

O magnify the LORD with me

Malcolm Edwards

This short exhortational article gives us the opportunity to consider how great we actually consider God to be, and whether our appreciation is fully reflected in all aspects of our worship of Him.

ASTRONOMERS tell us that the universe is 100 billion light-years in diameter. Whether true or not, such dimensions are totally beyond our comprehension; on that sort of scale, our solar system would appear as less than a pin prick, our own planet as a microscopic dot, and ourselves as mere microbes. Yet the One we worship and pray to daily is the Creator of it all. How large, then, do we imagine Him to be?

Our title is taken from verse 3 of Psalm 34, a psalm that is special in several ways. First, its title informs us that it was written by David after he had feigned madness before Achish, king of Gath, when being relentlessly pursued by Saul. David was now in further danger of being imprisoned and slain by the Philistine king. Secondly, it is one of the acrostic psalms, in which each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.¹ This system would have been a useful *aide-mémoire* to the temple singers, who perhaps never had written Scriptures of their own. Thirdly, it seems to have been a favourite psalm of the Apostle Peter, who quotes from it twice in his first epistle.

The theme is unmistakably deliverance from trouble, and David returns to it several times throughout the psalm. But it is in the third verse that he invites the reader to join him in magnifying God. Let us consider the opening section: “I will bless the LORD at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. *O magnify the LORD with me*, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (vv. 1-4). David is so thankful for his deliverance from many near-disasters that he invites his readers to unite with him in *magnifying* God—in comprehending Him as being much larger. (The NIV changes ‘magnify’ to ‘glorify’, apparently without good reason; the Hebrew word *gadal* really does mean ‘magnify’.)

How big is God?

This raises the question of whether in prayer and praise we *magnify* God as much as we ought. Must it require deliverance from some danger before we see God as large as David did? I

recall an exhortation on the theme, “How big is your God?” This is another way of asking how much we esteem His power and His care, our appreciation of which will be reflected in our spiritual life generally. The parallelism in the passage also leads us to the exaltation of God’s Name. The import is not so much what God is called, but what His reputation is—the Hebrew word for ‘name’, *shem*, includes the idea of renown.

Coming, then, to practical issues, perhaps we should ask ourselves whether in our prayers we praise our heavenly Father as much as we ought, for surely our praise reflects the extent to which we value His many blessings, showered upon us daily, sometimes quite unknown to us. Although in Philippians 4:6 (for instance) we are encouraged to let our requests be made known unto God, if our requests usually outweigh our praise we should perhaps sit down and try to consider what the Lord has done for us—to count our blessings. We may recall that forgetting God is a constant theme of Israel’s failings throughout Scripture. Amidst our own daily pressures of life it is not difficult, sometimes for long periods, to be unmindful of what God has done for us. The story of the one leper who turned to thank Jesus after he had healed ten is a salutary reminder of human forgetfulness.

Perhaps we may fail in our appreciation of God’s goodness even in our hymn singing—ironically the very means by which we may, together, magnify Him. From sheer familiarity and repetition of praise it is possible to sing part of or even a whole hymn without fully realising

1. Interestingly, Psalm 34 actually lacks a verse beginning with *vav*, and instead has a second verse (v. 22) commencing with *pe* in the word *padah*, meaning ‘redemption’. Perhaps this is David’s way of drawing attention to the theme of the psalm, which Brother Malcolm identifies.—*J.T.*

what we are saying. The music of praise is, of course, important, but the words themselves are always crucial when we consider that we are voicing praise to the God of the universe, before Whom the nations are as a drop in a bucket and the small dust of the balance (Isa. 40:15). In that passage Isaiah magnifies God in this manner to encourage backsliding Israel to be aware of His greatness and might, and to return to Him with all their hearts.

We recall that Jesus condemned the religious rulers of his day for having hearts that did not match their lips, and he quoted from Isaiah's words in Isaiah 29:13: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me" (Mt. 15:8). With the Lord's teaching under the New Covenant to help us, we must aim for better than Israel achieved, and Psalm 34 shows us the way. To magnify the Lord and to exalt His Name

is to do what David said of himself in an earlier Messianic psalm: "I have set the LORD always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (16:8).

Sharing our appreciation of God

Through human weakness David did not always achieve that, but his greater son, the Lord Jesus, never failed to do so. To him God was always great, besides being a most dear and cherished Father. Thus from time to time we must shut out the noise of the world, and learn to balance the greatness of our God with His closeness. While acknowledging Him as ultimately beyond our comprehension, we own Him as a loving Father Who is always nigh unto those who diligently seek Him. Then, like David, in verse 2 of the psalm, we may feel constrained to encourage others to do likewise: "My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad".