

LET US PAUSE!

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Preacher: Dr Jamie Grant

[0 : 0 0] so first of the same we'll see what that means first Sunday of Advent this is one of these unusual years when we actually the first Sunday of Advent encompasses the one of the December moving up to Christmas, it's first of December so I feel I'm at least slightly justified in using the Christmas word is that okay?

yeah, okay thank you I went to buy a Christmas tree yesterday I have a friend who I think if left to his own devices he would probably buy his Christmas tree in June but we almost managed to restrain him until until December we're always there this sound that we're looking at this morning sound 113 is it is a song that's traditionally read during the Advent season those church cultures that call them election day that set readings throughout the year Psalm 113 is normally a reading for one of the Sundays of Advent so I thought I would I would take a look at the psalm as we're in the first the first Sunday of Advent it's a beautiful poem it's a praise psalm it's part of a collection of praise psalms and if you again

I think you may have mentioned this the last time I was here I barely remember what I had so don't worry if you don't remember me mentioning it the last time I was here it was like a month ago or six weeks ago whatever it was whatever it was when you come across a praise psalm in the Bible there's always one question that you should ask and that's why why not in that sense of skepticism or not in that sense of reluctance but when it comes to the psalms of praise it's the most simple structure of all of the psalms that we that we come across some of the psalms are actually quite complex there's lots of different elements to them and lots of things going on but when it comes to the praise psalms you will always have a call to praise and you will always have a rationale for praise you'll always have a reason so that's why whenever we come across a praise psalm you want to ask the why question because the psalmist will be focusing on one thing or a few things very specifically about the character of God about who God is or how God works and you know he's giving a theological reason a theological rationale sometimes a very practical rationale as to why we should praise

God and this this sound is so often read during the advent season because of the rationale that the psalmist gives he firstly points us to this image in verses 4 to 6 this image of a God who is the high God the high king the one who is in control the ruler of all things and then secondly he points us to this image of the God who comes close the God who draws near the God who gets his hands dirty to help his people and so there's something profoundly incarnational about the psalm there's something in the psalm written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ but there's something in this psalm that just echoes the incarnation that shows us that this sense of almighty power intimacy and approach at the same time this is just an end to who

God is it's an intrinsic part of his character and his being so hundreds of years before the coming of Christ and yet echoing the work of Jesus when he became a man and lived among us Psalm 113 breaks down into three parts which is nice it's always nice when the psalm naturally breaks down into two parts it means that I don't have to work at finding an artificial way of breaking the psalm down into two parts but this one actually does very neatly break in three parts firstly you've got the call to praise in verses 1 to 3 and then you've got the image of God as the exalted God the high exalted God in verses 4 to 6 and then thirdly in verses 7 to 9 you've got this image of God as the exalted God the one who lifts us the one who comes alongside to help us and to raise us up so call to praise

[5 : 39] God as the exalted God and then God as the exalted God the call to praise is one of these things that's very easy to skip over isn't it you kind of rush past the call to praise in order to focus on what's the meat of the psalm what's the psalm what's the psalm actually about what's the focus of the psalm in that sense and yet the psalmist doesn't allow us to do that here do you notice that in verses 1 to 3 praise the Lord praise oh servants of the Lord praise the name of the Lord let the name of the Lord be praised both now and forever more from the rising of the sun to the place where it said the name of the Lord to be praised five praise injunctions in these verses five times as readers as the people of

God we are we are exhorted to praise the Lord sometimes when it comes to the praise you simply get that the praise the Lord command it's a very simple structure in the Hebrew but it's very plural that ending that's an ending in the Hebrew the hallelujah that means all of you all of you together and there's something quite cohortative about that it encourages us all of us together let's praise the Lord it's a community call encouraging us just to voice the praise that our God deserves praise the Lord praise the name of the Lord the name of the Lord is the name of the

Lord is the essence of his character and his being because God is who he is by character and because his nature is what it is the name of the Lord he is to be praised and then from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets from east to west we're probably on an axis aren't we east west yeah okay because a lot of churches work on the sun and east west axis so from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets the name of the Lord is to be placed but it's called a medicine in poetry two extreme points from the sun rises the sun sets and the old points in between the name of the Lord is to be praised so in all places the name of the Lord is to be praised

I missed one in verse 2 there both now and forevermore so again at all times and in all places the name of the Lord is to be praised now the psalmist forces us to pause on this language of praise doesn't he he forces us to think about who God is he forces us so we can't rush past it it's not just that hallelujah with the psalm it's five repeated injunctions to praise the Lord he forces us to pause in this place of praise and I would like to make that the application of the sermon this morning we're in that Christmas season and given Marina's announcements at the start of the service this morning it looks like it's going to be a very busy season and that not including all of the things that you've got going on with family and friends and kids and grandkids and all the rest of it that's going on and so this

Christmas season just passes in a blur doesn't it let's follow the exhortation of the psalm let's pause to praise let's pause in the season of busyness in the season of rush it's often a season of rush isn't it let's just take that time out to think about who God is to think about the essence of the Christmas story that God became a human being to die on our behalf to do for us what we could not do for ourselves that medical restoration that may come a renewal the fact that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have a future and we have hope this is why we celebrate Christmas and so my exhortation at the start of

[11 : 08] Christmas season is just to find some time to make some space to set aside time to think about the reality the glorious wonderful reality of the incarnation about all that the Lord Jesus has done for us like the psalmist let's not rush through and praise let's pause to really think about all that God has done for us so we pause to praise firstly and secondly we see this image of the God who worship is the high God the God who rules and reigns over all things in verses 4-6 the Lord is exalted over all the nations his glory above the heavens who is like the Lord our God the one who sits and throne and high who stoops down to look in the heavens and the earth there's a lot hidden ancient near eastern stuff going on in these verses things are perhaps a little bit hidden to us in our culture and our reading of the text in that sense so it says firstly verse 4 the

Lord is exalted over all the nations then as good Christian folks of an evangelical stock who have been well grounded with the scriptures over the years you don't bat an eyelid at this do you that God is God of all the nations the Lord is exalted over all the nations it's what we've been brought up with we see!

in the Samus day this would be a radically controversial claim a radically controversial claim gods were geographic in the ancient world so as far as if you were not an Israelite in the ancient world then you believed in gods that were geographic so the sun god Ra I'm sure you remember all of this from high school the sun god Ra he ruled to the extent of the boundaries of Egypt so as far as the Egyptian borders were marked that was the extent of the sun gods rule it's the same with Shemesh in Assyria also a sun god in Assyria to the north or Moloch who was a moon god just to provide some balance there in Babylon and Southeast so god's rule as far as the national boundaries of the nations that worship that god but what we see here no no no that's not the god of the scriptures he rules over all of the nations a universal claim absolutely unique within the ancient world this idea that the god of the

Hebrews ruled not just the Hebrews not just in the borders of Israel but rules the whole world and notice the lord is exalted over all the nations his glory is where glory above the heavens now again if you were an ancient year east of Joe walks if you were just a non Israel like living in that part of the world at that time as far as you are concerned the gods dwell in the heavens and you know we were kind of looking at that a little bit from Psalm 82 the last time was again high school classics wasn't it Zeus and Apollo and all the rest of it living in this pantheon this kind of little mini parliament of gods but they dwelt in the heavens that would be the universal expectation in the ancient world but what do we see here this god who we worship exalted over all nations and his glorious firm not in the heavens but above the heavens the high language indicating rule the high language indicating his glory who is like the lord our god the one who sits and throned on high who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth see that so I mean again if you go back to your great classics you know whenever anything goes wrong it's because the gods have paid attention to something that's going on on earth the gods look down from the heavens on the earth don't they but what do we see here this god the god of Israel this god who reigns over all nations so high so exalted is he that he stoops down to look not just on the earth but stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth so this is a this is an authority claim beyond imagination in the age of world this is a claim which would stagger belief at the time at which it was written but it's the claim of the soundness here that just forces us to look up it's that claim that just forces us to recognize afresh just how big our god is the creator of the cosmos in control of all things he has a plan and he is a king king over all things he's maker he is in control that's the imagery that we get here of this god who is the high and exalted god in verses 4 to 6 but the problem with the high and exalted god is that he can see this things isn't that right so when we think of a god who's so highly exalted so great this is glory that he has to look he has to stoop down he has to look what the words here do stoop down to look in the heavens and the earth he has to make an effort to look down in the heavens and the earth in that sense and so the psalmist ameliorates that problem by helping us to focus on the

other aspect of god's character which he wants us to celebrate so he celebrates because we worship the god who is highly exalted who is the king who is in complete control but he is also the god who draws near and that's why he celebrates because we still present it that god came to us that god became a human being the great tension of the bible the great tension of the old testament is how can a holy god dwell amongst an unholy people a sinful people how do you do it he did it by becoming a man he did it by becoming a human being himself living a perfect life and paying the price for us that he could not pay for us and so you've got this image in verses 79 of the god who comes alongside to help quite literally a god who gets his hands dirty he raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash this great god the one who rules on high the one who rules universally this god raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash the dust and the ash probably a reference to the place of lament if anyone was lost in deep sorrow deep sadness in the ancient world they would sit in the dust or often sit in the ash as a symbol of their pain as a symbol of their trauma and the image that we get here is this god the great god the high god comes down he descends he himself lifts his people from that point of need from that point of loss from that point of trauma he is the god who renews the god who restores and places his people from their position of need he places them in a position of honour he seats them with princes with the princes of their people and that's how god sees us through his son through everything that jesus has done for us he sees us as ones who are seated in that position of honour alongside the princes alongside the nobility alongside those who are kind of exalted from our human perspective in that sense that's how god sees us and he sets us to divide a woman in her role as a happy mother children he comes alongside to restore us in terms of uplifting and he comes alongside to restore us in terms of community here and so we see we see this incredibly powerful energy here of a god who is the high king a god who is in control of all things in control of all things doesn't feel like that sometimes but he is and that's also the god who draws near and that's also the god who loves you and comes alongside you to help you in your time that's the truth of the incarnation that's what we celebrate in this christmas period the miracle of what god has done for us the miracle of what god the high king continues to do for us that's what we celebrate in this christmas period so back

[22 : 17] to our point of application will we not rush past the praise let's just pause let's make space to pause and to reflect on everything that god has done for us through his soul alright let's pray all together holy god we wonder we wonder in the truth of who you are king of kings oh so highly exalted and yet you draw near to us to renew restore and to speak your peace into our hearts speak that peace of fresh we pray in this christmas season and will you lord god receive all glory in this we ask in jesus name amen and