

Psalm 113 "The God Who Cares"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Heavenly Father, we now come before you to hear you speak directly to our hearts and our minds. Lord, we admit, sometimes we don't want to, we don't want to hear your Word, or we don't want to hear from you, but we just want to continue with our everyday life. But Lord, we just ask that you break that that mindset, that thing that we struggle with the most, and that you draw us into yourself.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. I like how it feels like I'm preaching in someone's backyard right now. It's like a barbecue going on.

[1 : 5 3] Okay. So last week, I had the privilege of preaching here, and I used an opener, an illustration of me having a conversation with somebody at a restaurant, of the owner of the restaurant, when I was getting lunch after ministering at a different church. And we got to talking. And I'm going to use a similar illustration today, because it fits so well with this psalm. It fits really well. But it's going to be hypothetical. It's going to be, suppose you're having a conversation in a coffee shop with a group of friends. And these friends all come from different religions or different ideologies. But it's all, it's a good conversation.

No one gets heated. None of that. It's just, you're having a debate. Everyone's debating about their gods or what they hold on to most dearly in their life as their all and end all. And you get to talking, talk about your gods, and you start debating. And the psalm we're looking at today is kind of like that in a sense. The psalm has this, has a question within it, right at the middle, that makes you question who is like our God. And that can, anyone who has a different faith background can say the exact same thing. So we're going to come at this psalm in a different way.

We're going to ask these questions as we go through it, picturing in our minds this conversation conversation of these friends around a coffee table that we have. And this psalm, Psalm 113, it's very helpful if you can turn to that right now. If you have your Bible, please pull it out, because it's really good to see what's going on in the whole psalm. It's good to see if I'm holding to the text, and I'm also going to be jumping around. I seem to jump around in the psalm, so that's going to happen in this psalm. And the way we're going to do this, we're going to continue our summer series in the psalms. And it's always a reminder. Last week, I reminded you how great it is to read the psalms. And I'm going to do it again, because the psalms are a great book of the Bible to read every day, to read one of the psalms every day, regardless if it's the shortest one, which I believe is only two verses, or the longest one, whichever one you want to read, just read it. Timothy Keller has a great one-year devotional going through the psalms. I would highly recommend it. I think it's called the Psalms of Jesus. Just the psalms are a great book, because it allows you to see the pilgrim walking through life, experiencing every emotion, whether it's good, joyous time, or whether it's the hardest moments of their life. You see it, and you see them crying out to God. And that gives us, that allows us to come to God with every emotion. You don't just have to come to God feeling all joyful. You can come to God feeling very bitter, feeling very angry, feeling very sad. You can come to God for that. And it's just a good reminder. We should remind ourselves always. And as I said,

Psalm 113 is a unique psalm. It's a unique psalm because it sets up a question in the middle, and leading up to the question, there's nine lines of poetry. And then it asks the question.

Then following that question, there's another nine lines of poetry after it. And the question is, who is like the Lord our God? It's also the title of the psalm in the ESV, and I believe in the NIV, it's also that title. And so that's what we're going to ask. Who is like the Lord our God?

[5 : 19] And really in this conversation that we're having with this hypothetical conversation we're having with our friends here, we would be thinking this. And our friends sitting around the table would also be thinking the exact same thing. Who is like my God? Who is like the God that I worship every week?

Or who is the God that I go and practice, do my practice every week? And when we think about religions, world religions, there's many of them, we're thinking about Christianity, Islam, Islam, spiritualism, naturalism, Hinduism, Buddhism, paganism, and secularism. There's all these isms happening, all these different religions. And we're going to picture all these people sitting around a table having a good conversation, good debate. I know it's rare, but we're going to picture that. But there's something about this that no other religion can say.

No other religion can say about their God is that their God cares, except the Christian God. No other religion can say it. So we're going to approach the psalm in that sense, with that in our minds. And this psalm shows us that. And we're going to look at it in three ways. We're going to look at it in the greatness of God, very similar to the psalm last week. We're also going to look at it as the smallness, God cares for the smallness. And then we're also going to look at it in how to worship. How do we apply this concept to our lives? So point one is the greatness of God.

So we'll look at it beginning at verse two. And the psalmist says this, Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. So the psalmist right away in verse two is going after the sense that God is eternal. And this idea of eternity, just personally, really came home to me when we just came back from living in Port Perry, where I was an assistant pastor at a church doing this contract piece. It's called a curacy.

And it's the next step you take after going through school to help train you more up to become an Anglican minister. And the thing that really confronted me there right away was my mortality. And in one sense, the way it confronted me was that I tried to do things that I used to be able to do when I was younger. And my body would get injured or would recover very slowly. So that confronted me. But another way I got confronted was that we lived at the time there's no other places available for renting, except in an adult lifestyle community. Somehow they let us in. We were the youngest people in the community. And we lived in this adult lifestyle community. And you can just picture it. It looks like it's pristine. Everything is pristine. Everyone's lawns are perfectly manicured.

[8 : 15] And that's fine if you're into that. But the thing at the center of this community, there was this, they called it the center. It was a place where they went and played shuffleboard and all that. But they had a flag at the front of it that they'd fly every day. And the flag was the logo of the adult lifestyle community. But whenever someone died, they would have it at half mass so everyone can see that someone passed away. But the thing is about this community, because it was an adult lifestyle retirement community, that flag was always at half mass. About every other week, it was at half mass. So you're confronted with it if you're going for a walk that we are mortal. Our mortality is very real in our lives. And when you're young, you don't think about it that often. But when you get older, you start to think about it. And another way, you might be thinking that, well, Matt, you're only 36. I know no one knows my age here, but I'm only 36. So you might be thinking like, I wish like, oh, to be your age again, if only. You have no idea, Matt, what's coming. And another thing that I was confronted with in Port Perry was that within the first week of starting the job of being a pastor,

I was at the bedside of a man who was only 15 years older than me. And this man was in a coma. His family was around him. And we had the great privilege of coming in and praying with the family as they began the process of taking this man off life support. And he died within a couple hours after that. So like right away, Port Perry really confronted me with mortality. And this psalm confronts us with mortality. But it also confronts us with that eternity. Because God is eternal. And it says in verse 2. So if God's eternal, that means we're eternal. But not in the sense of like, we're like God. This verse confronts us with that God is eternal. And if God's eternal, we're eternal.

And the way we know God is eternal is that we see in Genesis 1, verse 1, it says, in the beginning, God. That means that before the world was created, whether you believe it was seven days or whether you believe it was a long creation, God was before creation. He has always been and he always will be.

But if God is eternal, what does that mean for us? We have to come to grips with that. That what happens after we close our eyes here in this world and move on? Well, it's very real and we're going to get to that. But here's the thing. Let's go back to the opening illustration. We're sitting around the table with our friends here having a debate. And they could be like, well, my God is the same as that.

My God is eternal. We teach in our religion, our faith, that our God is eternal. So what's it to you? And we have to say, well, true. You're right about that. But then we move on to verse 3 in this psalm.

[11 : 15] We move on to it. So let's look at it. From the rising of the sun to the setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised. See, here we're confronted with the idea of that from the rising of the sun to its setting, the vastness. The psalm we looked at last week talked about this as well, the vastness of God. It's talking about everything you look at in creation that as far as your eye can see has been created by the God. It's the God of the Bible.

In the outdoor lifestyle industry, I used to be very involved in the outdoor camping and climbing and that kind of recreation. And you'd always hear, always, everyone would say it, I even said it myself, that nature is my church, that I don't need a God. I have nature. See, that sentiment is nice.

That idea of naturalism is nice. But when you really scrutinize it, it starts to fall apart, and it starts to actually not be so nice. Because if nature is your God, you have to deal with the fact of the survival of the fittest. You have to deal with how cutthroat it is, and you have no answer for it.

It's just how it was. But if you have a God, and we're arguing here that it's the Christian God. If you have this God that's the creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-creator, created everything, we look at nature, and you see an ordering to it. When you look at it, even scientists who do not have a Christian faith will say that nature is ordered, and they can't explain it. Even down to the smallest atom, it is ordered, it's designed, it runs beautifully. You have to come to terms with that.

Again, though, our friends around the table would say, well, Matt, my faith also teaches that. That my God also teaches that he created the world, or the world always was.

[13 : 21] Well, that brings us to the next verse. Let's look at verse 4. Here we see that the psalmist is talking about that God is above every nation. There's no nation that rises above the God, of this God. There's nothing that can come above him. He is the all-powerful, the almighty God. He is the one who is high above all nations. Nothing can come to him.

Nothing can grasp him. And then it talks about his glory. This brings to mind, in Genesis 11, the Tower of Babel, the famous Tower of Babel scene in that chapter, when man is together, humanity is together, and they're building a tower. They all speak one language. And they keep building this tower, rising up, because they want to come to God. They want to be like God. And if you keep going through that chapter, you see there's an irony in the text, because it says God has to come down to them to see what they're doing. That God has to come down, because no kingdom can rise up to him. And then it addresses his glory. Because when you look at his glory, it almost, in a sense, makes you feel small. It's like when, I believe, the northern lights, you could have saw them last night here if you're out in the country somewhere. It's like when you look at the northern lights, you're silenced. You feel this sense of awe. You feel this smallness of, you feel small as you look at it. It gives you this sense of awe. That's what it means by the glory of God, his glory, the glory above the heavens. God is the one who is above all nations, all kingdoms, all powerful. His glory reigns forever. And we feel a reverence to it. But again, if we come back to our conversation with our friends from different faith backgrounds, they can all say the same thing about their gods. That this, my God is all powerful above every nation, every kingdom. That my God has the greatest glory, that no other God is greater than his glory. We have to come to terms with that. But the same, but here in the text, we get to verse 5. And verse 5 is where we part ways with our friends in this debate. And I would say we trump them, in a sense. Verse 5 shows us that actually the God of the Bible is the one who is the all-powerful, the all-creator, the everlasting, eternal God. And his glory is great. And it shows us this in the next verses. And it shows us this in a very unique way that no other religion or faith-based or ideology can say the same. So let's look at it. And that is verses 5 to 8. So we have the question, who is like the Lord our God? Who is seated on high? Who looks far down on the heavens? So far, our friends can agree with us. But then we get to verse 7. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

None of the other people around the table could say their God does this. None of them. If you really look into it, none of them can say that. They might say it. But actually, if you really go into it, it doesn't. Only the Christian God can claim this. Because when we look at verse 7, it says, he raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. What does ash heap and dust signify? It signifies death. It signifies extreme humiliation to those sitting in the dust at the side of the road. It signifies that. And it says this God raises them up and they sit with princes.

In Charles Dickens' last novel, *Our Mutual Friends*, there's a character who owns the dust heaps outside of London. And what a dust heap is in that era, in Charles Dickens' era, is that at that time, there's no HVAC. They have to use coal or wood to heat their places. And they have to get rid of the ash. And the ash would go outside of the town of London. And they would put in these heaps. But the thing is, whoever owned these heaps, we wouldn't think much today. But back then, whoever owned the heap would be extremely rich. Because ash back then, they turned it into bricks. And they built the houses of London and the buildings of London. So whoever owned it was extremely wealthy and extremely powerful.

But whoever worked at the ash heap was extremely poor, was extremely destitute, was at the lowest, the bottom of the barrel. The thing is, they'd have to sort through. It wasn't just ash they'd sort through in these heaps. That there'd be garbage. There'd be human excrement in it. It'd be awful.

[18 : 50] Awful work. And these people would be considered this low. It'd be like, you'd rather go to the workhouse. If you read those novels or watch the BBC stuff, there's always the workhouses.

The workhouses would be better conditions than in these ash heaps. So it's like, the bottom, nothing is almost worse than that, working in the ash heaps. And that's, this is what the text is saying.

That this god stoops down, comes down to these people, and raises them up, and sits them with princes. His princes. That means, he sits them with royalty. No other faith can say this about their god.

All the other faiths would just say, well, that's just the way it is. That's karma. It's just how they're lot in life. But here we see in the Bible that this god raises up the needy, the poor, the destitute. He raises them up and makes them royalty. But the psalmist doesn't stop there. He keeps going. If we look at verse 9, look at verse 9. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord. I'm going to, I just have to acknowledge here, every time when you hear a barren woman, we need to really reflect on that. There is people within, around us who really struggle with infertility. And when they would read, they would read this, and they would feel, they could feel a sense of grief, sense of anger, bitterness, sense of despair, hopelessness, or even jealous of those they see around them who have kids. It's very real, infertility. But we see here that the psalmist writes about those. And we see in the Bible that God uses barren women through the Bible for key moments through it. But what it's talking about here is that in this era, this time, in the people of Israel, in this culture, that barren women were considered worthless.

They were considered even lower than the people in the dust heaps, those who would be just on the side of the road begging. They're worse in this era, in this culture. They'd be socially, socially ostracized. No one would want them. Husbands would divorce them. What this is saying here, it's not giving a promise that if you pray to God, you will have children. What it's saying, though, is that when you follow this God, he gives you a dignity, and he gives you a home, and he makes you joyous, not through children. That may happen. But he makes you joyous through being his child when you put your faith and trust in Christ. It gives you this dignity. He gives dignity. So he gives dignity and worth to the poor, to the needy, to those who are considered the worst of society, and those to the women who have been pushed to the side because of something like a barrenness. He gives dignity to them.

[22 : 16] The God of the universe cares for the poor, the needy, the rejected. All other religions and faith or ideologies can't say that. They just say it's their lot in life. Even secularism, which claims not to be a faith, but it actually is a faith base, says they help the poor. But when you look into it, they actually just push them to the side. They just do the photo op. Only the Christian God gives dignity to the most downtrodden. But how? We have to ask that. How is this Lord, who is like the Lord our God, how is he so great? How does he do this? Well, he does this through his son, Jesus.

There's a famous passage in the book of Philippians. I know you guys just went through Philippians, so you should be able to quote these verses. And it's Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 to 11.

Where it says this, where Paul is writing to the Philippian church. He says this, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form of a servant, being born like a servant, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the time of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. What this is saying is that the God of the universe sent his Son, came in the form of man, became poor, needy, worthless, rejected, and died a criminal's death on a cross outside of Jerusalem in the ashes, in the dust. He died for you and for me, to give glory to you and to me, to give royalty to you and to me, to give endless joy to you and to me.

See, to those who call themselves followers of Christ, and they put their faith and trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior, this promise is given to you, then you can confidently say, who is like the Lord our God? Because there is no other. This God, Jesus Christ, is the only God.

There's no other God. He gives royalty to those. He sets them with princes. And if that's the case, when we look at this psalm, we see that it's laid out in a sense of praise.

[25 : 22] The psalmist is reflecting on this greatness, the great God of the universe who's created everything, but that also stoops down and lifts up those who are destitute, those who have been rejected by society. He lifts them up.

And then it's in a form of praise. If you look at verse 1, it says this, praise the Lord. Praise, O servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord.

This psalm is a psalm of praise. It starts with praise, and it ends in praise, a call to praise. This is a form of Hebrew poetry. I think it's a chiastic psalm, where it really rings home.

It's a reminder to continually praise. And whatever happens in the middle of the psalm is why you should pray, why you should praise. And in verse 1, it says, servants of the Lord.

Servants of the Lord are the only ones who can truly praise the Lord. And we have to remember that Christ, I read about it actually yesterday, in John, he does this thing to his disciples where he washes their feet.

[26 : 32] And he does this to signify that he is their servant. He came to serve them and save them. See, Christ became the servant so that we could be the servants of God, that we have an example of how to do that.

Only the servants, true servants of God, those who commit their lives to Christ, can worship truly. And the name of the Lord, what does that mean? The name of the Lord means how God has revealed himself.

And we see how God has revealed himself through the Old Testament, how he works through his history. And then he reveals himself ultimately in his son, Jesus Christ. And he shows his great love for us through his death and passion on the cross and his resurrection.

We see it. We see how we can worship this God because he cares so deeply for us. He's not just a far-off God who's there on the sidelines and hopefully you'll get there.

He is a God that is so intimately involved in our lives. And we can give him praise for that because he's a great God and he's a God that cares for the needy, the poor.

[27 : 39] The thing also about this psalm, just to quick, to wrap this up, that this psalm is the beginning of, I believe, a set of six psalms that's used at the Passover feast, the Jewish tradition.

And what the psalms signify, just got to get to my notes here. What the psalms signify, from Psalm 113 to Psalm 118, it's this.

It's a raising up of the downtrodden. It's a reflection on the great exodus. It's the corporate praise. It's personal thanksgiving. It's world vision and a festal procession.

The psalms remind us of God's works through history. The psalms remind us that this God is very present in our lives. And it's only because of Jesus that we can praise the Lord with assurance, with dignity, with joy and hope.

Because he became weak, we can be strong in Christ. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just give you thanks and praise for your greatness, how you revealed yourself.

[28 : 53] For your greatness, but we also give you thanks and praise for how you care about those who are so small. That you care for us, Lord. That when we could not help ourselves, you helped us through your son, Jesus Christ.

Lord, help us to remember that. Help us to remember to always praise you. Help us draw us into yourself. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you.