

Praise The Lord

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[0 : 00] And if you could, I don't know, Aidan, if you're able to put that picture up, that would be appreciated.

Now, I didn't think I would have this picture or a picture like it, but let me introduce you to three people here that are all part of my family.

The bride on the left with the glasses, that's my grandmother, that's my father's mother on her wedding day. The man in the middle is my great-grandfather, her father.

And the lady on the right is my Aunt Sadie, and that's the lady I want to speak about. She was my grandfather's younger sister. And I doubt this was, she was younger than my grandfather, so this was before she had been married herself.

And I don't think anybody would have known of her or met her. But she was a city girl and lived, she was a city girl, but she married a farmer.

[1 : 06] And when I was young, she lived in a house that was an amazing house away out in the country. It was huge. It had many nooks and crannies and interesting things that you wouldn't find in a typical house in the city.

Her husband, who's not in this picture, because I don't think they'd met by this time, was Willie. And she was the mother of five children. And her main claim to fame was that her youngest three children were triplets.

And they were born either the late 40s or early 1950s. And that's unusual today. It was particularly unusual back then. And it made her a bit of a local celebrity that she survived that experience.

And the farm in which she lived, it was also a farm, I think, that my dad used to go and stay there initially during the war when he was very young. I'm not sure about that, but I think that's the case. But he certainly did stay on the farm after the war as a young boy over the summers. Now, the reason for mentioning her is none of that interesting as that is a little bit of my family history.

[2 : 16] But because what happened to her about 10 years before she died, she had a stroke. And the stroke affected her left side, which meant that she lost most of her power of speech and her mobility as well.

However, there were some words that she could say. And they are the subject of what I want to speak about tonight. Because the only words that she could say after her stroke were praise the Lord.

So if you went to see her, it was praise the Lord when you walked in, when you were leaving and saying goodbye, it was praise the Lord. If she wanted to take part in a conversation, it was praise the Lord.

If she was getting a bit agitated because she was trying to get something across and she couldn't communicate, there was multiple praise the Lords. So in short, her last 10 years were spent saying praise the Lord thousands and thousands of times.

And I'm sure there's medical people in the room, so I'm sure they'll be able to explain this to me. But there may be an explanation why she could only say these three words. But I'm not sure that I would accept any advice from a medical person on this one.

[3 : 36] Because I think she was left with these three words. Because that is the way that she was. That was her inner self. And that was the way that she lived her life.

She was full of trust. Full of love for the Lord. And satisfied with whatever her lot was. And whatever that is. You can turn the picture off now.

I don't want to distract. So it's those three words that if there was a formal title for the psalm we have read and sung, this would be it. Praise the Lord.

Or as the ESV puts it, bless the Lord. And it's part of a group of four psalms that come together. Psalm 103 is about praising God for the benefits he brings to his people.

Psalm 104 is about praising God for his creation. Psalm 105 is about praising God for what he has done for his people. And Psalm 106 deals with praising God for his patience with his rebellious people.

[4 : 42] But it's also interesting as it's a psalm where David the psalmist does not ask for anything. It's just a pure psalm of praise and nothing else.

And when I say just a psalm of praise, in this context it doesn't feel quite the right word. But I couldn't think of a better one. But what it is, it's a psalm which is the how, why and who of praise. So what does that psalm tell us about praise, which is what I want to deal with tonight. And the first thing is, it's the how of praise.

And if you look at verse 1, It's like he is recording all the blessings that he has received in verse 2. And it's a short point that I want to open up with. But to start with, his praise, it's all in, as people of my generation say. He doesn't keep anything back in his praise.

[5 : 57] There's nothing left in reserve for another day. There's nothing half-hearted about his praise. And if you want to use another football expression, he leaves all his praise out on the pitch.

It's with all his heart. It's with all his soul, all his might and strength. And he is delighting and thanking God for all the things that he does. Because David the psalmist realizes that God is just wonderful.

And he wants to praise him for it. But he also wants to keep the momentum of his praise. He doesn't want to forget all the things and reasons that he has to praise God.

And when you look at verse 2, what he's doing, it's almost like he's counting all the reasons to praise God, all the good things that God has blessed him with.

And he will go on to list them in a slightly different way. But it could be things like the food he has on the table, his family, his friends, the support he has been given in his life, how he has been kept safe, prayers answered, and so on.

[7 : 02] And he does these things because if he realizes, he realizes that if he forgets, if he forgets his blessings, if he stops counting them, there is a great danger in forgetting the way that God blesses you.

And as I say, every time I come here, yeah, you probably know by now I have a history degree. But he did what Habakkuk does in that he looks back, he knows his history, and he learns the lessons of history here.

Because the psalm goes on to mention Moses later on in a slightly different way. And I will come to that. But Moses, again, did like what David did. He told the Israelites over and over again, do not forget the blessings of the Lord.

And if you want some examples, I'll not read them. There is Deuteronomy 6 verse 12, where he told them, do not forget that God rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.

And then in Deuteronomy 8 verse 11, Moses had been talking to them about what awaited them in the promised land. And it was wonderful. It was a land of plenty.

[8 : 14] It was a land of wonder. The old-fashioned expression is a land flowing with milk and honey. And he does. And the psalmist here does not want, and Moses didn't want the people to forget God.

But that's exactly what happened. Moses eventually died. And he was replaced by Joshua. And then Joshua died, and his generation along with him.

And that was the last of the generation that had traveled through the wilderness. And then we see in Judges chapter 2 verse 10, if you have your Bible open, it's worthwhile just looking at it.

It says there, And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

So the psalmist is saying, Count your blessings. Number them. Write them down. Take note of them. Because there is a great danger in forgetting.

[9 : 24] And the danger is that if you forget, you'll think it's all down to yourself. You'll start to think that maybe you deserve these blessings. You start to think that it's your own talents and gifts that means that these blessings come your way.

But the psalmist is saying, No, good things, they come from the Lord. Good things come from the Lord, so count them lest you forget. Because if you do, only harm can come from you.

So that's the first point about praise. It's praise the Lord. It's all in. It's full on. It's never ending. And do what you can to make sure that you don't forget how much you are blessed each and every day. And then the psalmist, he goes on. And he deals with why we should praise God. And the reason why we should praise God is for all the benefits that come our way if we do.

And there is no doubt that being a true believer in God is the only perfect arrangement that you're ever going to get. There is nothing better, nothing more complete or sure and something that if you are a true believer can never be taken away from you.

[10:41] And David praises God because it is the best. And I think sometime in our traditions, we don't do this enough. We don't share or show our delight at the God that we have and the blessings he provides, which are many.

And I think there's maybe various reasons for it. Maybe there's a national characteristic of that stiff upper lip where we are the same wherever we do. I think there's a Presbyterian thing going on, particularly maybe a Scottish and Irish Presbyterian thing where we almost like to behave in accordance with our own stereotype.

And I spent a few amusing minutes looking at Presbyterian stereotypes. And somewhere I found Presbyterians pleasant, if a little dull.

And of all the newspapers that I've never read before, it was the Tampa Bay Times which referred to Presbyterians as frozen but chosen. And in our tradition, we don't wail in the way that they do in the Bible in bad times.

So we don't tend to smile so much in the good times either. But this is not David's example. David's example is to praise God with every bit of his being, with everything that he could muster because he wanted to do, because he realized that being the follower of God was the best.

[12:09] And this psalm goes on to tell us why. The first thing he points out is early in the psalm where he praises God for all the forgiveness for his sins.

And that's the best of all gifts because without the gift of forgiveness, all the rest of the other things that David mentions here, they're meaningless. But we are sinful beings.

We're sinful in every action, every thought, every inaction or word. All of them are tainted by sin.

Our view of ourselves are tainted by sin. Our view of each other's are tainted by sin.

Our impact on each other, the world that we live in and the resources, it's all tainted by sin. But we can receive this gift of salvation and forgiveness from God only because of the death of his son Jesus.

And we should praise God for that. And if we believe, if you look at verse 12, it says, As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

[13:20] And what he's saying is that east and west never meet. You know, wherever you stand, east will be one direction and west will be the other. But when he forgives us our sins, it's just like that because it's a vast, it's unmeasurable and it's wonderful.

So praise God if you believe in him tonight for your forgiveness and the forgiveness of your sins.

Praise God as well for your health or as it says here, because he heals all your diseases.

And this is not some statement that Christians don't get sick or if you do, it's because their faith is bad or there's some particular sin in your life. Christians do get sick.

Many of us, I'm sure all of us have been sick at some times. And sometimes and in all our lives, a time will come when we won't get better. But what David is saying is here is that when we are sick and we do get better, it is God's doing.

So praise him for your health and praise him for the clever people and the caring people who help you maintain it as well. So praise God for his forgiveness.

[14:34] Praise God for your health. Praise God as well because he keeps you safe. And it talks about, in verse four, it talks about somebody who redeems your life from the pit.

Now, I don't know original Bible languages, but obviously through the children, I know the odd word here and there. And that word pit comes from the word sheol. And it's a place of darkness that lies, what David's referring to is a place of darkness that lies after death.

And David praised God here because God had protected him from that many times. We don't know at what time of life David wrote this psalm, but he was protected. He was protected from the animals in the field.

He was protected from Goliath. He was protected from Saul. He was protected from all the battles he had been in. And David wanted to praise God for that protection.

And God is protecting you here as well. He's protecting you because you're here worshipping us either in person in this building or online in some way.

[15:44] God has protected you and allowed you to do that. And he protects us every day, whether it be safety and work or safety on the road, safety and worship, safety from harm.

So praise God for the protection that he gives you each and every day. And David praises God as well for the satisfaction that God brings.

Now, I'm sure each one of us could write a book about people's views on what satisfaction is, how it can be found. And people continually chase satisfaction. And the truth is that true and full satisfaction is elusive.

And one of my favourite quotes, and it's one that I've used many times over the years, but they interviewed the original, when I say the original, the first John Paul Getty who had more wealth than what most of us could imagine.

And whatever he did seemed to turn to gold. And he was an incredibly wealthy man. And they asked him once, how much is enough?

[16:49] And he said his reply to that was, just a little bit more. The world we live in, doesn't matter who you are, what you have, you chase satisfaction. But it never quite gets there.

But David did because the good things in his life, they came from God. And because they came from God, they were wonderful, they were satisfying, they were enough for David, whatever they were and however they came about.

So praise God for the satisfaction that he brings. And it's not about your wealth, it's not about your possessions, it's not about your good looks or talents or anything else. Praise God for the satisfaction that he brings, that only he can bring.

And be like David because whatever it is, be content with that because they are enough. They were enough for him and God's blessings on you will be enough for you also.

So to take that first point about why we praise God as individuals, these are the points we praise him for the forgiveness he brings.

[17:59] We praise him for our health. We praise him because he keeps us safe. And we praise him because of the satisfaction he brings. And don't be shy about these things.

Don't hide them as I've said in that Presbyterian way where we like to be falsely humble. Praise God and let everybody know maybe not what you say but in the way that you are because of the wonderful saviour that you have.

So that's the first point. That's why we praise God as individuals. But the psalm also goes further than that because it tells us about why we should praise God for our corporate or national blessings.

and we praise God because of his blessings to us corporately in this church or as a nation and we live in the world I seem to be saying this more and more that seems to be increasingly unfair and broken.

It's a world where it seems that the poor and disadvantaged are increasingly poor and disadvantaged. It's a world where richer nations are getting richer every day and poorer ones are being left behind.

[19:13] We also live in a country where we used to boast that we didn't suffer from the corruption or mismanagement that other nations did but that is no longer the case and I've taken this across all political parties so that I can't be accused of any particular bias but we look at individuals in power over the last three or four years there's been two men recently in the news guilty of assault of other men two cases of that we have had one ex-politician who's spending time in prison for embezzling money we have another one who lost his job because inappropriate messages to young boys we have multiple COVID fines at all layers of government we have another I think ex-MP who's in prison again for lying under oath pretending she wasn't somewhere where she actually was and we have another who's quite open about his inappropriate behaviour towards women and so on and I could go on and on about that but we praise God because he is not like that we have a God who's righteous in every way we have a God who can't be unrighteous we have a God who treats everyone in the right way regardless of their status or wealth or talent or position we have a God who goes out of his way to protect those who are least able to protect themselves whether they be poor whether they be disadvantaged in some way or weak or as this passage calls out or sick

God protects all these people has done from the beginning of time and will do to the very end of time will do until the very end of time so we look at God at complete contrast to what we have and we praise God for that and we praise God as well because we know that one day he will deal with the people that I've mentioned be they he will deal with the unrighteous he will deal with those who abuse their position of power or abuse their position of responsibility in some way we also praise God because of his character and what David does in the psalm is that he points us back to Moses and the chapter that we read in Moses about how God revealed himself to him Moses had been taken away from the people and in that time the whole nation had turned away from God and in the aftermath and this is what we read

Moses asked God to let him know his ways so that he could understand him better and enjoy his favour and that is exactly what God did for Moses he took him up to Mount Sinai he hid him in a crevice he covered him with his hands and allowed allowed Moses to see God's back and if you look at the impact on Moses you can turn it up if you're able but Exodus 34 verses 6 7 and 8 the Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord a God of merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation and look what Moses did and Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth and worshipped and this is what the psalmist the psalmist is referring directly back to this point when Moses was showing how God really was when he was giving that when he was giving that little bit because he needed that at that particular point

Moses praised God and David this psalmist he is praising God because he understood better who God was and what he was like he understood that God is compassionate and merciful to his people and God's compassion was there despite the rebellion in Moses time despite the rebellion in David's time and after and God continues to be compassionate to us today in our rebellion and he's compassionate and merciful particularly because we don't deserve it yes this passage tells us that God does get angry but it's not in a fit of temper but his anger is slow and compassionate and the wonderful thing is that there is full and free forgiveness for those that genuinely ask for it praise God for these things and David praise God as well because he loved him so much that he didn't constantly pick on his faults and remain angry with them for a long time we should praise God for these things and David also praise God because of his father a fatherly love and that's a love that takes into account frailty it's a love that's constant and full despite our personal insignificance because none of us will probably make it into the great books of history but yet

God loves us and loves us fully and wonderfully and David praise God for this fatherly love that it did not reduce and the wonderful thing about being a father is that your love is always there it's always complete but the time that you understand it the most is on two occasions one when your children do something wonderful and the other occasions when they do something bad and David is the one who is praising God for these things his true fatherly love it's always there and it never lets us down so praise God for these things praise him for his compassion and mercy and love and when we praise God just very quickly we praise him because he's the king of all creation we praise him with the angels his messengers we praise him with the sun moon and the stars who are fulfilling his will and we join in with the whole of creation when we praise him so I do want to finish tonight and how do I finish well I think there's two things

[26 : 08] I need to say well for those tonight who are this chapter the psalm refers to to us in different ways but those who fear God or one of his children obeying his commandments or whatever however we refer to well then his psalm tells us how we should worship and the way that we should do it and as I said earlier it's not to be half-hearted there's nothing held back it's to be full on it's counting your blessings so you don't forget it's in your face and it is fully satisfied because there's nothing to compare these blessings to nothing better nothing more complete or nothing everlasting so because of that you have no right to hold back your praise or no reason to do it either both as individuals or as a church or as a wider group of God's family if you do hold back you're missing out on the blessing you're not living your life to the full and you will not be satisfied but on the other hand and I hope I'm not talking to anybody tonight but if you're not what this what this psalm refers to as part of God's family or rebelling against his commands these blessings aren't yours you're missing out on them now and you will miss out on them for the whole of eternity and you will never get the satisfaction that only

God can bring and if that's you you need to turn to Jesus because that is the only way that these things can be found and look around you because I know most of you here I know most of you are reasonably well and there are people like my Aunt Sadie who have that praise who have that joy and you look at them and you just know that they have something that you do not have and they have something that you have been looking for in their wrong place and you haven't found it if that is you that that praise can be yours as well look to Jesus and give your life to him now I'll just finish maybe we just read the last few lines how do we finish a song like this look at the last line bless the Lord oh my soul amen