

“Beholding the Wonders of God’s Providence”

Psalm 104

November 26, 2023

Have you ever noticed that giving thanks suffocates anxiety? I don’t mean this flippantly as though voicing a few things we should be thankful for is a simplistic way to conquer anxiety. But what I do mean is that the more we behold and affirm God’s goodness, kindness, generosity, provision and grace, the more confidence we have to trust Him in our immediate trials. In other words, giving thanks lights the kindling for the fire of faith.

Yet a vision of gratitude is not the natural inclination of our humanity. However, we can train our eyes to see the constant working of God’s providence in our lives and world in a way that results in thankfulness and trust in God.

One of the reasons we struggle to live with overflowing gratitude is because we have not trained our eyes to see the abundance of God’s kindness. There are two primary ways for us to train our eyes to see God’s goodness. The first is to listen to the witness of Scripture which reveals God’s working of providence behind the scenes of normal life to work out His plan and promises for His people. That’s what we have been seeing in the book of Esther over the last couple months. Observing God’s ways in Scripture enables us to discern God’s working in our own lives as Rachel and Sarah have testified to this morning.

The second way to train our eyes is to observe how God cares for creation, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. So today we are going to look at this side of God’s providence, His benevolent care of creation, through the lens of Psalm 104.

So why Psalm 104 on this Thanksgiving weekend? *To awaken our souls to rejoice with thanksgiving by training our eyes to see the astonishing providence of God in creation.* Psalm 104 is not a Thanksgiving Psalm per se, but it is a Psalm of praise set within a loose trilogy of Psalms that celebrate

God’s providence. Psalm 103 celebrates God’s providence as our Redeemer-King. Psalm 104 celebrates God’s providence as our Creator and Sustainer, while Psalm 105 celebrates God’s providence through the history of Israel in the OT.

So let’s dive into Psalm 104 which poetically describes God’s creative work and reveals His personal involvement in sustaining all that He has made.

Bless the Lord, Immensely Great and Clothed with Splendor (Ps 104:1-2)

Psalm 104 opens with a call and declaration of praise for God’s splendor. **[1-2]** When the Psalmist says, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul,”* he is awakening his soul to intentionally recognize and respond to the magnificence of who God is. He’s commanding his soul to open the eyes of faith which alone can see the true magnificence that the beauty of this world points to. It’s possible for people to look at the breath-taking beauty of a sunrise or the simplicity of a blade of grass and fail to see that the beauty of this world is but a reflected beauty of God Himself. We must look with intent, with eyes of faith.

The Psalmist goes on to say, *“O Lord my God, You are very Great!”* The sense here is immensely great, exceedingly great, even excessively great! *“You are clothed with splendor and majesty.”* Clothing in the Bible is often used to describe the character of a person.¹ Thus, splendor and majesty are not just a façade (as clothing may be for us). They are a manifestation of the truly glorious character of God Himself. And yet this splendor and majesty, overwhelming as it is, is merely what we perceive of Him. “God is [much] greater than any of His creatures conceive Him to be.”²

God’s clothing is light—*“covering yourself with light as with a garment.”* 1) God loves light! It was the first created thing to be pronounced good (Gen 1:3-4) on the first day of creation. 2) God Himself is light, meaning that in Him is no darkness at all—nothing to hide or be ashamed of, nothing evil or sinful or less than praiseworthy (1Jn 1:5). 3) God manifested Himself as light: a cloud of fire by day in the wilderness. His shekinah glory was manifested like

¹ Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, pg. 248.

² W.S. Plumber, *The Psalms* (Geneva Series), pg. 921.

a magnificent star over Bethlehem when Jesus was born as the Light of the world (Jn 8:12). 4) God is a consuming fire (of white-hot pure holiness), and His Son is light that gives life.

This God of exceeding greatness and splendor, the Psalmist claims as his own—“my God.” A personal God to whom he looks for all his needs and who praise fills his heart to overflowing! So, for the next 34 verses, the Psalmist will go on to illustrate the impressiveness of his magnificent God.

Bless the Lord, the Creator of the Heavens (Ps 104:2-4)

Picking up at the end of vs. 2, the Psalmist gives poetic commentary on the second day of creation. “...*stretching out the heavens like a tent. He lays the beams of His chambers on the waters; He makes the clouds His chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind; he makes his messengers winds, His ministers a flame of fire.*”

Stretching out the heavens like a tent speaks of the ease with which God created the heavens. When we build houses, we build them on solid foundations, but God lays the beams of his chambers on the waters, or on the mist in the air, dependent on nothing other than Himself to hold it fast.³ In ancient homes, the upper chambers were above the main house, secluded and private. Here the palace of our heavenly king is above the heavens inaccessible to man.⁴

To make the clouds His chariot and ride on the wings of the winds, is symbolic of God’s governance over creation.⁵ Who can capture the wind, yet God has created it and tamed it like a mere horse. Nothing escapes his notice as He rides on the wind to oversee all things. To make wind and fire his servants speaks of God’s sovereignty over the elements.⁶ The creator of the heavens is supreme and sovereign over all things.

By the way, vs 1-23 give a poetic portrayal of the first four days of creation. It is appropriate to speak of God’s creative work poetically to capture the beauty, joy, and warmth of the personal “touch” of God. Creation was not an experiment in a sterile lab, but an artist at work. The Genesis account is

recorded in prose rather than poetry to not be mistaken for artistic license. It is straight forward, factual, and clear. So we have both the historical (prose) and the poetic. Together they capture God’s creative acts with the ease of chemical reaction and the intimacy of an artist molding clay into pottery. Science helps us capture the mind-blowing sophistication and mathematical genius of God’s creation, but creation is not merely a set of cold facts and numbers. It is the work of an artistic genius that points to the unspeakable glory of the loving and all-joyful God who we will see in vs. 31 rejoices over the beauty of His work.

Bless the Lord, the Creator of Earth and Oceans (Ps 104:5-9)

So how will the Psalmist poetically capture the creation of earth and oceans? [vs. 5-9] This is now the third day of creation when God gathered the waters on earth into one place so that dry land appeared (Gen 1:9-10). The mountains and valleys were not merely the result of erosion, but God’s creative design. The Psalmist speaks of God rebuking the ocean waters (7) to reveal God’s sovereign control—even the ocean waves obey Him like a humble servant! Isn’t it amazing that a tsunami can wipe out entire cities. We’ve all seen the devastation to coastal lands from hurricanes. Yet God can restrain the power of the ocean and humble its waves with a little band of sand that he has set as boundary. Beaches are a provision of God’s providence to preserve the land on which we live.

Bless the Lord, Who Sustains all Life He Created on Earth (Ps 104: 10-18)

Oh, how we should give thanks to the Lord for things that we so easily take for granted like rivers, rain, grass, work, and mountains. [vs. 10-18] By God’s providence, He fills rivers and books and lakes with water to sustain beasts, critters, trees, and birds. Just think of it. These sources of water are essential to the economy of ecology. And these sources of water are as dependent on the rain that God sends as the grass which feeds the livestock and trees that provide refuge for the birds. Notice creation and weather are not mere machines. In vs. 10, God’s makes the springs flow. In vs. 14, He causes the

³ Plumber, 921.

⁴ Ross, pg. 249.

⁵ Willem VanGemeren, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*: Vol. 5, pg. 659.

⁶ Ibid.

grass to grow by the rain He supplies (13). God is personally acting to sustain every wildflower, every needed blade of grass, every bug for every woodpecker. He even provides the high rocky mountains for wild goats and rock baggers (18).

But did you notice that the Psalmist also mentioned wine and bread in vs. 15? Both of these involve a degree of work on our part. God provides the grapes, but we must crush them into wine. God provides the rain for wheat to grow, but we must grind the flour and cut the wood to bake the bread. Even our ability to work (including our knowledge of how to do it) is a provision from God's good providence.

So how do we apply these verses to a life of gratitude and faith? Creation is museum of living props to remind us of the goodness of God who cares for us and all of creation. May we never cross another river or creek without seeing in it a thousand workings of God's good providence. May every bird be a reminder of God's goodness that feeds it. May every shower of rain be seen as God's provision. Even the banks of snow in MN help water the earth and insulate the ground from the frost that God Himself sends. I'm not saying you have to like snow or the bitter cold wind that brings it, but we should not fail to see the hand of God that moves the wind and designs every snowflake. Jesus said, don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air. They don't sow or reap...yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? Or observe how the lilies of the field grow and how God clothes the grass of the field (see Mt 6:25-34). If God faithfully cares for little flowers and birds, how much more will He take care of you!

Bless the Lord, Who Created the Heavenly Bodies (Ps 104:19-23)

[vs. 19-23] On the fourth day of creation, God created the sun and moon and hundreds of billions of galaxies with each containing hundreds of billions of stars.⁷ That alone is impressive, the but focus of vs. 19-23 is how

⁷ When we google "how many galaxies are there in our universe," we get answers that range from hundreds of billions to trillions. That's because even our largest telescopes can only see an infinitesimal sample of our universe. For example, the Hubble telescope's deepest image which took into view 5,500 galaxies was only accounting for one slice of the sky were we to divide it into 32 million slices

God uses the heavenly bodies as a clock to regulate night and day for the purpose preserving His creation. Night provides the cover for animals to creep about and seek their prey. Daylight causes them to retreat so that man can go about his work. Furthermore, daylight causes vegetation to grow, and nighttime prevents it from getting burned up by the heat of summer. What an amazing world our Creator administrates and stewards day by day.

Bless the Lord, for His Immeasurable Wisdom Displayed in the Diversity of His Works (Ps 104:24)

In vs. 24, the Psalmist erupts into praise, overwhelmed by the multitude of wonders and the remarkable diversity of God's creative works, especially the living creatures that fill the earth. **[vs. 24]** And yet the Psalmist is still not done reciting the wonders of God as he turns to consider how God sustains all the life that fills the ocean.

Bless the Lord, the Sustainer of All Marine Life (Ps 104:25-30)

[25-30] The vastness and depth of the ocean is really hard to comprehend. Yet it is the home to innumerable fish and other marine life that God sustains. Leviathan is a mythological creature that the pagans believed lived in the seas who was immense in size and responsible for stirring up chaos in the sea. Here the Psalmist is using the concept of Leviathan to demonstrate that the ocean is vast enough for him to play in.

Consider the largest sea creature we are aware of—the blue whale. Fully grown, the blue whale is as long as 100 feet (the length of this entire building). A mature blue whale can weigh upwards of 200 tons (400,000 lbs). "[Its] tongue alone can weigh as much as an elephant and its heart weighs as much as an automobile. So what feeds such a massive marine mammal? Tiny, tiny shrimp-like animals called krill. A blue whale can eat up to four tons [8000 lbs] of krill in a day.⁸ Yet the thousands of blue

(1/32,000,000.). Now take the hundreds of billions of galaxies and consider that each one contains hundreds of billions of stars!

⁸ <https://oceanconservancy.org/blog/2019/06/05/biggest-animals-ocean/>

whales, big as they are, are not crowded in the ocean. The only thing to restrain them is their own smallness in the vast ocean home God has provided.

And what about the smallest marine life (25)? There are more than 10,000 species of tiny plants (invisible to the human eye) called diatoms. Just one teaspoon of lake water may contain a million of these little diatoms which produce 20-50% of the oxygen on the planet.

The Psalmist spoke of wonders more immense than He knew. Yet don't miss the wonder of what He *did* see—the personal involvement of God in sustaining all His creatures. [**vs. 27-30 with emphasis**]⁹

Every created thing is dependent on the provision of God's hand of providence. Don't overlook the implications of [**vs. 30**]. One Scholar explained it this way, "*Creation is not just an event that occurred in the beginning...but is God's continuing activity of sustaining creatures and everything in being.*"¹⁰ Or as John Piper put it, "*Every time an animal comes into being, God is active in that creation.*"¹¹ God sustains His creation by His creative power!

Bless the Lord, whose joy-producing glory entices us to worship our joy-abounding God (Ps 104:31-35)!

[**vs. 31-35**] Take note from vs. 31 that God rejoices in His work of creation because it displays the enduring nature of His glory. He rejoices in what He has made, because what He has made reveals His wisdom, power, character, and glory. So creation does not exist primarily for our joy, but for God's. Yet God has set us in the midst of His creation as His image-bearers so that we might share in the fullness of His joy by seeing Him through it. ***Creation exists as a lens through which we may see the multi-faceted glory of God and experience the joy of His providence in unceasing displays of divine goodness.***

⁹ *These all look to You...when You give...when You open...when You hide...when You take away...when You send forth...and renew*

The sunsets and fall colors you enjoy, God enjoys more. Why? Because he creates sunsets and fall colors to delight in the beauty they display of His own glory which we only see faintly but He sees purely. Not only do our physical eyes have imperfect vision, but God sees perfect brilliance and detail beyond what we can see, so that He also grasps the true reality that they point to of the glory of God.

And if God continues to sustain the expression of His glory through this creation (as well as the new heavens and earth which will not pass away), then our Joy-abounding God will never cease to be joyful! And so the Psalmist concludes in vs. 33-34 that if God will not cease to be joyful, then he will not cease to rejoice in the Lord either, as long as he has life and breath.

Vs. 34: "May my meditation be pleasing to Him, for I rejoice in the Lord." It's impossible for your meditation to be displeasing to the Lord if you rejoice in the Lord, because you are rejoicing in what God Himself rejoices in most—the supreme excellence of His glory!

Now it seems kind of jolting that he says in vs. 35, "Let sinners be consumed from the earth and let the wicked be no more." In the context of Ps 104, this is not a vindictive cry as much as it is a desire for nothing to blemish or detract from the joy-producing glory of God that fills the earth. And so the Psalmist ends the Psalm as he began: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul!*" That is, "*Look around you, Soul, and behold the wonders of God. And seeing all that God has done, rejoice in the Lord and be filled with His joy!*" This is a great way to live with our eyes on God and His goodness, our hearts full of gratitude, and our souls gripped by anxiety-killing trust in God.

¹⁰ Bernard Anderson quoted by Willem VanGemeren, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*: Vol. 5, pg. 664.

¹¹ John Piper, *Providence*, pg. 222.