Psalm 144:17. Both when He smites and when He heals, He is righteous, and in Him unrighteousness is not. Finally, all His saints, when set in the midst of tribulation, have first praised His righteousness, and so sought His blessings. They first have said, What You do is righteous. So did Daniel ask, and other holy men: Righteous are Your judgments: rightly have we suffered: deservedly have we suffered. They laid not unrighteousness to God, they laid not to Him injustice and folly. First they praised Him scourging, and so they felt Him feeding.

16. The Lord is near unto all that call upon Him Psalm 144:18. Where then is that, Then shall they call upon Me, and I will not hear them? Proverbs 1:28 See then what follows: all who call upon Him in truth. For many call upon Him, but not in truth. They seek something else from Him, but seek not Himself. Why do you love God? Because He has made me whole. That is clear: it was He that made you so. For from none else comes health, save Him. Because He gave me, says another, a rich wife, whereas I before had nothing, and one that obeys me. This too He gave: you say true. He gave me, says another, sons many and good, He gave me a household, He gave me all good things. Do you love Him for this?...Therefore if God is good, who has given you what you have, how much more blessed will you be when He has given you Himself! You have desired all these things of Him: I beseech you desire of Him Himself also. For these things are not truly sweeter than He is, nor in any way are they to be compared to Him. He then who prefers God Himself to all the things which he has received, whereat he rejoices, to the things he has received, he calls upon God in truth....

17. He will perform the will of them that fear Him Psalm 144:19. He will perform it, He will perform it: though He perform it not at once, yet He will perform it. Certainly if therefore you fear God, that you may do His will, behold even He in a manner ministers to you; He does your will. And He shall hear their prayer, and save them. You see that for this purpose the Physician hears, that He may save. When? Hear the Apostle telling you. For we are saved in hope: but hope which is seen is not hope: but if what we see not we hope for, then do we with patience wait for it: Romans 8:24 the salvation, that is, which Peter calls ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:5

18. The Lord guards all that love Him, and all sinners He will destroy Psalm 144:20. You see that there is severity with Him, with whom is so great sweetness. He will save all that hope in Him, all the faithful, all that fear Him, all that call upon Him in truth: and all sinners He will destroy. What all sinners, save those who persevere in sin; who dare to blame God, not themselves; who daily argue against God; who despair of pardon for their sins, and from this very despair heap up their sins; or who perversely promise themselves pardon, and through this very promise depart not from their sins and impiety? The time will come for all these to be separated, and for the two divisions to be made of them, one on the right hand, the other on the left; and for the righteous to receive the everlasting Kingdom, the wicked to go into everlasting fire. Since this is so, and we have heard the blessing of the Lord, the works of the Lord, the wondrous things of the Lord, the mercies of the Lord, the severity of the Lord, His Providence over all His works, the confession of all His works; observe how He concludes in His praise, My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless His holy Name for ever and ever Psalm 144:21.

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