

Psalm Sundays

Text
Psalm 138

Topic
David recognized that the Lord was working to perfect him in the present and that He would complete the work in the future

Title
"Practically Perfected In Every Way"

Writers call them "time jumps." It's when the story they are telling jumps forward, or backward, in time.

The Christmas movie season is upon us. You will likely encounter a new or old version of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. You'll jump with Ebenezer Scrooge to Christmas past, and to Christmas future. The things Scrooge witnesses in the past and future radically change his life in the present.

Psalm 138 seems to have been written by David at his coronation, on account of which he worships the LORD, who had made good His promise to him.

The psalm has time jumps within it:

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- 👤 There is a time jump to the future. In verses four and five we read, "All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD." I don't think that happened during David's reign. It hasn't happened yet. It sounds like something that the Bible says *will* happen, in the Millennial Kingdom of God on the earth after Jesus' Second Coming.
- 👤 The psalm time jumps to the past. In verse three David spoke of a previous day "when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold *with* strength in my soul."

David chose to utilize time jumps to underscore what he would say in verse eight: "The LORD will perfect that which concerns me."

God had begun a great work in David in the past; God was performing the work in the present; He would perfect it in the future.

Same with us! "He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

- 👤 When you receive Jesus Christ, God saves you.
- 👤 Everyday after that, He works to sanctify you - to make you more-and-more like Jesus.
- 👤 At the resurrection and rapture of the church, your salvation will be complete as you receive your glorified body.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Jesus Will Complete The Work He Has Begun In You Despite Supernatural Opposition**, and **#2 Jesus Will Complete The Work He Has Begun In You Despite Human Opposition**.

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#1 - Jesus Will Complete The Work He Has Begun In You Despite Supernatural Opposition (v1-3)

God's great work of grace in changing us does not go unchallenged. We can expect opposition. And not just from other human beings. As Nick Fury said, "We learn that not only are we not alone, but we are hopelessly, hilariously outgunned."

We're introduced to supernatural beings in the unseen realm in verse one.

Psa 138:1 A *Psalm* Of David. I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the **gods** I will sing praises to You.

The Hebrew word translated "gods" is *elohim*. Isn't that the name of Almighty God? Turns out, "No," it is *not* the name of Almighty God.

One resource says, "The word elohim occurs more than 2500 times in the Hebrew Bible, with meanings ranging from "gods" in a general sense (as in Exodus 12:12, where it describes "the gods of Egypt"), to specific gods (e.g., First Kings 11:33, where it describes Chemosh, "the god of Moab"), to demons, seraphim, cherubim, and other supernatural beings, and even to the spirits of dead humans (e.g., Samuel in First Samuel 28:13). There are also frequent references to YHWH, the Almighty God of Israel."

Satan, fallen angels, demons - these, too, are *elohim*. Any being who lives in the unseen realm is an *elohim*.

The Almighty God, the God of Israel, YHWH, is an *elohim*. But note: While YHWH is an *elohim*, **no elohim is YHWH**. They are created beings; subordinate beings. The Bible always makes it clear no other is like Him.

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(If you want more on this, check out our study in this series on Psalm 82).

Let's return to verse one:

Psa 138:1 A *Psalm* Of David. I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You.

At his coronation, David's heart was filled with praises, and this was just the song for the occasion.

Exactly who the *elohim* in the audience were is not specified. But since later in this song he refers to crying out, needing help, I think we can safely say that evil *elohim* were involved.

You'd expect interference against David and Israel. There are *elohim* at work behind the scenes of the nations of the world. Here are two references that bear this out:

- 👤 The prophet, Daniel, was praying. The angel Gabriel was dispatched to give Daniel information about the Last Days. Upon arriving, Gabriel explained, "from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard... but the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia" (Daniel 10:12-13). A supernatural being, an *elohim*, was a "prince" assigned to Persia, and he sought to interfere with God's plans and purposes for Daniel, and for Israel.
- 👤 In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we read that "Satan's throne" was in the city of Pergamum (2:13). It may be a reference to an altar to Zeus that was there. But I see no reason not to take it literally. *Elohim* were headquartered there.

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Satan has principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, in key positions behind the scenes of the nations to interfere with God's plan in general, and God's plan specifically for you.

If you stop there, it's terrifying. In a battle with sinister *elohim*, by ourselves we **are** "hopelessly, hilariously outgunned."

But we are not by ourselves, are we? Not by a long shot. God the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Greater is He that is in us than the *elohim* against us.

Psa 138:2 I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

The "Temple" wasn't built in David's lifetime. He was either referring to the Tabernacle, or time jumping to the future Temple.

The attribute of God that was especially on David's heart when he penned this psalm under inspiration was "lovingkindness." David mentioned it in connection with "truth." God's lovingkindness is a truth to be held despite any feelings to the contrary.

- 🧠 The LORD's lovingkindness was just as true during the years of David's exile as they were at his coronation.
- 🧠 All of God's attributes are "truth" regardless my circumstances or experiences.

"You have magnified Your word above all Your name" needs a better translation. Derek Kidner writes, "*The meaning of [this phrase] can only be that*

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God has fulfilled His promise in a way that surpasses all that He has hitherto revealed of Himself."

For a long time, more than a decade at least, God's promise that David would be king seemed improbable, if not impossible. Yet here he was, despite all supernatural interference.

Does it seem strange that evil *elohim* would be in a heavenly audience hearing David sing? We get a glimpse of something like this in the beginning of the Book of Job. In the ISV, we read, "One day, divine beings presented themselves to the LORD, and Satan accompanied them" (1:6). Strange as it may be, there was Satan, in Heaven with other *elohim*.

Psa 138:3 In the day when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold *with* strength in my soul.

David cried out, and God answered it by strengthening what we call the inner man. That strengthening of soul produced the boldness David needed in order to wait on the promises of God. Though he stumbled along the way, he never lost sight of the LORD's lovingkindness.

The Bible indicates that Christians will one day rule and reign with Jesus on the earth. Right now, we seem more like David in exile, hunted down as fugitives by the malevolent supernatural beings in Satan's army. Pray that God grant to you strength of soul by his indwelling Holy Spirit. Be bold in believing His promises to you.

#2 - Jesus Will Complete The Work He Has Begun In You Despite Human Opposition (v4-8)

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Our physical battleground isn't in the unseen realm. It is at home, at work, out in the world at large. The world is currently held captive by the god of this world, Satan. Without the need for possession, he takes captive nonbelieving human beings, enlisting them to do his will to interfere in your life.

Some things defy explanation apart from supernatural interference. So many incredible, nonsensical, things are happening right now on account of COVID19. A California judge ordered San Diego to reopen strip clubs while the county carries on with its crackdown on churches. Don't even try to figure out the logic.

There is something supernatural going on behind the scenes of a decision like that.

For the sake of argument, let's say the governing authorities have no malice in targeting churches. Don't you think that devils **do** have malice, and want to take advantage of this opportunity to close churches?

An early church father said, "Nothing ordinarily so repairs the soul, and makes a person better, as a good hope of things to come" (Chrysostom). David's "good hope of things to come" began in verse four.

Psa 138:4 All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth.

Psa 138:5 Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great *is* the glory of the LORD.

That's gotta be future. I can't remember a time in human history when "all the kings of the earth" praised the LORD. Or when *all* of the earth heard the Word of God.

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That time is coming. At the end of the Revelation, the apostle John wrote concerning the New Jerusalem, "And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it... And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it (Revelation 21:24 & 26).

In Zechariah 14:16 we're told, "And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." This happens *after* the Great Tribulation, *after* the Second Coming of Jesus.

It's reasonable to ask, "How does hope of the future help me now?" Hold that thought...

Psa 138:6 Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.

- 👤 The "lowly" are believers who are being opposed.
- 👤 The "proud" is our opposition.

The "proud" seem on top, in power. Believers are oppressed - sometimes with no end in sight. David was no stranger to this kind of treatment:

- 👤 His own family excluded him when the prophet Samuel came to their house to anoint the next king of Israel.
- 👤 His brothers mocked him when David expressed shock that no one would accept the daily challenge of Goliath.
- 👤 King Saul threw spears at David, then chased him, seeking his life.

All the while, David held to the hope of the future God had promised him.

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The "LORD" "on high" condescends to involve Himself against those who oppose us. Think of it: *Almighty God is for you.*

The apostle Paul boldly said, "If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Right after Paul said that, he rattled off quite a list of beings who **are** against us. What, then, gives us the victory *now*, not just in the future?

Psa 138:7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me.

The next time someone does asks, "How are you?", tell them, "*I walk in the midst of trouble.*"

"I walk in the midst of trouble" could describe a believer pretty much any time. During times you might feel free from trouble, plans are being made against you by the ruler of this age's accomplices.

"Revive." It has a lot of possible meanings, including "preserved from the wrath of my enemies." Your ultimate enemy was death. I say 'was' because death was defeated by Jesus as He died on the Cross, then rose from the dead. If you are in Christ, "to live is Christ and to die is gain."

"To live is Christ" means, among other things, that everything He promises you is available. You have the Holy Spirit living in you, and you have every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. All that you require to live out your life in godliness is yours.

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I asked you to hold a question - "How does hope of the future help me now?"
Hope in your future revives you. It breathes new life in you by the Holy Spirit.

"You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me."

Sorry lefties, but the "right hand," in the Bible, is the power hand. I like that I'm saved by God's right hand, and that my enemies can easily be defeated by His left. It's like He's saying, "The LORD can beat my enemies with His right hand tied behind His back!"

Psa 138:8 The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

If the LORD "will perfect that which concerns me," why ask Him to "not forsake the work of His hands?"

Do you have a project that you started but have yet to finish? Maybe you have no time; or you ran out of money; or you simply lost interest in it.

You are a project that the LORD started but has yet to finish. He has all the time, and unlimited resources, for Project Gene. More importantly, He cannot, will not, lose interest in me.

Albert Barnes said,

He will complete what He has begun. He will not begin to interpose in my behalf, and then abandon me. He will not promise to save me, and then fail to fulfill his promise. He will not encourage me, and then cast me off. He will

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complete what He begins. He will not convert a soul, and then leave it to perish. "Grace will complete what grace begins."

When David said, "don't forsake me," he was expressing a proper impatience for the LORD to accelerate His work in his life.

Truth is, progress in making us, in molding us, is often interrupted not by the LORD, *but by us*. Charles Ryrie said, "A Christian of longer standing may not be spiritual not because he has had insufficient time, but during the years of his Christian life he has not allowed the Holy Spirit to control him."

David would example this in his life. After he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and arranged for her husband to be killed, he made no spiritual progress.

He would say of that time, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away by my groaning all day long. My strength was exhausted as in a summer drought" (Psalm 32:3-4).

David repented, and David was revived. He experienced that the LORD's mercy endures forever. It means He won't quit. He won't give up on us. He will finish what He has started.

Some of you may have experienced this. You were walking with Jesus, in the Word, in prayer, in fellowship. You fell away. For weeks... months... years... decades. The moment you repented, the LORD's mercy was abundant.

Paul, Peter, and John were guys who jumped time in their writing:

👤 Among the time jumps in Paul's letters, he described the day that Jesus will, "Present [the church] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot

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or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

- 👤 Peter jumped to the future when he wrote, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (Second Peter 3:10).
- 👤 John jumps in chapter four of the Revelation to show us the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming of Jesus, the Millennial Kingdom, and the New Jerusalem - and everything in between and after.

Peter does some time jumping to the past, talking about Noah and the global flood.

All of them apply their jumps to the present. Peter is a good example, saying, "what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (Second Peter 3:11).

Your hope in the future makes all the difference in your walk in the present. It revives.

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