

Praise the Lord! God's covenant goodness

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Date: 09 July 2023

Preacher: Benji Cook

[0 : 00] Great are the Lord's works. Praise the Lord. I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright and in the congregation.

Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendour and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous work to be remembered.

The Lord is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him. He remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

The works of his hands are faithful and just. All his precepts are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people.

He has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All those who practice it have a good understanding.

[0 : 56] His praise endures forever. What does God want his people to be doing this side of heaven? I wonder if you've ever thought about that question. What does God want from us?

What should we be doing with ourselves? Is Christianity merely just the sort of having a kind of group of intellectual ideas that we are sent to, and then we just kind of sit tight, wait for heaven, smile, and we're done?

Or what would God rather have us do? Is there something that God would have us concerned with? Well, we are this morning in a one-off sermon in the book of Psalms. And the book of Psalms ultimately is a Christ-shaped book.

Its great hope is the coming of a new David. We've been looking at David all through the book of Psalms, if we were to have read from Psalm 1 to the end. And we would have seen that Psalms presents David as almost the king we need, but not quite.

Almost the king we need, but not quite. And so as we are in this final section of the Psalter, this final section, Psalm 111 comes in, this book of Psalms is divided in five, and we are in the final section.

[2 : 02] God, in essence, is giving his people the words to say as they wait for this coming new David. God's people are in exile, they are waiting for a king, and this part of Psalms is basically equipping them, what are they supposed to say?

What are they supposed to do as they wait for this new David? And we, therefore, I hope we can see, can apply this Psalm basically straight to us, almost. Because we as New Testament believers, we know who this king is, the Lord Jesus Christ, but we too, of course, are waiting for his return. We are waiting for the king. So what are we supposed to be doing in the meantime, as we wait for Jesus to return? Now, our psalm has one point, and one point only for us this morning.

And if you have the handout, it would be really helpful to have a look at that on the back, just to give you an overview of where we're going. But our one point this morning is simply this, that the Lord would have us concerned with as we wait for Jesus, to praise the one and only God of heaven.

Praise. That's our point this morning. God would have us praise. Specifically, praising God for his works. I wonder if you noticed that in the reading. His works are all over these verses.

[3 : 14] Verse 2, great are the works of the Lord. Verse 3, full of splendor and majesty is his work. Verse 4, he has caused his wondrous works to be remembered.

Verse 6, he has shown his people the power of his works. And verse 7, the works of his hands are faithful and just. And the psalm is bookended with a command to praise.

Verse 1, the first three words, praise the Lord. And the final clause of the psalm, his praise endures forever. What are we supposed to do? We are supposed to praise.

How long for? Forever. There is the claim of the psalm. And right in the middle, what are we praising him for? His works. His works.

Now, before we spend any kind of time reflecting on what we are supposed to be praising specifically, we're going to clear the weeds, as it were, as to why praise is so appropriate.

[4 : 14] Why the psalmist would have us concerned with praise as we wait for the Lord Jesus' return. Now, perhaps, as you realise this psalm really is all about praise, you've sucked in your cheeks with boredom and frustration.

Praise is so common, isn't it? That's such a classic Christian answer. It's unimpressive, you might be thinking. Oh, come on, this really is Sunday School 101. Yes, the answer is Jesus, and we should praise him.

Can we not move on to something more theologically rigorous? Praise is the appetiser. Tulip and the five points of Calvinism is the meat. Why aren't we getting to that? Or perhaps, for those of us who aren't a follower of the Lord Jesus here this morning, you're thinking, that is rather sycophantic of you, God.

That is rather arrogant, actually, of you, God. Really, the thing that you want us to be doing, the thing that you want to drive us towards as we wait for this promised return of Jesus, is praise. How self-focused, God. How rather human, God. Really. Praise. Well, this morning, the psalmist hopes to dispel for us both of these myths.

[5 : 25] And just before we dive into what exactly we're supposed to be praising God for, two implications for us on praise that we notice from the first four verses. Number one, praise generates a God-centered life.

Praise generates a God-centered life. Notice with me, and these words are just packed with meaning, the state of the heart of the psalmist in verse one.

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. Now, heart in Hebrew is a technical term. When we think of heart, we think emotion.

We think lovey-dovey. We think valentines. We think warm cuddles and kisses. I don't know what you think. But that's what we think. We just think the emotions. But in Hebrew, the heart means not just the emotions, but the mind as well.

In other words, the psalmist is saying everything. Not just the intellectual ideas of my mind, but also my emotions are entirely caught up with God. I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole being, as it were, with my mind, with my heart, with my actions.

[6 : 31] Everything that I am, thanks to the Lord. And so, in other words, the psalmist is saying it is incredibly difficult. In fact, the psalmist cannot in any way have himself pulled to think or love anything else.

He is fully caught up in God. He is fully caught up with God. My whole heart. The application, therefore, follows, for those of us who are Christian, that it should be the same.

It should be the same. Now, of course, as soon as we say that, as soon as we hear this verse of a psalmist who is able to have both his mind and his heart and his actions and his being caught up with love and adoration and praise to the one true God.

Of course, we think, well, that's not me. If we're honest with ourselves, or at least that's certainly the case for me, that that is a struggle. There are so many things, aren't there, that seem to make our walk with the Lord feel so barren and dry.

And the causes of this world, well, they can just be so overwhelming. And the new mum, who has a young child who's not sleeping, she knows she's supposed to be reading her Bible and saying her prayers in the morning. And she wakes up thinking with great intentions, time to read my Bible, gets downstairs, opens up to a psalm, reads one verse, and then suddenly that cry comes from the bedroom.

[7 : 48] And then the Bible is closed and runs back upstairs, feeds said child. And by then the day has started, 24 hour passes and she realises, I've had no joy in the Lord. My whole heart has not been given over to him.

Or perhaps we've lost a job recently and anxiety is pressing on us. And the worry of the world and thinking, who am I if I don't have a job? What is my identity now?

How am I going to provide for my family? How long is this going to last for? And again, we might be left thinking, how is it that we are supposed to have our whole heart caught up in God? Or perhaps we're being mocked in school.

You speak to any of the youth at JAMS. It's very striking what they say about what would happen if they were to out and out tell their friends that they need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's very hard to have a whole heart caught up with God.

Or perhaps it's that unanswered prayer for a loved one to come to faith or for a particular thing to happen that we so long for. And we can be left thinking again, my whole heart, my whole being caught up with loving the one true God and praising him.

[8 : 48] How? That doesn't seem to happen. Or of course all of us will go through some kind of suffering. That might be now. That might be later. And again, the cares of the world, well they can just seem so massive.

The cares of the world, don't they, they fight to fill our mind and hearts. And we despair of ever finding joy and giving praise to the one true God again. But the surprising solution that this psalm is going to drive us towards is that when these things happen, the solution is not to look inwards, but rather to take the lens off ourself, to look at the one true God and praise him.

Praise him. And if we think for a second, of course that makes sense. It's very hard to love the world when our heart is fixed on God. And that's the second implication that we're going to think about.

Why praise? Why are we talking about praise? Same side of the coin really. Praise kills our love of the world. Praise kills our love of the world. Worries by definition, don't they?

Take up our thoughts and minds. And we are consumed by them. And you find yourself waking up thinking about them. You find yourself going to sleep thinking about them. But here we see that the praise of God leaves no space for such worries.

[10 : 02] The heart is full. The mind is full. There is no space for anxiety. Of course, though, we need to actually understand what we're supposed to be praising God for.

We've seen, perhaps, that praise might be the answer to these worries, to these concerns, whatever the case may be. But what are we supposed to be praising God for? And that's where our handout is going to be particularly helpful. The psalmist is going to draw us through and show us exactly what he would have us praise God for.

To begin with, praise God for all his works. Praise God for all his works. Verses 1 to 4. Have a look down with me. Praise the Lord.

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. In the company of the upright, in the congregation, great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.

He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered. The Lord is gracious and merciful. Now, you would have noticed that nothing actually has been specified yet.

[11 : 10] It is just a universal statement. All his works. Which works? Should we pray? All of them. All of them. All works. So, if we just pause and do an experiment, perhaps for 30 seconds here this morning.

What could we thank God for? His works. Well, the breath you've just taken. The thoughts you've just had. The fact that you woke up this morning. The fact that you slept last night. The world we live in.

Sky. The animals. Birds. Fields. Food. Fiction. Music. Art. Mountains. Beaches. Rest. Friends.

Family. Children. Sun. Stars. Moon. Math. I suppose. Academia.

Sports. Just some of the gifts that God has given us that we could perhaps enjoy today. Or perhaps the things that he's given us in provision. Our jobs. Our minds. Our hobbies. The things we enjoy to do with family and friends.

And that's before we've even spoke about the spiritual gifts that the Lord has given us. And the fact that his son died for us. The fact that we can pray. The fact that we can hear him speak. The fact that he forgives us. And forgives us.

[12 : 08] And forgives us. And forgives us. And his delight in us. The fact that he lives with us. Giving us a part to play in his kingdom so that we're not just passengers. And on and on and on we could go.

And we've not even really spoken about Jesus yet. The precious infinite blood of Jesus that speaks a better word than able. The life of Jesus which is now ours. The cross of Jesus where we see death and Satan and sin defeated.

Eternal union with Jesus that one day we will stare at him. And delight in him for eternity upon eternity and still will not be done. Great are the works of the Lord. Great are the works of the Lord.

It is not as though we could run out of things to praise the living God for. Great are his works. There is a stunning amount we could praise God for.

All his works are worthy of contemplation and praise. But we get more specific. We now get more specific. This is our second point. Praise God for his works of provision.

[13:06] And the psalmist in verses 5 and 6. Have a look down with me. He begins to give us specific things that we can praise God for. He provides food for those who fear him. He remembers his covenant forever.

He has shown his people the power of his works. In giving them the inheritance of the nation.

Notice, provides and giving. This is God's giving provision to his people.

Now of course, the first thing that we're kind of zoomed in on is providing food. And you want us to imagine that a good Israelite reading this. We go, of course, yeah, that's right.

Passover, food in the wilderness. Yeah, God gives food. That's absolutely right. He would have that very firmly in view. So of course, as I suppose Izzy the Israelite, that's what they're all called, Izzy.

Don't know if you knew that, but that's true. He sits down to eat and he reflects that the food before him is a gift from God. And it's meant to drive him to praise. But of course, it's also a reminder about how God fed the Israelites in the wilderness.

[14:06] But I want us to imagine we're not Jews here this morning. I don't think most of us. But I want us to just pause to think for a second. Why has the Lord made a world where we need to eat every day?

Not just once. Those teenagers in the room who maybe just have McDonald's at 10pm and don't eat throughout the rest of the day. I don't think that's meant to be the model. We're meant to eat continually throughout the day.

And we're used to thinking about thanking God for that, aren't we? Like now and again, we say grace. We try and say it as fast as possible so that we can get to the food, don't we? Dear Lord, thank you so much for the food. Amen. That's just my family.

Okay. And it's almost become twee saying grace. But have we ever stopped to think that the reason God has made a world where we need to eat is so that every single time we sit down for a meal, we wake up in the morning, we go and have our breakfast and we remember God's provided.

And then halfway through the day, we stop and we eat lunch and we think God's provided. And then we come towards the end of our day and we stop and we think God has provided. God has provided that every single day, all the time, is punctuated with the Lord's reminder, I provide for you.

[15:12] Praise. Praise me. So yes, of course, we might think that the provision of food feels very parochial, feels very small. But what does it say about our God?

That he cares enough about us to provide food for us. That he is interested in us praising him for the very small, very common things like getting up and eating breakfast.

And so, of course, that is verse 5. But then the next thing, if that is kind of zoomed in, I suppose, on the individual eating, the next verse is jaw-dropping in its proportion and its comparison.

Have a look with me at verse 6. He has shown his people the power of his works in giving them the inheritance of the nations. Now, I want you to notice with me the strange interplay between our two lines in verse 6.

These are very strange lines when we see them next to each other. Line 1. He has shown, past tense, his people the power of his works in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

[16:18] That is a strange combination indeed. Shown and giving, giving sort of, are in the past tense. Yes, they are already done. The Lord has done it, as it were.

But the thing given is an inheritance. Did we notice that? Which is something that comes later, after a death. Something in the future.

And, of course, our initial readers would feel the strangeness of this. They are in exile. Izzy the Israelite would look to his other friends, Izzy the Israelites, and he would look at them and see that there is no king, no country, no inheritance, no conquered nation single.

So what on earth is this psalm talking about? Nations plural. There's a second strange reality, though, of course, to this gift. That being its nature and who it belongs to.

Now, it would be strange, wouldn't it, beyond measure? We need to imagine this morning that you went downstairs and you received post, which on a Sunday I know doesn't happen, but let's just say that it does. And you receive a letter from your old aunt Ethel.

[17:22] And sadly, very tragically, old aunt Ethel has passed away. It's very sad. But old aunt Ethel wanted to give you something in her will. And she's given you the nation-states of Turkmenistan. And you think, oh goodness, she lost her mind.

There's no way she can give me the nation-state of Turkmenistan. We might deduce that old aunt Ethel suffered from delusion before she died, that the nation of Turkmenistan is not hers to give. And if it were, we are certainly not worthy of receiving it. Well, you might have a very huge view of yourself. And you might think, of course, I should be king of Turkmenistan. But we might pause and think, well, that is not a gift that we should really have.

And that is certainly not the case. But what does it say about our God that this is the gift that God decides to give? Two thoughts for us, and by way of application for this point.

Is not the enormity of our God plain to see? Whilst old aunt Ethel has no right whatsoever to hand over to us the nation-state of Turkmenistan, the Lord has every right to give the whole world to whomever he wishes.

[18:30] Because the world is his. If the Lord decided to give you Turkmenistan or London, it's yours. It's his to give. And furthermore, the Lord is so self-sufficient that for him to give the whole world as a gift shows he has no need of it.

I wonder if you ever realise that, that God has absolutely no need for this world at all. Yes, he loves it. Yes, he delights in it. Does he need it? No. Of course, that makes sense, though, doesn't it? We can't give what we don't have. A friend of mine, she has an autoimmune disease, which is very, very sad, but it means that she regularly has to have kidney transplants. Now, one of the great sadnesses and difficulties of that is that you can only give one kidney.

Let's have biology lesson 101. You have two kidneys. So if you give two, you die. So that's the logic. So you can give one. And, of course, that is a wonderful gift. But her father, who gave her her first kidney, he can't give more than that because he only can give one.

So what does it say about our Lord that he can freely give the entire world? Second implication.

Izzy the Israelite would have no idea how on earth it would be possible that the Lord could give the world to his people.

[19:46] But, of course, for us, as New Testament Christians, we know exactly how. Jesus, upon his conquering of sin and death on the cross, has won the world to himself.

That is why, I wonder if you've ever thought this, that is why Jesus says in Matthew 28, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go out and make disciples of all nations.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, disciples, here's your marching orders, here's your conquering command. Go and make disciples of all nations.

All nations. In other words, note the scope. There is not a square inch of this tiny speck of a planet that the Lord God in the Lord Jesus Christ does not say is mine and has handed over to us his church.

Missionaries, I suppose, would be better called inheritance chasers. That's what they are. There's my inheritance. It's mine. I'm going to go and get it. Saudi Arabia is ours in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[20:50] China is ours in the Lord Jesus Christ. 3.4 billion people currently unreached. That is a lot of inheritance. It's ours. We should go and claim it.

But of course, our homes, they're ours because of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our office, it's ours because of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has conquered. The order has been given.

The world has been given to us. The Lord has given us the inheritance of the nations. Now, of course, therefore, if you are not a Christian here this morning, I wonder if you notice the rather, I suppose it could be termed offensive claim that this psalm is making.

That you are a spoil, not a conqueror. And that you are the inheritance of the church, not the other way around. And I suppose this psalm implicitly is saying, move sides.

Be a conqueror, not a spoil. Finally, we are to praise God for his commands. We are to praise God for his commandments.

[21:50] Have a look with me at verses 7 to 10. The works of his hands are faithful and just. All his precepts are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

He sent redemption to his people. He has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All who practice it have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever. Our final instruction on what the Lord would have us praise for is his commandments. I wonder if you notice that word in verse 7. Precepts. Precepts means moral instruction.

So it is commandments, but in a moral sphere. And why is that so wonderful? Well, verse 8, because they are established forever and ever. In other words, this is objective morality. This is God has given his moral instruction and it does not change.

Isn't that liberating? If we just pause for a moment to think how morality has shifted over the last even 10 years. And verse 9, they flow what from?

[22 : 51] Verse 9, he sent redemption to his people. He has commanded his covenant forever. Isn't that wonderful? Just to have that order made absolutely clear for us. Every other world religion, by the way. Every other world religion.

Follow commandments. Once you will receive redemption. The Lord, verse 9, I've sent redemption. Therefore, follow. In other words, this is not a workspace faith. Redemption is sent. And we follow as a response.

Always as a response. Salvation. Then commandments. Now, it might be strange to our ears that we should be grateful for instruction on how to live our lives. There's a recent article that I read outlining that in China they've just added a word to their dictionary, which basically translates loosely as to lie flat.

That's what the word means. And it's in the context of where they've decided that actually I don't want to work past 5 p.m. This is the millennial generation, so the older people can start rolling their eyes. Classic. And it basically means I refuse to do more than my job description says.

If my job description says I have an hour's lunch break, I'm having it. If my job description says I finish at 5, sorry, you should have made it 6, I'm going home. In other words, do not tell me what to do.

[24 : 00] Do not tell me to go above and beyond. Here's my contract. I will do no more. And, of course, anecdotally, the number of times I'm sure many of the teenagers in the room have either heard or read older generations bemoaning the laziness and disobedience of those pesky millennials and Gen Zs, obsessed with their TikTok and never listening, no authority, think they can have it all, not in my day.

I'm sure the idea of being told what to do, we get it, we don't like it. Terms such as my truth, my story have become catchphrases for our society. To tell someone, it's very interesting.

Last night we had one of our dialogue events, presenting the gospel to one of the individuals, and he just turned around and said, there's no way I could believe in a God that would ask of me and expect things of me at all.

A God that would expect my worship. I've moved past that. It was very striking. We hate being told what to do. Except, of course, that the fallout of that worldview is plain to see, isn't it?

Just take one look at France and the hatred of others that you see. The mental health crises that we see in our school. The erosion of truth in the public square. Terms that even like fake news that even have to exist.

[25 : 09] Growing distrust of politicians and police. Are we not? Is it not obvious that we are crying out for an objective, good, clear authority to tell us how to live?

Are we not crying out for that? Here's a thought experiment for us. What would the world look like if tomorrow morning the entire world decided to follow the commandments of the Bible?

What would the world look like? Well, first of all, all STDs would end if we followed the Lord's instruction that the only safe place for sex is within marriage. The porn industry would collapse tomorrow from billions of views every single day to zero.

No. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women would end. And the NSPCC would go bankrupt tomorrow. Women would feel safe on the street.

There would be no more catcalling. No more sexual assaults. No more leering. Those posters on the tube that say staring is a crime. Well, you could tear those down because no man would look twice at a woman in a lustful way.

[26 : 09] Abortion would be a redundant issue because fathers would stay home and lead. No more broken homes because fathers would stay home and lead. Climate crisis would end because people would no longer be selfish and use the world's resources for their own means.

Racism would end because we would all see people made in the image of God and therefore there would be no discrimination. Homelessness, end. War, end. No, it is not a strange thing. It is not a strange thing at all for the psalmist to bring his praises to a climax with praising the commandments of the Lord. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people actually listened to what the Bible said?

Wouldn't that be stunning? Wouldn't the world be so very beautiful if they did? No, it is not a strange thing. Here in God's word is the objective, good, safe, clear way to live for a life of flourishing. Praise the Lord that he's shown us how. Which of course is why our psalm ends with verse 10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[27 : 15] All those who practice it have a good understanding. We begin, if we want a world like this, first and foremost, by submitting to God. And fear here is not a kind of jump scare horror fear.

Fear is a awe and reverential point. Of course, if we wanted a world that was flourishing, step one, fearing the Lord. Then we see the implication. Two implications from this point before we move to our conclusion.

Do we see that for us, and I wonder as we went through that list, and I'm sure you could add many of your own examples. All of our longings for this broken world start with evangelism.

I wonder if you ever thought about that. Often we seem to get in a tis where we separate evangelism into one sphere over here, and social action into one sphere over here. But the Bible never separates those things.

If you want true change, it starts with fearing the Lord. Then you obey him, and then society's problems begin to change. There is no separation between evangelism and social action.

[28 : 18] And implication number two. For those of us in the room who wouldn't call ourselves a Christian, I guess the question is, does your worldview have answers to the problems that we just spoke about?

Does it? Do you not long for a world like this? Is this not exactly what all of us are striving for? And do we honestly think that things like education, or the political system, or financial freedom, is the answer to those problems?

No, here, the fear of God, and following his commandments, is the answer. As we conclude, we said, didn't we, that the great kind of thrust of these verses is to help us, to help the Israelites, and then to help us keep going, to know what to do in the gap, as we wait for this Psalm 2 king.

I'd encourage you, if you want to kind of get an overview of what the Psalms is about, go and read Psalm 2, as we wait for Jesus to return. And we may find longing for the return of Christ immensely difficult, for a whole host of reasons, and that we touched on at the beginning.

It might be very painful, trying to wait for the Lord Jesus, as the ups and downs of life come at us. Yet here we are told, exactly, what we are supposed to do, as we wait.

[29 : 36] Praise. Praise. Praise, and praise, and praise, and praise. Praise him for his works. Praise him for his provision. Praise him for his commands. And of course, we have something even more beautiful, and even more stunning to praise God for, than the first readers could have even dreamed of.

That the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross, really did conquer sin, and death, and Satan. And that because of him, we have an eternal home to look forward to. We can wait. We can praise.

Because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. There is a discussion question, on the bottom of your handouts. It would be wonderful, if after the sermon, we could be thinking about, this question together.

I encourage you, please do come and ask me as well. And this has been a wonderful psalm, for me personally. And I'd love us to be, as a church family, thinking about how we can apply this, to our own hearts. But why don't I, lead us in a final prayer.

Praise the Lord, his praise endures forever. Father, please, would we be able to say with the psalmist, that my whole heart, is caught up with giving thanks to you.

[30 : 45] Lord, we thank you for all that you have done. The splendor and majesty of your works, your beautiful provision, your beautiful and perfect commandments, and supremely giving us the Lord Jesus.

Please ignite our hearts with praise and love for you, so that the cares of this world might pale in comparison. Amen.