

# Power of Praise

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[0:00] Amen. Today's text is Psalm 117.

So I guess after I read it, I'll say, you know, this is the word of the Lord. And in joyful response, as usual, I'll say thanks be to God as a congregation. So Psalm 117.

Praise the Lord, all nations, extol Him, all peoples. For great is His steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. I'm glad to be with you this morning, but I'm also glad this passage is short.

Someone said, how could anyone ever preach on a passage so short? I just have to say, I hope we get out by midnight.

[1:05] This is short but profound. And I guess if we tried to summarize everything, it's just that there's power in praise.

That God is so, in His providence, created us for His glory. He's created the world and everything that exists for Himself.

And when we praise Him, power is released from heaven. And so today, we just want to look at that, the power of praise.

And to begin with, a quick report. This are the people that you prayed for before I left and when I was gone, to Uganda, the group on the top, and Tanzania, the group on the bottom.

The last time I went away, I asked you to pray as you always have. And now I bring back a great report that these two groups of people gathered together for a marriage seminar.

[2:12] Now, what I didn't know before I went internationally to do a marriage seminar is that this is so strategic to God and His blessing on earth, and it is so opposed by Satan, it surprised me, the spiritual warfare before and after.

But I will say that God equipped and empowered marriages in these two African countries because everywhere I go, it's not about just what can be done in them, but what God will do through them. And all of these were equipped to go out then and hold marriage seminars. Here is a little closer look of couples that, as they gathered around God's Word.

And you know, many of us may take this for granted, but the number of couples that pray together regularly or even read God's Word and then discuss what they're reading is very small.

The number of people, even in the church or even leaders, this is very unique. But when we do this, we see an amazing grace from God in our marriages.

[3:40] So here are a few of the couples. A little closer look again are some of them that not only as they looked into the Word, but they huddled together, growing close together, and then writing down what God had shared with them about marriage.

I find, again, as I went on this trip, very few couples have even explored God's Word and what it says about marriage.

But here is the thing. When they got into huddle groups, especially the women over here, and believe it or not, what is taking place in this left is we're talking about sex and marriage.

Now, someone says, what did you talk about in Africa? What did God do? And I said, well, we talked about sex and money. And that's what we did. But these women, and this is just one small group, exploring God's Word on sexual intimacy and then what they shared appropriately but profoundly with the group was just mind-blowing.

And then over on the right, getting couples together, not just to share with each other, but to share with other couples was profound.

[5:04] And I know I don't need to say anything about the Swahili in the middle. I know you can all read it so we can move on. But that is actually about finances.

And I'm not going to read every word, but they were summarizing two things we were learning about transparency in finances between husband and wife.

And there's a look at Swahili. Well, let's go on to the next. I want to thank God and praise Him for the prayers of Shoreline.

But today, we want to move on into this incredible Psalm 117. Phil has already read it, but what we can see here is that three times we're told to praise the Lord.

And that should raise some questions in all of our minds. Why does God want us to praise Him? Now, it's very clear in this message what God wants us to do.

[6:12] Praise the Lord. Extol Him. Praise the Lord. That is clear. But the question becomes a little more difficult when we ask the question, why?

Why would God want us to praise Him? And when we add on to it some of the original language for these imperatives or commands, we're not...

God doesn't say praise Him as a suggestion. You know, if you get around to it, if you think it's a good idea, He commands us to praise Him.

And He not only commands us to praise Him, but He does it in the most intense way. I thank God for many years ago, 41 years ago or 42, when I finally got out of seminary and by God's grace, I was a Hebrew major and loved studying the original language.

And I'm not here to impress you with that, but to say this, that when God tells us to praise Him, He uses a stem in Hebrew that demands urgency, emotion, and energy.

[7:37] Now, we read it in English and we go, God commands us to praise Him. But when you get this particular stem in Hebrew, there's an urgency, do it now!

And there is an emotion, do it with a loud shout. And it has energy with it. It's not this staid and small thing that we may find in the shortest chapter in the Bible.

It has an intensity, an energy, and an urgency. And not only in that, but in two verses, it's repeated three times.

So God is trying to get our attention. And as He gets our attention, I want to ask you again, why? Why? Why does God, the God of the universe, who created everything for His glory, who has no need of anything, why would He ask us?

Why would He command us to praise Him? You know, many people misunderstand this. C.S. Lewis, before he became a believer, said he equated this kind of thing, God demanding praise, as an old woman who is always demanding someone think well and talk well of her.

[9:04] That's how C.S. Lewis understood God. He is insecure, He's in need, and He says, meet me in my need, and praise me.

Now, C.S. Lewis is not alone in that. In today's world, Brad Pitt, the actor, who was raised in a Baptist home like many of your homes, has walked away from the faith.

He's walked away, I read even recently, and I don't like talking about him behind his back, but I read because it's public knowledge that he vacillates between agnosticism and atheism.

And yet he was raised, just like many, right here, in a Baptist church and in a Baptist home. But here's what Brad Pitt said, and here is the reason he walked away from Christianity.

He said this, I didn't understand this idea of a God who says, you have to acknowledge me.

[10:13] You have to say that I'm the best, and then I'll give you happiness. If you don't, and if you won't, you will not get that happiness.

Here's what he said, this is a quote. It seemed to me about ego. I can't see God operating from ego, so it didn't make any sense to me.

And yet, this is the word of the Lord. And so we have to ask ourselves, why? Why, in this shortest and most profound chapter in the Bible, would God ever demand that all creation, all people praise him?

As we explore the words, it becomes even more intense in the question. Not yet, please, I'm sorry. I told him every time I, Kevin, every time I raised my left hand, change the slide.

Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho. The word praise is halal, where we get the word hallelujah. And you know, here's an intensity about that word.

[11:31] It actually means to brag. You know, God wants us to brag on him. I want to boast. I want to tell you. Let me brag on God for a minute. And yet, he commands, brag about me.

And that intensifies this question that has caused some people to walk away. But if we look at that second word, extol him, it's a different word, shabbat.

And shabbat means to laud, extol, or commend. But it has a dual meaning. And that dual meaning, depending on the context and how it's used, it means to still or soothe.

How can such a word mean extol loudly, commend the Lord? And then, in another context, it means soothe, still.

In Psalm 65, verse 1, it says that, Praises do you, O God, who stills the roaring seas. That's the word, shabbat.

[12:34] It's what Jesus did in Matthew chapter 8 when he came and he stilled the wind and the waves. Everything that we're seeing here is that praise of God has an importance in our lives.

That the more we praise God, the more peace he gives us. Have you ever experienced that? Ah, one of us. Thank you. Raise that hand.

I agree with you. The more we praise God, the more peace we get. Why? Because of Shabbat. It's because that it's built within the nature of praise to bring peace.

It's amazing how God works. Let me just move something here so I know whatever slide we're actually on. You know, actually, praising God does amazing things for us.

Thank you, Kevin. Praise, and this is all from Spurgeon. I read two of his books on praise, just preparing my heart for this.

[13:44] praise delivers us from self-centeredness. Spurgeon would say something like this, praise prevents self-centeredness because we cannot bless God and idolize ourselves at the same time.

Notice, it also delivers us from envy. Spurgeon would say, praise preserves us from being envious of others because when we praise God, we actually praise Him for what He's doing in other people and for other people.

Notice, it delivers us from complaining. Spurgeon would say, praise keeps us from complaining as the spirit of discontent will be ejected by the spirit of thankfulness.

It delivers us from laziness. Here's what he would say, praise liberates us from laziness by exciting and empowering us to serve God and others.

And then it delivers us from despondency. Pray drives away the fog of despondency by shining positive light on our dark circumstances.

[14:56] No wonder God said, I want all the world to praise because it has something for us. God is not this egomaniac waiting for us to say good things about Him.

But He knows that when we're created in the image of God that we become more of who He wanted us to be when we praise Him. It's amazing that this psalm would say such things.

Take a look at this. All of you good Baptist folk should know about Jack Taylor. He's in heaven now. Wrote several books in preparation for today.

I read his The Hallelujah Factor. But here's one sentence out of that entire book. When we praise, productivity is maximized, fulfillment is realized, and frustration is neutralized.

That's one way that this man tried to bring the benefit of praise. No wonder that God said I want all people everywhere in all ages to praise me.

[16:16] Why? Because there's something in it for us. And I'd like you to think it's not just pragmatic. It's not just that there's something good for you, you kind people.

Praise God. And you'll get a benefit. There's something far greater. And here it is. It's about the Lord.

When I recognize, receive, and respond to who He truly is, I can't do anything but praise. And I'd like you to think about the Lord for a moment.

The Lord is the highest good. What does that mean? It means there's nothing more beneficial in all of life. If we were to search a philosophy, a principle, anything, there's nothing more beneficial than Him.

Look at this. He's the most beautiful. There's nothing more attractive. Nothing that, if you look at the greatest piece of art or the best looking person, nothing is more attractive than the Lord.

[17:27] How about this? He's the most desirable. Nothing fulfills like Him. I don't care how much money or how much fun or even how much fame, nothing fulfills a life like God.

Next. He's the most reliable. There's nothing more sure, nothing more sound, nothing that will help us in life.

And here's the bottom line. The Lord is simply the best. So the reason He wants us to praise Him is because He is offering us His very best.

He is offering us Himself and He is waiting for us to respond in enjoying who He is. Now, I want you to think about this for a moment.

If God offered you anything but His very best, if God offered you anything, all the money in the world, if God offered you anything less than Himself, here's what He would be saying to you.

[18:44] You don't matter to me that much. Oh, I have all the riches of heaven, God would say. But for you, this is enough for you.

If God did not offer the very best in Himself, He would be yelling throughout the universe, you don't matter that much.

Or to put it another way, He would say it this way, when He lays down His life in Jesus Christ, He allows us to see His beauty, His wonder, and Jesus, the darling of heaven, dying on the cross for us, here's what God is saying, nothing is too good for you.

Now do we understand praise? It's when I recognize that God is saying, nothing is too good for you. That's why I gave you my only son.

my only son. And I allowed him to be spat on, beaten, crucified. Why? Because nothing is too good for you.

[19:58] Nothing. I would spare nothing in bringing you joy and happiness and I want you to have it all in me.

Nothing is too good for you. I want you to enjoy all that life is but in me. Now we're only looking at why God would want us to praise.

But I've got to say today that if you've never come to the point of seeing the beauty of Jesus, the wonder of God, the very best God could ever offer, and if you don't see in Him coming to the cross, carrying your sin, dying, shedding His blood, and rising again, you've missed the whole purpose of life.

But what God wants you to do is to embrace Him by faith and respond to God with great praise.

And so I urge you, based on this command to praise, receive Him now and praise the Lord forever. forever. Because our God is saying, there is nothing too good for you. Now, does that sound like an egotist?

[21:23] Does it? Nothing's too good for you. Not even my son. You see, we begin to see that when God commands us to praise, it's because He had something in us He wanted to do.

Let's look, Kevin, at this next one. C.S. Lewis, and you've seen this quote before and I've quoted it in so many different contexts, but he got the essence.

In his reflections on the Psalms, I think we delight to praise. Now, notice, this is not something we're commanded to do, so we do begrudgingly.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is its appointed consummation.

So notice what God is saying. Nothing is too good for you. I want you to embrace this and enjoy and that joy never comes to its full completion until we praise.

[22:35] it becomes full cycle. Whatever comes from God, I bring it back to God. All things are from Him, through Him and to Him, Paul would say.

And so we return with praise. Hallelujah to you, Lord. And it's when we finally get around to praising. Oh, wow.

Now we enjoy God. I want to tell you that this season has been one of the hardest for me to praise God.

I'm not going to explain why, but I just want you to know, I'm not talking about something that's done in an easy chair when everything's going your way.

But God calls us to praise Him even when the darkness comes. He's calling us to praise Him, and that as we do, we find power in the seasons that are difficult.

[23:55] God wants us to praise Him because regardless of what we face, there are two truths about Him we always need to know.

And the first one is great is His steadfast love toward us even in the difficult times.

Praise the Lord all nations, extol Him all peoples for great is His steadfast love toward us. I wish I knew how to explain this.

I actually dreaded coming up here to speak because these are mysteries, mysteries far beyond my ability to martial language and talk about it. But I will attempt as the best I can.

When we talk about steadfast love, that's a covenant love. It's chesed in Greek, excuse me, Hebrew. It is this love that God pours out on His people and it is a love that will always guide everything He does in life.

[25:11] God has given us a covenant in Jesus Christ. It's a covenant that He can never go back on. And so this psalm is pointing forward to Jesus whose love was laid down.

Not that we love God, but that He loved us and He gave His Son as a propitiation for our sins. He satisfied His own wrath because of His steadfast love.

love. Oh, listen, God has entered into covenant with us because of Christ. It's something they could never conceive in the Old Testament, but it is ours in Jesus.

And that's why it says His steadfast love is great. It's not talking about greatness as if it was exceedingly large. It's talking about something far greater.

But let me tell you that His steadfast love toward us is key in the original language. It actually means that His love is over us.

[26:20] It reminds us of the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 4. He brought me to His banqueting house and His banner over me is love.

I can't tell you how many times when I have prayed to God and I say, listen, Lord, I just want to declare on the authority of Your Word, You love me and You love my family and Your banner is unfurled over our house and nothing will defeat us.

Nothing will bring us down because His steadfast love is over us. It is our shield, our protector. It is the blessing from heaven. When we see great is His steadfast love toward us, please see His love over you.

But when He says that that love is great, here is what it means. It means it's mighty and it prevails. His love cannot be defeated. Take a look at this. Because of the Lord's steadfast love that is over us, it prevails over our sin, our suffering and our sadness.

[27:38] Now, let me just say, I can't do justice here and we still get out of here before your dinner burns.

And so, I don't usually do this, but if you have a camera on your phone, take a picture of that and talk about these passages with your family.

I'm only going to highlight it because I just don't have time. But when we think of the steadfast love over us, it prevails over our sin.

In Psalm 103, verse 1, it says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. And it goes on to say, Do not forget His benefits.

And the first blessing or benefit is He forgives all your sins. And in case we didn't get it, later in Psalm 103, it says, For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.

[28:52] As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Listen, in Jesus, when He went to the cross, He prevailed. And there are many times that I say, Lord, how could you love someone like me?

God says, My steadfast love prevails over your sin. It prevails when you think the worst about you. If you have come to Christ, I want you to know His steadfast love prevails over your sin.

But it also prevails over our suffering. In Psalm 59, David is praying, Lord, deliver me. People want to kill me. This is when Psalm 59 is when Saul was perching with his men outside David's house just waiting for him to come so he could kill him. That's what Psalm 59 says. Here's the context. they're wanting to kill me. And David says, These people are always waiting.

[30:03] At night they even come and they're lurking and they're looking for me. David is in intense suffering. And he said, The people are all around me and they're ready to pounce on me and kill me.

And in the midst of their unrelenting persecution, he says, But, but I will sing of your strength. I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress.

Oh, my strength, I will sing praises to you. For you, oh God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

I don't know what you're going through, but if you know Jesus and you've come under this umbrella, this shield, this steadfast love over you, he shall prevail over your suffering.

[31:09] Whatever you face. And then how about our sadness? Once again in Psalm 13, David is, he says, how long, God, are you going to hide from me forever?

Am I always going to have this sorrow in my heart? Read Psalm 13, it's very short. Am I always going to have this sorrow? But in the midst of his grieving, mourning, and sadness, he said, but I have trusted your steadfast love.

My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. And David rose up from his sadness. Well, no wonder God is commanding everyone praise me for my steadfast love because his love prevails over everything.

Praise the Lord, all nations. Why? For great is his steadfast love over us. God is ever faithful to his word.

It says, your truth endures forever. And that's because this key word in Hebrew means both truth and faithfulness. And it tells us that God is ever faithful to his word.

[32:42] He will always keep his promises. And because that is who he is, it can never end. And so whether we translate it truth or faithfulness, it's all the same.

God remains faithful. And that becomes our sure foundation. Here's how we read in some scripture. The Lord is faithful in all his works and kind. Askew in all of his words and kind in all his works. That's in the ESV.

Here's another scripture. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promises is faithful. When you're going through a dark time, I want you to get two mental pictures. The first one is God's love over you. Got it? His love is great over us. I want you to get another mental picture.

[33:47] And that is his faithfulness under you. It's your sure foundation. So everything under you and over you and everything in between is him. No wonder he's calling the world to praise.

And that brings to my last point. And some of you are going, praise the Lord. Here's the last point. And if you say I didn't even hear points, it's hard to get all of this into words. The first point is God calls us to praise him. The second one is why his steadfast love is over us and his faithfulness endures forever.

But I want you to take a look at last of all, who should join our praise. And this is why we go on mission. This is why I leave my family. This is why you go home today and talk to your family. Praise the Lord. All nations extol him all peoples. This is for everyone. God is calling that we not sit on our praises, but we take them out.

[35:05] Once we've looked up and we praise him, take those praises and brag on the Lord outward. Take his goodness and share it with others.

We cannot take this psalm without understanding. It's a missional psalm. It's a psalm that drives us out to the world and praise packed people are the ones who have impact.

Let me try to illustrate it this way. And we're almost done. As we think about the mission of praise out into the world and its impact in the world, I call your attention to Acts chapter 16.

In Acts chapter 16, Paul had responded to a vision God gave him to go to Macedonia. He shows up in Philippi.

Now listen, God had said, you go there. You would think with a vision God had big things in store. Listen, when they got to Philippi, one woman came to Christ.

[36:17] No multitude, one woman. And then in the midst of continuing his ministry, he gets thrown in jail. It's not the time that you would think that God would be praised.

It seems that everything in this story marshals against it. But when Paul and Silas, it says that they were in jail and they were praying and singing hymns to God.

in the midst of their difficulty, they did not get down. They rose up. And God was releasing something through praise.

But what is beautiful about this story is the next phrase that the prisoners were listening. People are listening. praising. And they were hearing this incredible work of God.

Let's go to the next one. And as they were praising God, it says, suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

[37:32] Now, we're going to make some points in a moment about praise. But before we do, let me just say something quickly.

Often we abuse or misuse God's Word. We abuse and we misuse. And here's what we do. And I've done it. I've preached it over 40 years.

We try to take stories like this and we turn them into paradigms. And we say, okay, I see what happened, but I want to tell you, God isn't giving us a paradigm.

He's not giving a formula. And here's what I want you to see. In the Bible, in the book of Acts, Paul was in prison four times.

Four times. This is the first one. And he never went back and said, I got the formula for prison. Praise God and the prison doors come open.

[38:32] Do you see what I'm saying? That's what a paradigm would tell you. Praise God, prison doors open. He never applied that. And he was not only in prison four times in the book of Acts, but another one where he lost his head.

He was executed. And never once again did this ever happen. So that tells us, don't go looking for paradigms, but treat this more like a true life parable.

And they're principles that come out of the story that aren't about physical jails, but they're about jails within our hearts.

You see, when Paul and Silas praise God, there are three things that we can take away.

Look at this. That when we praise God, this world will be shaken. Now, it may not be shaken in an earthquake, but I'm telling you, things will never remain the same.

[39:40] And we can also say that praise breaks the bonds that holds us back. It did it physically for Paul, but God is doing something far greater.

Let me just share what I'm trying to get at about breaking the bonds inside rather than just the ones that you can see. One of my heroes of the faith is Watchman Nee.

And Watchman Nee, in all of his profound ministry, spent the last 20 years of his life in prison. He was incarcerated in China for being a Christian.

They trumped up other charges, but that was the bottom line. He never saw his wife again. She died while he was in prison. As a matter of fact, he died while he was in prison.

And some people might say, what a waste. But some of the greatest things with Watchman Nee came out of those prison years. But here's what I want you to see.

[40:48] He was praying for deliverance. He was asking God to be delivered from prison. And God spoke to him. And here's what God said.

Well, first of all, God gave them a vision of a boat that was on a body of water. And it hit a rock. And it was stuck.

And it was that that he was praying God, that boat is stuck. I'm stuck. I'm stuck in prison. And he called on God to deliver him from prison. And here's what God said to him.

I can do this in one of two ways. One, I can remove the rock. Secondly, I can increase the water.

And then God said this to Watchman Neve, and he recorded it. God said to him, which do you choose? Remove the rock, increase the water, the boat will move on.

[41:52] Watchman Neve felt so convicted by God that he said, increase the water. And he knew that when God gave him that question, it meant you won't get out of prison.

But the water of the Holy Spirit will flow. Which do you want more? Do you want to just go back to an easy life? Or do you want to increase the water so that you flow freely?

Watchman Neve chose increase the water, and he never got out of prison, but his heart was free. You see, this is what we're talking about in the difference between a paradigm and a true life parable.

God has a way of setting us free. I spoke in a prison in Uganda, and I said to these prisoners, it was so packed, they're sitting on the floor, and I was talking about freedom in Christ.

You are incarcerated, and you did something wrong, but I want to tell you about a freedom. And when we ask how many of you want to come to faith in Jesus, they stood to their feet.

[42:58] Whether I never get out of this prison, I want out of this one. I want out of the one in my head, the one in my heart. I want to be truly free in Christ.

This is what we learn here. Praise shakes the world. It begins to free us from that hindrance that is holding us back, and it positions us in a place to impact people.

And guess what happened in Acts 16? it actually worked. Look at this. After this incredible scene, the doors are open, the jailer is going to kill himself, but Paul said, don't hurt yourself, we're all here, we're not looking to get out of prison, we're looking to get you out of prison.

And it says, then he, that's the jailer, brought them out, and he had one question, sirs, what can I do to be saved? And they said to him, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.

It was in this hour that this man came to faith, he and his household, and they were baptized. Look at what happened. And after they were saved and baptized, it says, this is the jailer, he rejoiced.

[44:26] What is happening? He's joining in the praise. And this is why we go on mission. Because God is wanting to liberate people all over the world.

But here's the bottom line. When you leave here today, you have a family. And I'm going to challenge you to brag on God.

Brag on him. Tell them how good he is. You see, mission is not just being far away. It starts in our own home. And somehow through your own praise, as you glorify, enjoy God.

He's given you the very best in Jesus. As you praise him and enjoy him, let that new life spill over to others.

And then, let us never stop going. God, let us do it. I'll be 70 years old in, that's not that old now, but I'll be 70 years old in December.

[45:38] And unless God by his sovereign will takes away my health, I pray I never stop going. And here's the reason why. It's because God wants everyone to praise him.

praise exalts God, empowers us, and impacts others for God's glory, our good.

Always married. The best way to look at this is this psalm. Praise the Lord, all nations.

Extol him, all peoples. for great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord. Will anyone say praise the Lord?

Okay, about a dozen of us. Will anyone praise the Lord? Praise the Lord.