

Communion Preparatory Sermon

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[0 : 0 0] May we rejoice like the kings of the earth to hear God's word. So let's turn and study God's word together. Just now in the book of Psalms, Psalm 117.

In the church Bible, this is page 614. Praise the Lord, all nations.

Extol him, all peoples. For great is his steadfast love towards us. The faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord. Let's bow our heads in prayer just now for a moment. Heavenly Father, may we tonight be filled with praise as we are called to in these verses.

We long, Lord, for that overflow of praise that will fill the earth, where we will not need to say to our neighbors, believe in the Lord or to trust him or call people to worship, because all of the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

[1 : 2 3] And so just now we pray, Father, as missionaries, as people who are sent and commissioned to go into the darkness of this world, but to bring forth the light of the countenance of Christ Jesus and to show him to all peoples.

And for that praise to resonate from us as those who are redeemed and have the hope of the gospel beating in their hearts.

So, Father, guide our thoughts and our minds, our attention this evening. Fill us with certainty in the things of the gospel. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I wonder this evening, what are we giving thanks for? There are, of course, many things that we can give thanks for.

Many reasons to be filled with thankfulness. Sometimes they're small things. Sometimes we can be giving thanks for almost mundane things in our lives and our experience.

[2 : 2 9] If you follow Scotland as a football fan, I'm sure there was some thanksgiving going up for Scotland's performance recently. And then you come to the draw of the groups and you think, are we still so thankful?

Perhaps. Recently, we've just had Thanksgiving. We had our own Thanksgiving as a congregation last week. And we give thanks this time of year for the harvest and for the fullness of God's blessing.

There are many things, just even day by day in our lives and experience, that we can give thanks for. And on some levels, they are just mundane things. We can give thanks for the air we breathe, for the food that we have, the water we have to drink, and for the good things that God gives us.

We can thank God for our families. The list is endless, really. Not just trivial things, but great things in our lives that we can give thanks for.

And that call to thanksgiving is what is being echoed in this psalm. It is a psalm that the words are there for all nations of the world.

[3 : 3 8] Praise the Lord all nations. Extol him all peoples. It is, in fact, a wonderful thing that the shortest psalm in the Bible, the shortest chapter in the Bible, it is a chapter that is seen simply to preach and proclaim the gospel.

To make the good news of Christ known to the nations so that they can respond to this call and they can praise the Lord. And the evidence of that, I hope, is what we see, as I've already said in prayer this evening, the evidence of this is what we see tonight.

That we, I suspect, largely a Gentile congregation, have come together tonight to worship the Lord. And to make him known.

And to give thanks to him for his steadfast love towards us and for his faithfulness, which endures forever. And so as we come tonight to respond to this invitation, and as we, I hope, would also be looking to examine our hearts as we come to the Lord's table tomorrow.

That's the main reason for our gathering like this. It's to enter into that exercise of spiritual preparation that we ought to have as we come to the Lord's table. Let us tonight consider this invitation.

[5 : 00] It is an invitation to do something. It is an invitation tonight to come to praise and extol.

To praise means simply to acclaim. To make much of someone. To extol means to exalt or to eulogize them. To proclaim their goodness.

To proclaim good things about them. To make these things known. And the act of praising or extolling the Lord is an act that uses the whole person.

And so tonight, if you're wanting to engage in the act of worship, if you want to engage in the act of praise, then not only do you need to use your lips, but you need to use some of the other organs and abilities that God has given you.

First of all, you need to use your mind. The person who comes to praise the Lord engages their mind in thoughts concerning the Lord.

[6 : 10] And so tonight, as we come to praise God, as we come to worship Him, and as we do that through, in particular tomorrow, the remembering of the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then we do so engaging our minds in the act of worship.

We think about the words that are coming out of our mouth, certainly. But we think more about the person and the work of that person.

We think about Jesus. And that's one of the things that Paul, when he writes to the Corinthian church, reminds them of. That they should come correctly to the Lord's table.

And part of that is discerning the Lord's body and blood. And that is to think about it. To perceive truth about the body of Jesus and His blood which have been broken and shed at the cross.

And so the way that we come to the Lord's table is thinking about what Christ has done. But it's not enough for us simply to know these truths. It's not enough for us simply to have in our minds some element of that truth.

[7 : 27] It also has to move other parts of us. So if we want to come truly worshiping, if we want to fulfill the invitation of this psalm, the way in which we have to come is using our hearts.

If I want to acclaim somebody, if I want to tell you of the wonders of a particular person, then I need to use my heart behind that.

The example that you might use would be to talk about human people, people that we would know and we want to pass on something of their wonderfulness.

There are some politicians that we might want to do that with. We might really love some politicians. Perhaps it's Tony Blair.

And you think about how good he was as a prime minister and how good his government was. Or sometimes you might even recognize how effective he was, but still not entirely agree with everything he did.

[8 : 32] And actually even my mentioning his name tonight might, for some people here, have resulted in a pretty visceral reaction down in your stomach. And you think, well, hang on a minute. That guy was, you know, Iraq war.

Are we really sure that's someone we'd want to acclaim? Go a little bit further back and you can see the same about Margaret Thatcher. You can go further back into recent European history and you find some truly awful figures.

You might know an awful lot about them, but you would never dream of praising them because they are so despicable. Your heart, to issue praise, your heart needs to be engaged.

You need to delight in them. You need to find things that are worthy of praise in them that move your own heart, that move you to express affection.

And so with Jesus, that's what we're invited to do in this psalm. It is to find, using our minds, find things that actually speak to our hearts about what Jesus has done.

[9 : 37] And so to truly praise him, to truly extol him, what we need to do is reflect on the person and work of Jesus and find things there that move our hearts, that result in devotion for us.

And hopefully that is the case. We can think about the work of God in the gospel. We can think of the promises of God.

We can think of what Christ has done at the cross to deal with our sin. Perhaps there are things at the cross even that particularly speak to us. The gentleness of Jesus, even as he's in agonizing pain and he addresses his followers and his mother.

And he says to John, Behold your mother. And to his mother, Behold your son. That love and that affection that filled the heart of Jesus just pours out of him, doesn't it, at the cross?

As he speaks to the thief on his side and says to him, Today you will be with me in paradise. Words that are particularly precious to me. Perhaps to some of you as well.

[10:44] Our hearts are moved by the things of Jesus and the things that he has done for us. And perhaps even as we reflect on that in a deeper and more theological way and we begin to think about the propitiation of sin, of the fact that sin is covered.

We'll be singing tomorrow morning about the hyssop. Well, some of us will be singing in Gaelic, I think it'll be. But we'll be singing about hyssop being used to sprinkle blood. A covering for sin that hides us, shelters us from the wrath of God.

How we're spared from hell and damnation because Christ has loved us and given himself for us.

Our hearts are moved by what we hear and what leads us to worship.

But also to an invisible muscle, almost I suppose you could say, our faith needs to be engaged. We have to believe if we're going to praise God, and this is a simple fact, very difficult for people in our modern age to understand, but if you're going to worship God, you have to worship an invisible God.

And no one can worship him without believing that he is. And so if we want to come and praise God, then one of the things that needs to be engaged in us is that muscle of faith that needs to be active, that element of trust in the person of Jesus, who though we do not see him, yet we believe in him.

[12:22] None of us have seen Christ Jesus personally, I think. but yet we can be moved to praise him and to speak of his goodness and his love towards us because we believe in him.

We have been given the grace to exercise faith. And faith is like a muscle. It has to be exercised. What else?

It begins to suffer from cramp and decay. And so this call in this psalm, praise the Lord, all nations, extol him, all peoples, it is a call to exercise faith.

It's a call to actually engage not only our minds and our hearts and our affection towards Christ, but to actually believe in him with an element of trust and personal dependence that says, he is my Savior.

That not only is Christ a Savior, not even perhaps is Christ the Savior, but tonight to worship and say, he is my Savior.

[13:35] And it is necessary for us, therefore then, to use our bodies. To use our bodies in obedience to the call of Jesus.

And that does involve our lips and our tongues and our lungs and our vocal cords. It involves somehow expressing from our hearts a belief that needs to work its way out of us, that needs to be heard, that needs to be given voice, that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we will testify to this with our lips and therefore, having believed in our hearts and testified with our lips, we will be saved. If that's you, then perhaps there's another piece of your body that needs to be exercised tomorrow.

Perhaps that's your feet and your legs. Perhaps they need to be exercised in physically coming to the Lord's table, professing the Lord's death with your body, obeying the command of Jesus to use these very visceral, literal symbols, bread and wine, to testify to the praise of what he has done, to acknowledge the grace of God revealed to sinners.

sinners. In this psalm, there is in fact an invitation to come to the Lord's table, an invitation to make the highest proclamation of your faith, testifying to what Jesus has done for sinners and to come in obedience to him.

[15:13] So it is an invitation to do something. It is also an invitation to do something concerning someone. The person that we are to praise is this one, the Lord.

Praise the Lord, all nations. Extol him, all peoples. And you'll see, you'll note in your Bibles that the name, the Lord, there is that use of the capital letters, L-O-R-D.

In the Hebrew Bible, the words that would be there, the letters that would be there are the consonants of the name of God, which even the Jews wouldn't take on their lips. And so it's almost a bit tricky for us to think, how do we pronounce this?

Yahweh, probably. It's tied into the name of God that was given to Moses at the burning bush when Moses came and he had to put off his sandals because the ground on which he was standing was

holy ground. And Moses' concern there is not to say, well, you're sending me, Lord, on this impossible mission to tell Pharaoh, let my people go.

The bigger concern in Moses' heart at that moment was to say, well, actually, what about your own people? What if they ask me who sent you? What will I say? And you remember the answer that was given to Moses.

[16:19] Tell them, I am has sent them. This one who is the faithful God of their patriarchs, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The God of your forefathers, the God of promises is the one who has sent you.

We'll come to that in just a moment because that's spelled out for us a bit more clearly as we go on. But just for us tonight to think about this, the invitation for us is to praise the Lord. And I find it very interesting.

I think as I go through the book of Psalms, I think actually as I read the Psalms more and more, one of the things I recognize is that whatever you see the name of Lord in the book of Psalms, you can actually put in the name of Jesus very easily and it's not wrong.

It's not wrong from a Trinitarian theological perspective anyway. What is true of one member of the Trinity is true of all members of the Trinity. And so if one member of the Trinity is worthy of our praise, each member of the Trinity is worthy of our praise.

So we can comfortably and theologically be right in putting the name of Jesus in there. But even to see it at a higher level than that, it's interesting to me that even that expression that we use, whether it's the name Jehovah or the name Yahweh, it's a name that sounds in some ways difficult for us because it's not the name that we know our God by.

[17:33] Tonight, the name by which we know our God is Jesus. And it's at His name that every knee should bow and every tongue shall in fact confess that Jesus is Lord.

And so tonight, the invitation to us to come to the Lord's table is to come and remember the work and the person of Jesus and to praise and extol Jesus.

And so as you come to the Lord's table, do you come thinking and moved in your heart and exercising your faith, not in some abstract idea of God who is distant from us perhaps, but God who has come close to us, the God who has come and lived among us, the God who has borne our sorrows in His own person, the God who has come and lived among us and in fact emptied Himself by taking on the form of a servant and coming in the person of Christ?

Do we love Him, therefore? This person who is not distant from us. And are we moved, therefore, as well to reflect on what we do in relation to Him?

Do we come to Him as our great high priest with all of the sorrows of our own hearts? And do we praise Him through our confession of sin?

[19:13] Because that's part of what this worship and extolling Him involves. It involves an acknowledgement of the relationship that we have with Him. And it is a relationship where sin is inescapable.

You cannot have a relationship with Christ without wrestling with the reality of our sin and His forgiveness of it.

And so, as we come to praise Him, as we come to worship Him, as we come to pour out our hearts before Him and acknowledge His Lordship over us, do we come acknowledging our sin and confessing what's necessary for us, this Jesus?

It's an invitation as well, not only to a certain thing and concerning a certain person, but it's also an invitation to all. The nations are mentioned. Praise the Lord, all nations.

The word in Hebrew is the idea of Gentile nations, of foreign nations. That's why the New Testament translation of it that we've read in Romans, Paul says, praise Him, all you Gentiles.

[20:26] It's an invitation that goes out to all of the geopolitical groups of the world. It goes out to the nations that surrounded Israel, whether it was Edom or Moab or Egypt or Babylon or whoever else.

All of these powers are invited to come and praise. It's an invitation that goes out today to Hebrideans, and to Glaswegians, to Tughters and Townies, to Moas, to every single one of us. It's an invitation that comes to all peoples, all ethnic groups. It's an invitation for everyone. And this again is one of these things that I think in terms of communion people struggle with.

Because sometimes what you think is one of the objections that I know people struggle with who've sat away from the Lord's table for a long, long time is sometimes they think, well, it's not for me

because it wasn't for my dad or it wasn't for my mother.

And I know my mom and my dad and they were very righteous people and they never felt able to go to the Lord's table and if I measure myself against them I am no better so how can I possibly go to the Lord's table?

[21 : 57] But I want you tonight to remember the invitation to come and the invitation to praise and extol the Lord and the highest expression of that I think is an obedience to Him. It is for all peoples.

And so I want you tonight, if that's you, I want you to lay that concern aside. Because God is not asking you to praise Him on behalf of your mom and dad or on behalf of generations past. He is asking you to praise Him. It is an invitation for you to obey Him and come. It is an invitation for the individual. And there is no limits.

It is all nations, all peoples. So the invitation of this psalm comes to all of us and we must bow the knee before Christ and acknowledge Him as Savior.

We must trust in Him for our salvation and we must praise Him. We must extol Him. So what are we praising Him and extolling Him for? I mean, we've mentioned this a little bit in the passing already, but verse 2 helps us.

[23 : 11] For, the great explanatory word of the Bible, For great is His steadfast love towards us. Great is His steadfast love.

Steadfast love in Hebrew is one word. It's simply the word chesed. It's God's love for His rebellious creatures.

Remember I said before that sin, our sin, has to be acknowledged within how we praise God. It has to be seen. It has to be a component of how we think about why we're praising God at all.

Part of that is because that is what His chesed does. The steadfast love of the Lord comes into our experience and it obliterates the traces of sin in our lives.

It just covers them entirely so that they cannot be seen. If you want to think about the greatest act of God's steadfast love, it is found at the cross where God in all of the fullness of time before that had been busy telling the Jews this is how we deal with sin.

[24 : 22] We deal with it through sacrifice. Someone's blood has to be shed. And there's a wonderful moment where God has been demonstrating this all the way back to Abraham where He sends Abraham and He says to Abraham take your son, your only son whom you love and take him to the mountain I will show you and there sacrifice him to me.

And Abraham takes his son, his only son whom he loves, Isaac, and leads him up the mountain and Isaac's even asking, where is the lamb? And as Abraham takes his son up to the altar, he binds him to the altar.

And he does so in faith. He does so believing, confident that the promise of God is through this son so he believes at that point in a resurrection. although Isaac may be slain and burned as a sacrifice, God will raise him up.

So he does it with full confidence in God. But he takes him and he's ready to plunge the knife into his son, his only son whom he loved. And God calls out to him, the angel of the Lord calls out and says, Abraham, stop.

Do not do this. Now I know that you love me. And God who speaks these words knows that at some point, maybe 2,000 years after that or 1,000 years after that, perhaps even on the same hill and the same place, another son will be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

[25 : 51] And as we'll think tomorrow, there is no voice that calls out, stop. Great is the steadfast love of the Lord.

Not in some abstract sense where we can look at someone and say, oh, they're a lovely person. Haven't they got such wonderful characteristics? Aren't they great? But in God's case where we talk about his steadfast love, and in the Bible it is almost consistently expressed this way, it is his steadfast love moving in a direction.

It is towards us. It is steadfast love that is not abstract and over there. It is steadfast love that comes into the experience and the lives of God's people and does something there that brings redemption into their experience, that sets them free from the coils and entanglement of sin, that sets them free from death itself, and will one day raise them up with Christ Jesus in the fullness of the resurrection. This is the steadfast love of the Lord. My question for you tonight is quite simply this, do you know this God?

Do we know the steadfast love of the Lord? Is that what we're wanting to worship? Is that who we want to praise? Is that what of God we want to extol? It ought to be as we're coming to the Lord's table because the Lord's table is the place where we remember the pinnacle of that love being expressed.

[27 : 23] in the broken body and the shed blood of Christ Jesus. It is steadfast love for us sinners.

And it leads us to worship. The covenant love of the Lord, that steadfast love of the Lord, it's bound up in his covenant as well. And so within the heart of covenant theology is the simple fact of God's substitutionary love.

God establishes a bond with his people to save and redeem them. But the bond that he establishes is one made and sealed through the blood of Jesus.

And allied to that is this other word, the faithfulness of God. God having entered into a covenant to do this, follows through on that promise.

And that covenant is bounded at multiple levels. We might think that it was God's promise to Abraham, who was the father of the faithful, that God promised Abraham his name.

[28 : 32] We might go further back, in fact, and we might even go back to Adam, and we could say in Adam, well, God made a promise to Adam. In fact, it was a promise passively made to Adam. It was a statement, a judgment made to Satan, to the evil one, where he said to the serpent in the garden, one day the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent.

It's part of the curse. But within it, there is that wonderful truth, that promise of God, that a faithful, established covenant has been entered into.

God is going to redeem these people. He's going to bring redemption. And in the fullness of time that comes in the person of Jesus.

But there is another layer to this as well, which is the covenant that God made with his son, that the father and the son entered into in eternity before the foundation of the world.

Where creation is established, God says we will make man in our image. But even before that process begins, it's not as if there's a plan B gets set up.

[29 : 39] Where God says, well, by the way, if things go pear-shaped and Adam sins, you're going to have to go and redeem them. The actual plan from the beginning was that Christ would come, that God the son would enter into the experience of humanity.

It's almost as if sin was inevitable, not foreordained under God's control, but just inevitable in the nature of his creatures. That sin was inevitable.

God had agreed within the Trinity, between the Father and the Son, had agreed to come. And the faithfulness of God is seen that in the fullness of time, the Christ did come.

This is perhaps the greatest wonder of the cosmos, that the God and creator of all things, the one by whose word and power all things are made and sustained, that he came into the world, that he took on himself the form of a servant, and that he subjected himself to the misery of this world.

And that in his faithfulness he went to the cross and he died for his people. And tonight, the question before us is simply this, what are we praising?

[30 : 58] I mean, what are we singing of when we sing this psalm? What's on our minds? What's in our hearts? What's moving us? And surely it is this, that we know a Savior, a Redeemer in Christ Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us, and who did so through the sorrow of Gethsemane, who in the depths of sorrow in Gethsemane said, nevertheless Father, even though if I could ask that this cup would pass from me, nevertheless Father, not my will but yours be done, who surrendered himself willingly to the will of his Father, who carried out the fullness of the covenant commitments that God had entered into, who carried the cross.

This is our Savior tonight. Lord, this is who we are invited to make much of and to extol with our lips. And so will we not come and praise the Lord? Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for tonight your fidelity your faithfulness the fact that you are in Christ Jesus the hope of the Gentiles and so Lord we need desperately to have our hearts engaged and our minds committed and our faith exercised towards this great truth that you have done it all and so Father prepare us to come in obedience to your invitation and we ask this for Christ's own sake Amen We're going to sing in conclusion in that psalm, Psalm 117 in Sing

Psalms page 155 The tune is Regent Square We've sung it recently actually in the congregation Praise the Lord O all you nations all you peoples sing his praise for his love is great towards us his commitment lasts always he is faithful now and ever Hallelujah Praise the Lord I think we'll sing it

through twice and we'll stand to sing and remain standing for the benediction Praise the Lord O all your nations all you need must sing his face for his love is great towards us praise the Lord praise the Lord

He is faithful now and ever praise the Lord praise the Lord Alleluia, praise the Lord.

[34 : 31] Praise the Lord, O all you nations, all you peoples sing his praise.

For his love is straight towards us, his moment and last always.

His faithful, alleluia, praise the Lord.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Amen.

Amen.