

Holy and Terrible Is His Name

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2002

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 0 0] Well, I'm looking at Psalm 111, and Psalm 111 is a call to praise the Lord. And it would be great if you could turn to page 539 and follow along with me.

It is a great encouragement to us in our Christian lives to praise God. One of the news stories that was good news this week was the story of Heidi Thomasy, who said she feels a little like Cinderella.

She's this waitress in Kansas who found \$3,300 in cash and had this dilemma. She had a child, has a child, who had heart surgery, and she owes \$15,000 for that surgery.

And what she ended up doing was turning over all the cash to her manager for safekeeping until the person came back. And he did. He came back and gave her \$100 as a reward.

But, of course, that's not the end of the story. What happened after that, as news of her honesty spread, money started rolling in. And she now has far more than the \$3,300 that she found.

[1 : 1 2] And many people are caring for her and praying for her. One of the things that didn't come out in the newspapers and so forth was a little interview that I saw with her, where they asked her what she felt and what was going on with her.

And she said, you know, I was in all this debt. I found this money. And I was thinking, God, what are you doing? What are you doing with this test? You've just given me \$3,300 in cash.

What am I supposed to do? And she said after she had turned it in, and, of course, the things that happened afterwards, she realized, she said, what God was doing in my life was her words.

Well, what she was doing there is that she was praising God, actually, by assigning him the credit for what was going on. And the reason that she praised was because she recognized the work of God very, very recently.

And, you know, that's what Mary is doing in the Magnificat, in the line that this Psalm 111 comes from. Because she says, he who is mighty has done great things for me.

[2 : 1 6] And, therefore, she says, and holy is his name. Therefore, she praises him. That's what Psalm 111 is doing, too. He's saying praise the Lord, but he's giving in this Psalm the reason why he praises the Lord.

And that's very, very important for us. You know, the great songs of the church don't just call people to praise. They don't just tell what they feel about God. These songs say why we praise.

And so the description of God and what he has done is in these great songs of the church. And that's why praise is important for us, the way we do it. It's very easy in the pressures of life to forget the reasons to praise God.

And even as we're sitting here, Neal Mancor is speaking on the subject of spiritual grumpiness and how to deal with this awful affliction.

And that grumpiness often happens because we say, why should I praise God? Why should I? My plans at work aren't going the way I thought.

[3 : 22] Things in my family are difficult right now. It was a hassle getting to church today. So you might be afflicted by this condition as well.

And it's not a new problem because the Israelites in the Bible often suffered from it. And so they said when they're in the wilderness shortly after they had been released in a miraculous way, if only we had died in Egypt because there we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted.

But you, Moses, you have brought us out into this desert to starve. And then, of course, later they grumbled because they didn't have enough water. And they said, why did you bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?

So it's no wonder that Moses cried out to God at some point, what am I to do with these people? He saw this affliction of spiritual grumpiness.

Well, Psalm 111 was written for people who are prone to this. And so they needed to hear why they should praise the Lord. It wasn't enough just to say it, but why should they?

[4 : 27] So that they could praise him. Well, Psalm 111 is a great psalm. And it was particularly good for them because it was written as an acrostic. So every line starts with successive letters of the alphabet.

So those sounds would help them to remember this psalm so they could sing it and say it during the week. And when they're feeling particularly forgetful and self-centered, this would be in their mind.

And that is probably why the psalmist could say, I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart. He's not going through the motions. He's not just a duty that he's doing.

It's not a thankfulness that's polluted with grumbling. It's a thanks that involves his whole being. And the reason for that deep gratitude is verses 2 through 9, where the psalmist reminds us who God is and what he has done.

And throughout it, there is this deep sense of thankfulness. So let's look at verse 2. It says, Great are the works of the Lord, studied or pondered by all who have pleasure in them.

[5 : 34] And he knows something that some of us forget in this era of science and great learning and sort of figuring out how all this creation has come into being. We think we do. And that is that every good and perfect thing comes from God.

And the Bible is clear that creation is God's handiwork. And so that if we witness physical or emotional healing, if you are a nurse who makes doctors much better, thank God for that healing.

If we see children say and do marvelous things, praise God because he has made them. If we see understanding of truth, if we are teachers and teaching, thank God because all truth is God's.

And if we see humans working together in respect, in harmony to bring out success in a business or an organization, thank God who is the author of all whole relationships.

If we see beauty in the land, in the sky, in the sea around us. And if we don't see it here in Vancouver, we're blind. We're seeing a little reflection of God's beauty and his goodness.

[6 : 44] But after having said in a very general way the works of God in creation, he gets very specific. And he talks about the greatness of God, particularly shown in two ways.

And the first way is through God's work in the Exodus and the leaving from Egypt by the people of God, all of which point towards Jesus.

And there's really three movements that I just want to briefly look at of these works of God in bringing them out of Egypt. The first movement is verse three in the first part of verse four.

It says full of honor and majesty is his work and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wonderful works to be remembered.

So the first movement is the rescuing, the redeeming of God's people from Egypt. And verse four at the beginning is literally a memorial has been made for his wonders.

[7 : 45] And that memorial is the Passover feast, the great feast that is still done today by Jewish people that reminds them of what things were like in Egypt, how God had rescued them and brought them into the promised land.

And so these verses, verse four, would have been sung at the Passover meal during the eating of the lamb. And that work is really singled out as being full of honor and majesty and righteousness because it reveals the central character of who God is.

And that is he's a God who redeems. He is a God who rescues and releases people. And that word redeem, which you'll see actually in verse nine, if you quick jump down, he sent redemption to his people.

It means to be released from slavery. So a slave would be redeemed if he was able to pay money for his release or if the master had grace on him or if he had paid for time served and it was enough to release him.

It was a sense of being sent from slavery to freedom. And in Jesus, we see perfectly this central characteristic of God, who is one who redeems.

[9 : 00] The best verse that I can think of for this is from Colossians 1.13. This is the gospel. And it says this, God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, freedom, the forgiveness of sins.

And there's the cure for spiritual grumpiness, because in Jesus, God has given you and me the greatest exodus. We are released and we are redeemed into his kingdom by the forgiveness of sins.

And so Jesus releases us from the darkness of self-centeredness and ignorance of God into the light of knowing Jesus as king of our lives.

And there is a constant process in our lives of being freed from sin that so easily entangles us. And we should live for this fact. And that's what praise will be about.

Now, the second movement, besides God's rescue, is taking care of his people through the wilderness journey. So look at the end of verse four. The Lord is gracious and he is merciful.

[10 : 11] He provides food for those who fear him. And he is ever mindful of his covenant. And here again, and the covenant is revealing his character and his will by speaking.

So it is by providing food, manna from heaven and providing his word that he actually takes care of them. And of course, we know that this is a period of great uncertainty in the lives of the Israelite people.

They had a deep need to be taken care of in the desert. That verse is telling them that they were sustained by food and by God's word during that time of uncertainty.

And those two words, ever mindful, are important because they mean God never wearied in taking care of his people in the desert. For us today, we're entering and we're actually in the middle of the season of Advent.

And in Advent, we remember that Jesus is Emmanuel. He is God with us. And many of us are facing uncertain times, sometimes grave uncertainty, as we see that happened in the desert for the Israelites.

[11 : 19] In those times, Jesus sustains us and reveals God to us so that we can know him. He is the risen Lord who by his Holy Spirit comes into our lives and he reveals God's will to us in his word.

His care for us is constant. He never wearies of it. And that sense of being sustained physically and emotionally and so forth, but also being sustained by the word of God, comes to us because Jesus has risen and he is God with us.

Now, the third movement, besides rescuing his people, besides sustaining them in a time of great uncertainty, God's work involved bringing them into the promised land.

So look at verse six. It says that he has shown his people the power of his works in giving them the heritage of the nations and the works of his hands are faithful and they are just.

The heritage of nations is the promised land. That is what he brought them into. It was the goal of his work. And it's interesting that the work is called faithful and just in verse seven.

[12 : 28] But that's because it has to do with God's promises in giving Israelites that land. God shows that he does what he said he was going to do.

He is faithful to his promises, even through all those years of slavery in Egypt and uncertainty in the desert. He was faithful. There was purpose to his rescue.

And that was to move the people of God from the place of slavery to the place of blessing to the promised land. And today we understand the gospel is the fulfillment of all this because Jesus is God's yes to all his promises.

And so God's faithfulness in bringing his people finally to the promised land actually points to the faithfulness of Jesus in our own lives, that he is transferring us.

He is moving us to the place of blessing. Jesus said this exactly very clearly. He said, this is the will of the father in John six of my father, that everyone who sees the son and believes in him should have eternal life.

[13 : 37] And I will raise him up at the last day. You see, there is a goal. There is a movement of God's promises towards something. It is to bring us to the place of blessing.

And that blessing is to know God. It is eternal life. Not only that, it is a blessing that will involve us being raised to life with Jesus on the last day. And that is the movement that is happening in each of our lives as he's bringing us out from slavery into the place of blessing.

So those are the works of God that remind us. They don't even just tell us what happened with the Israelites. They point to what Jesus will do for the world.

But the psalmist finished by saying it's not only the great works of God that caused one to praise him, but it is also his words or the precepts of God. So you look at verse seven at the end.

It says all his precepts, his words are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

[14 : 40] And he is reminding here, and he's talking, the psalmist is talking about the words given in the law at Mount Sinai. He's telling him those words are trustworthy and they are established forever and ever.

In other words, they're not affected by the passing of time. And in fact, they bring faithfulness and uprightness with them. And the clear sense here is that those words of God, his will revealed in his commandments, are dynamic.

They work powerfully in every generation to bless people who keep his word. And I believe this is an important word for us in our generation, because in this one particular, we are tempted to add to and take away from God's word, to try to make them more relevant, to try to make them dynamic.

But you can only do this if you forget verse eight, that they are established forever and ever. There is eternity about those words that bring God's blessing.

And as I close, I'd like to let the psalm apply for us all of these great things that we have heard about God's revelation, because the psalmist told us that God has revealed himself in an awesome way.

[15 : 55] And in verse nine, he sums it up. He is a God of redemption. That's his character. And he and his covenant are forever. His words, his promises, his relationship is forever.

And the conclusion that one must reach is that God is, in fact, holy and terrible. And that word terrible means awesome. And that's what the new translations say.

His creation and rescue are powerful. And his words are powerful. They all last forever. And so the psalm is revealing that there is no one like him. He defines power and grace and mercy and faithfulness.

And there's no other God before him. He is transcendent. And we cannot fathom his greatness. So what do we do with that revelation? What do we do with the mighty works that are revealed to us?

What do we do with the fact that Jesus rescues us through his death on the cross and that he perfectly reveals God's person to us? Well, there's only one response, and that's verse 10.

[16 : 59] It is to fear him. The only response is to fear God. And it's very important for us to understand what that word fear means. It doesn't mean psychological or emotional response.

It very simply means to revere and to respect God, to give him the highest place because he is holy. Fear of God is actually something that you practice, it says later on in verse 10.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and good understanding have all those who practice it. And you can look a little bit further on. And I'd like to have you look at Psalm 112, verse 1.

Praise the Lord. Blessed is the one who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments. To fear God is to delight in his commandments.

That's the wisdom of God. And so when the psalmist calls us to praise the Lord, he is actually calling us to obey God. When he sings praises to God, these songs, which are beautiful, are simply an expression of what is going on in his life throughout the week.

[18 : 08] It is an expression of his obedience to God. And when he says, I give heartfelt thanks in the congregation, he's not just saying I'm able to say it really loudly or with great gusto.

He is saying, I do it with my whole heart because my whole life is characterized by obeying God, which is what it means to praise him. And so true praise means asking a basic question every day.

And that is, how can I delight in obeying God? How can I delight in obeying his commandments? How do I delight in obeying God as I raise my children?

Or as I deal with clients in my business? Or as I relate to my husband or wife? How do I delight in obeying God with my finances and with the time that I have?

How is it that I delight in God in my thought life? And so when the psalmist calls us to praise God, that is what he is saying. And God gives us grace to live this difficult life of obedience as we remember his faithfulness, as we remember his mercy and his provision and the power of his rescue in each of our lives through Jesus Christ.

[19 : 27] And so we are called to make our lives a constant praise to the Lord with all our heart and all our mind and with our soul. And according to this psalm, which talks about forever at least five times, that act of praise, those acts of praise are the one activity that will endure forever.

Amen.