

Praise The Lord

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Date: 10 September 2023

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[0 : 0 0] As we've been looking at these 15 songs of ascents, and as the people sang these on the way up to Jerusalem, we finish with a small psalm. It's just in type, we don't know who wrote this, a song of ascents. It's really at the end of their pilgrimage, as it were, and as they will return back home from Jerusalem. So, let's just read these three verses together.

Psalm 134, a song of ascents. Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who minister by night in the house of the Lord.

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who is the maker of heaven and earth. Such simple words, and we'll try and make sense of these and grasp what's actually happening here as we look at them in a moment or two.

But let's stand, shall we, and we'll sing. Page, Mines is a relatively new Bible, and that's what Mines does. I've been in this wee section of God's Word so often, it just falls open there.

Thanks for the musicians who led us in our worship this evening. Psalm 134. Let's just ask for the Lord's help now as we come to this portion of his Word.

[1 : 2 5] Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that you've not left us without witness to yourself or without instructions for ourselves. And we thank you that we can read your Word. And at times, Lord, our heart goes out in wonder and praise when we encounter you afresh.

There are times, Lord, when the Holy Spirit, whom we have just been singing about, Lord, convicts us of personal sin in our lives, Lord. And we thank you for his ministry, which is a ministry to make us holy, to make us like Jesus. And we thank you, Father, for these great resources that you have given to us.

And, Father, we pray now as we come to bring this series to a close, we pray, Father, that you would speak to us and encourage us in our faith. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Here is an image of the—this is the FIEC conference this year, and it's about November time, I think it is. It's in Blackpool. This one is called Ministry of Justice, the Righteousness of God in a Broken World.

I don't know if I'll go to that or not. I'm not too sure whether that'll happen. But about a thousand pastors or whatever, quite a few, I think it is. I can't remember. It might be less than that, descend on Blackpool for that. I think I've said to you before, as a pastor, I'm never usually keen on pastors' conferences, especially in the early days. I think I've maybe mentioned this to you.

[2 : 5 2] When you go and there's testosterone flying everywhere, pastors are all, yeah, I'm great. You're great. Where church is growing, yeah. And then the first few days, they're all high-fiving, and everything's great. How are you? Yeah, I'm great. Is your church great? And you know that it's not quite the case, because the way the conference finishes is very different from where it starts. When you start, it's all singing, and all these men are singing, and women are singing, and it's just, wow, you're having a great time. And then the last speaker that speaks usually has a particular message.

As you go home, as you return home, life is hard. It's not easy. Keep going, guys. Keep pressing on. And that's very much the tone. And if you happen to speak to any pastors just before they return home, maybe at lunch before the final talk, and they're honest, and usually at that time they are, the guard is down, and they say, I'm not looking forward to this. I was in a pastor's company who was just returning recently, not a Scottish pastor, an English one, and he'd been off for two weeks, and he says, I'm not looking forward to going back. And it's hard. Ministry's hard. Being a Christian is hard. It's hard to live, to walk in the straight and narrow way. And that's really what this psalm is all about, this final psalm. As you know, these 15 songs were sung by God's people in pilgrimage three times a year up to Jerusalem. And we've looked at many topics because the psalmists have been singing or encouraged us to sing about our experiences of the Lord. We started our service this evening thinking about our story to tell. Israel, the people of Israel have a story to tell. A lot of it's recorded for us in the Old Testament. Individuals will have a story to tell. You have a story to tell about your pilgrimage with the Lord. Times when you said, I was in the slough of this point, out of the depths, Lord, I've cried to you. Maybe that was a psalm that spoke to you. Or as a slave looks to the hand of its master, so I look to you. Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain.

Many experiences. And that's what we've been looking at over these past few months. Last week, we looked at the importance, one of the topics of Christian unity. And we've been thinking about that recently over recent weeks, how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity. Now we come to this conclusion. And in many ways, this is the highest point. Usually you think the highest point will be in the middle, but some of the commentators would stress that this last one is the highest point in all of this, because this last psalm has to do with worship.

I was speaking to Richard. Richard's preaching next week. And I says, what are you preaching? And this was in the car park before I drove away. He goes, I'm only preaching worship. Well, I'm stealing your thunder a wee bit here, brother, by looking at this psalm. I'm sure you'll add to this. But this is about worship. What a way to finish. Praise the Lord. What three words are better than those to begin or to end a conference with or to end a journey, to end a pilgrimage with?

Praise the Lord. And really, that is when they've sung, when they've shared experiences, when they've rejoiced that they're God's people, now the time comes to an end and they're returning home. And here is a call to God's people to keep worshipping and to keep praising the Lord.

[6 : 28] Now, it's not an easy psalm to understand. Psalm 134. It's difficult to know who's speaking to who exactly in this psalm. Here are four very brief interpretations. There is one interpretation of what's happening in this psalm is there's the practical interpretation, which basically says this. The pilgrims had set out on their journey and they arrived, if you remember, in Psalm 122.

Our feet are standing at the gates. They are there. But they can't wait till the morning. So, they go to the temple. It's like you go to Keswick. You've never been before. You want to see where it's like. You want to see the big tent. You want to do whatever. You've heard about it. It's great. You want to go. It's a bit like that. That's one interpretation. They can't wait till the morning. They've arrived. And so, they go to the temple. And here, they're encouraging those who minister in the temple at night. Keep praising the Lord. Keep praising. And you'll be back the next morning and so forth. And that's one interpretation that it could be that. The other interpretation is the day shift is finished. And this is them encouraging the night shift who are taking over from them because the Levites had to pray and serve the Lord day and night. So, the day shift is finished and the night shift arrive. And that's what they're saying. Praise the Lord, all you who minister in the tents by night. The third interpretation is probably the one that I've alluded to. Quite a few commentators would take this. The pilgrims are about to leave. They're about to return home. And here is an encouragement to those who remain in the temple, who serve in the temple.

They will return back to wherever they came from. And they're saying, we're leaving. We'll be back in the feast of Pentecost or whatever. We will come back. But until then, keep praising the Lord.

Keep pressing on. And it's, as I said, I quite like that interpretation. You can take whatever one you want. The fourth one is, this is a picture of the end of our journey. Heaven and glory, praising and worshiping the Lord. And the Lord blessing us in heaven. So, those are the four main interpretations of this. But whatever you say, there are things that are not confusing. The main points are praising the Lord, serving the Lord, and the Lord blessing us. Whatever interpretation, that's what comes out of this passage. So, I want to look at four things. Oh, I mentioned three there. I want to look at four things. So, first of all then, there is the call to worship. We often begin our service with us, a passage that encourages us, ready, primed, ready through the passage or whatever, ready to praise.

Here is a call to worship. So, I've not given you subdivisions. I think there's two, if I remember rightly, under this heading. The first one is praise. If you're taking notes, call to worship. First of all, praise. Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord. What does it mean to praise the Lord? I think we think we know what that means, or we don't really stop to think about what it means. The word that's used in this psalm, in verse 3, or sorry, in verse 1, praise the Lord, is the exact same word that's used in verse 3, where it's translated, bless, there. Praise the Lord, bless the Lord. May the Lord bless you. So, you could say, bless the Lord. It's the same word. So, what does it mean to bless the Lord?

[10:18] We look to the Lord to bless us. We don't bless Him. So, what does it mean to bless, or when we want the Lord to bless us? What we mean when we want the Lord to bless us is the Lord to look down, to discern our need, and to meet those needs. Lord, bless me. I'm struggling. See me. I'm in this particular predicament. I need you to bless me. You want the Lord to look down, to recognize our needs, and to respond accordingly. And in many ways, that's what it means to praise the Lord. It is a response where we recognize Him. We look to Him. We gaze to Him. As we want Him to look at us, we consciously look to Him, and we recognize who He is, and it results in us responding appropriately. And that is praise.

That's what that is. The two words are quite closely linked. Bless. The difference is, when the Lord blesses us, we benefit from this. The Lord doesn't benefit in that way from us. But it's mainly that, to praise the Lord, to bless the Lord, is to recognize who He is and to respond appropriately.

And when we recognize who He is, we would respond appropriately. If cherubim and seraphim came in and flew about this room, or Jesus appeared to us, like John in Isle of Patmos, we would respond appropriately by falling at His feet as though dead. And this is what we should do. And therefore, it's more than just singing. It really is understanding who God is, getting to know Him, getting to know Christ, getting to know the gospel, and responding appropriately. And that is what this psalm, these whole 15 songs have been about, isn't it? Where they repented. They started off in 120, and went out. Their confidence was in God, the maker of heaven and earth. They rejoiced in their religion. They're standing in the house of God. Psalm 123, they looked to Him for help as a slave looks to the hand of its master. They have confidence in the Lord, unless the Lord had been on our side.

We could go through all of these. And as they've gone through all of them, they have reminded themselves of how God is. So, when you get to Psalm 134, you hardly need to say to the people, praise the Lord. It's just there. Wow, you've recounted all the blessings, and you just cannot help but praise the Lord. In our part of the world, we're not good at meditation. People in the Bible, in the East, and so forth. They know what it means to meditate. We can concentrate for about 30 seconds, and the shutters come down. We just live in an instant gratification. But to think on a verse, and to meditate on it, and chew on it for a long time, we struggle. We struggle even to have memory verses. We teach our kids to do it, or certainly we used to do that sword drill, and stuff like that.

We don't do all this stuff now. We just want it all just to come to us. But to stop, and to recall, and to remember, is to cause us to worship Him. Therefore, to worship God is experiential, in that we have a story to tell. We have our own reason to praise God. Even this evening, you might say, John, I am up on the mountaintop. I am praising the Lord, because last Tuesday, this happened, and I'm blown away. I thought the Lord didn't see you, but He saw me. I know He sees me. He loves me, and you're just, that's your experience. But it's also theological, that we get to know what it is we believe. I have a conference, or a kind of residential conference, to speak at for a few days. I can speak longer, but I says, look, I'll give you a couple of days. It's prisoners who have made a professional faith, and they go to this place in Shannon, over Paisley Way, and I've asked if I would speak at that, and I'm thinking, what on earth am I going to say to these guys? And I thought, well, I could give them warm sermons. Keep going. The Lord loves you. You just keep going. And I thought, they really need a better foundation for their faith. So, I'll talk about the doctrines of the

[14 : 43] Bible. I'll mention to them that there is a plan of salvation, and you're part of that plan, and you're reconciled, and you're redeemed, and you're justified, such that you begin to thrill. There's a theology behind it. It's not just warm fuzzies that you go, well, you know, I just wouldn't mind a wee hug now and again from the Lord. But your faith is solid, sure, steadfast. And the more you get to know that, the more you thrill. I went through Bible college, as most pastors. I think, I remember at the time, most of the guys, most of the folk, they liked systematic theology. That was one of the lectures they liked the most. Other lectures were heavy duty, and just going, we're nodding off in the afternoon. But systematic theology, suddenly, wow, look at these great teachings, Paul, the Old Testament, how it all comes together. When you realize that, you realize how good God is, how good the gospel is.

The gospel really is like a diamond. It's got so many facets to it, and only when you pick it up, and you begin to rotate it, and the light shines through it, you go, wow, look at this. This is really quite something. As Christians, we can sometimes be too lazy. And we reduce praise to a couple of songs on a Sunday, or maybe a wee headphone thing that you might have on during the week.

But to actually stop, and you're standing at the bus stop on Monday, and it's pouring of rain, your praise can be better there than it can be in here on a Sunday. When you stop to think of the theology, the plan of salvation, how it's all working, however, not just the planets that's spinning, but God is working towards something. You're part of that. You're loved by that. Or think of your experience. Just recount. You may be having a miserable day there, but six months ago, it was, wow, God hasn't changed. And recall these things. We are not the focus of our praise. He is. Kent Hughes says this. He says, the unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today's Christendom is that worship is primarily for us to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment-focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators. They are silently grading the performance.

Everything is judged on how it affects them. And we can sometimes leave and think, it was okay, service wasn't great. And then you think, well, why wasn't it great? It's up to you to make it great, not just for you to sing, but for you to worship. Worship is not just dependent on the singers or the musicians. You can have somebody on a washboard or a couple of spoons, and you can still worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. And therefore, even in our worship, it's not about what we get from it. Our worship is taken out for the Lord, regardless of what it means to us. We cannot help but worship Him and to focus on those things. Lucille was chiding me on the way in here about my attitude towards Scotland. Now, I'm not talking about the country.

I'm talking about the football and the rugby team. Before they play, I have them beat 6-0 every time. I just focus on the negative. And I was saying to you yesterday, when we were playing Cyprus, I said, if these donkeys don't beat Cyprus, they don't deserve to go through. And it was this, and then I thought today, they've got, I mean, South Africa, don't have a hope, not a hope. And this is the way it goes. I know a wee bit of the score, I won't ruin it or whatever, but I just always paint this black picture of, why are we bothering? Why do we really bother putting a team out for anything? And that's, and we can do this. We can even, no, we would never say that to God, but we just don't get excited. We don't expect any great things from God. We were saved in 1960 by great testimony then, but what about last month? Where is the joy in these things? So, first of all then, this call to worship, praise. Secondly, posture under the same heading, the call to worship. Praise the Lord, and there's posture lifting up holy hands in the sanctuary.

[19:06] Praise the Lord. So, the psalmist is not just saying, praise the Lord, but he's telling us how to go about it, what that might look like. Many Christians do this, they reach out their hands, and so forth. It was very common in the Old Testament, certainly, and even in the New, while you're standing, you spread your hands before the Lord. Old Testament 1 Kings 8, Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven. Psalm 63, I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name, I will lift up my hands. Psalm 141. I could give you many, but this is the last one. May my prayer be set before you like incense. May the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Some Christians feel this very, they can do it very naturally. They just do it. It's always a, there's always a tension with this, isn't there? Even as I'm leading worship, I can see folk, and they're just a wee burning cauldron. They just want to do this, but they don't want to kind of poke somebody in the eye or whatever, and others are saying, hands firmly in the pocket. It's the last thing I'm going to do. Never lifted up my hands in a service, almost as if they're proud of the fact that they do this, and for some folk, it's just a very personal, intimate thing. It's, even this morning as I was preaching, there was a brother sitting in the congregation, and he was just doing this, but you have no idea how much that encouraged me, and just when I saw him doing this, and I thought, at least I know that guy's not asleep, unless he sleeps with his hands like that, which I doubt, but it's very encouraging, and then if you want to do this, and we have people in our church that do that, I just think it's great. Why do we do it? What would make somebody do this? Well, I was in a church not very long ago, and it was basically people were encouraged to open their hands to receive a blessing. Now, I don't agree with that. I don't agree it's as simple as that, by the mere fact that you just do that, that you will be blessed. You can be in there, and your heart can be far from the Lord.

It's not a mechanical thing. There's nothing mechanical in this. Your heart can be far from the Lord, but the spreading out of your hands to receive a blessing, I wish it was as simple as that, but it's not. We worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. We worship from here, and this is just an expression of what's here. If what's here isn't right, you're wasting your time. You're deluding yourself, and you're just trying to impress others. That's not why we do this.

Opening our hands, in many ways, is a sign of humility, almost like a beggar coming, and coming with empty hands and just saying, Lord, fill me, bless me. I'm praising you. Who am I?

There's a sign of humility there when we do this. There's a sign of honesty there as well. There's nothing almost like, I'm empty-handed. I've not got a dagger or a knife. There's an honesty about this. It's a sincerity. There's a humility, and there's a love. There's a reaching out, a bit like a child comes up. I mean, our girls are so, they're grown up now. They don't jump on my knee, which is just as well. My knees went in the last two minutes, but I loved it when they come up and just go, they just did that up. They wanted you at that time. See, when a wee baby or a child comes up to you and just does that, if you're a stranger and you come up to a child, they just look at you and they go, I'm off.

[22 : 45] Who's this baldy guy? I'm not talking to him. But if a child, even if they don't know you, come up and they do that, that just melts your heart, doesn't it? And there's something in worship, the posture of worship. It's not that mechanical thing, but it comes from here. It has to come from here. It has to mean that. And when done correctly, in the right way, and we cannot judge anybody with how they're lifting up hands or not, when it's done generally, it expresses the heart of the worshiper. And sometimes I just see the joy that folk do this. I never know what to do with my hands. I walk about like that, and I'm standing here, and I'm doing whatever in worship, and I sometimes do that. I always find that's a bit weird, but I do it. I've been in gatherings of Reformed pastors. That's a very common way of worship. You put your hands behind your back, and it's almost as if you're restraining yourself unless you are tempted to lift your hands. But it's an expression of your heart, just how you feel before the Lord. Lifting up of holy hands speaks of a holy person, a person who loves the Lord.

Not that we're saying we're perfect or we're better than anyone else. Lamentations. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven. That's Lamentations 3. Let us lift up not just your hands, but your hearts. So in many ways, when you're doing that, your heart is being lifted up as well.

Psalms 28. Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help as I lift up my hands towards the most high place. 1 Timothy 2 in the New Testament. I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing. Lift up holy hands. It really is such an important thing. Scripture's talking about other postures and gestures in worship. Standing, kneeling, lying flat out, falling at the Lord's feet.

various postures that express our heart. But as I was saying, it's not a mechanical thing. The worshippers in Isaiah's day, in Isaiah 1, first chapter, when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you. Even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood. It is an expression of our life. And in communion, we keep short accounts. And you can come in as a sinner and feel your sin. But where we confess that sin and you just come, Lord. And even doing that might be just a sign of repentance. Lord, forgive me. It's quite an intense, it's a lovely thing.

It really is a lovely thing. So, call to worship. Praise the Lord. Lift up your hands. Focus on the Lord. Who is He? Think about who He is. Think about your experience. Praise the Lord and do it genuinely through lifting up hands. Secondly, there's a call to joyful service. A call to joyful service. Look at verse 1. Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who minister by night in the house of the Lord.

[26 : 01] Here is a call to praise and to ministry, to serving the Lord. The people served in the Old Testament, you and I, we serve in the local church. Don't we? We use our gifts and talents. Romans 12, we have different gifts, one from another. If it's to encourage, we encourage. If it's giving, we give, and so forth. Paul says in Ephesians 4, Christ gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip His people for works of service. It's not just all about singing. It is all about serving His Lord. The two of them go hand in hand in that way. To Timothy 1, he writes to Timothy and says, for this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you. So, he's basically saying to Timothy what they're saying to them. Praise the Lord, you servants of the Lord who minister. Here's a challenging quote here from Eugene Peterson in his commentary on these Psalms.

He's thinking here about pastors, but it's not just related to pastors. He says this, I have a friend who is the dean of a theological seminary where men and women are being trained to be pastors. Sometime he calls one of these people into his office and says something like this, you have been around here for several months now, and I have had the opportunity to observe you.

You get good grades, you seem to take your calling and ministry seriously, work hard, and have clear goals, but I don't detect any joy. You don't seem to have any pleasure in what you are doing, and I wonder if you should reconsider your calling into ministry. For if a pastor is not in touch with joy, it is difficult to teach or preach convincingly that the news is good.

If you do not convey joy in your demeanor and gestures and speech, you will not be an authentic witness for Jesus Christ. Delight in what God is doing is essential to our work. If you are serving here in whatever capacity, musically or whatever, we have books on leadership, as I mentioned this morning. One is called *Serving with Joy*, and it is such an important thing. We can sing, and we can sing miserably. We can sing the words and give the impression. You can sing miserably. You can serve miserably as well, and here is a call for, whether it's the night shift or the day shift, to serve the Lord with joy, and to try and keep that, to try and keep the joy in serving. It is one of the—you're aware of it in a church, especially in a small church, when it's all hands to the pump, and you become weary in well-doing. And it's very—but you have to try and guard your own joy. Nobody will do it for you.

You have to try and guard it, and ask the Lord to restore your joy. Go back to praising, remembering God's great, the message is great, the gospel is worth dying for, to remind ourself of these.

[29 : 09] So, how good is our singing? Is it real? Is it sound? Are we praising? Are we recognizing who God is? Is our posture genuine and real? How good is our service? Is that real? Is it joyful? And that is what the psalmist wants. Thirdly, a call to persevere in service. Here is a call to those who minister by night. It's a strange one, isn't it? They mention the ministering by night.

But ministering by night, I think I've said to you, I did night shift in Hagerston Castle right after Bible College, just outside Berwick-upon-Tweed. Oh, dear, those were long nights.

Long nights. You just watched the goldfish swimming round and round, and it just drove you insane. You thought you were going to go mad. See, when somebody came in at six in the morning, you wanted to just hug them. And when the sun went up, oh, great. And the sun went up, and you thought, that's it, it's morning. But it's only four in the morning. It's the middle of summer.

And it's long, long nights. I remember thinking, who can do this every time? I just found it so destroying. And it's difficult. It's difficult to know, once again, who's speaking here. Is this a single priest preaching or speaking to other priests? Is this half the priestly choir who are singing and passing it over to the night shift? Or is this the people perhaps calling to the Levites?

minister, those especially whose ministry is difficult to keep going on. They were in charge, the Levites of the temple worship, day and night. 1 Chronicles 9. Those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night. The singers will be glad. At least tonight, you get to go home. You don't have to be here all night, keeping the lights burning and just singing, even if there's nobody here, to hear it. But here is the importance of worshiping the Lord, ministering even during difficult times. And here is an encouragement from them to, in the lonely hours, when they feel that there's nothing much happening. Every night, day in, day out, night in, night out, when you're tempted to be bored and apathetic. Why are we doing this? Is this not the case sometimes in church? Why are we doing it? Why are we talking about kitchens? Is this a big thing? What's it all about, really? And these things can just leave us empty and frustrated. But we know that it's not.

[31 : 49] But all these things, in some ways, serve the gospel in so many ways. And Christian service can be hard and long and tedious. And not seeing fruit for your labors. I remember hearing that about missionaries.

The hardest thing for a missionary is not eating worms. I remember hearing that missionaries would eat worms. They'd do whatever, go to the darkest tribe, as long as they see fruit for their labors.

I'm sure you would agree with that. If you've got a missionary, says, I don't care what it is. If people are being saved, I don't really care. But if you don't see fruit for your labors, that's very hard. Very hard to keep going on. And I don't know if I've mentioned this quote. I don't think I have about the missionary that came back from Africa for 40 years. And Theodore Roosevelt had returned from three weeks of big game hunting. And as the ship rolls in, the missionary for 40 years in Africa, Theodore Roosevelt, he arrives at the harbor. There's a big band playing. And we're all whooping it up.

And for Theodore Roosevelt, he's only been away three weeks, hunting away. And they get a big band. And the missionary, nobody there to welcome the missionary off the boat and begins to feel sorry for themselves. And 40 years, they say, I've been serving you, Lord. And one man spends three weeks in Africa and the band plays for him. He comes home and looks at the welcome he gets. Then the Lord says, but you're not home yet. And that's quite something, isn't it? There's a band ready for us.

And the band might not be playing tonight for you in all your faithful ministry, but we long to hear those words. Well done, you good and faithful servant. We work towards that, even when folk don't pat us on their back or do whatever. But here is an encouragement from the Lord's people to the other Lord's people. Praise the Lord. Keep pressing on, even in the midst of the night shift. Keep you who minister in the Lord. Paul and Silas in prison. I just love, not just the fact that they were singing. They were singing at midnight. My batteries die at midnight. My daughters, the night just begins on them at midnight. They never go to bed the same day. They get up.

[34 : 13] And well, we had folk around last night, and it was a case of kind of, let's drop some subtle hints. It's 10 to 12, and let's turn on the dishwasher, and maybe they'll go, yeah, maybe he'd be heading at 12 o'clock, just boom. But Paul and Silas are in the stocks at midnight singing praise. I don't know if I've ever been singing praises at midnight. Maybe New Year's Eve. That's a good time to sing praises, isn't it? But that's what we do. True worship is joyful. It is intelligent. It's focused on the Lord. It is persevering, even when it's not easy. Lastly, in this psalm, there's a call for blessing. It begins with a call to worship, as many of our services do, but it ends with a benediction. That is the last verse. May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who is the maker of heaven and earth. The Levites in the Old Testament pronounced blessings on the people. At that time, this is Deuteronomy 10, the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi, Levi to cover, or carry, sorry, the Ark of the Covenant, to stand before the Lord and to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name. It was the rule. Bless the people. Pronounce a blessing on the people. Great ironic blessing, isn't it? The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you, be gracious to you, turn his face towards you, and give you peace. Jesus also did this. When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, Luke 24, he lifted up his hands. There's a good example to follow. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And while he blessed them, he was taken up into heaven. He blessed them.

He blessed his disciples. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. The apostles did this. We don't have time to look at all of these. Paul mentions this sometimes at the beginning of a letter, sometimes at the end. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May the God, Romans 15, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace. They're not prayers. They're pronouncing a blessing. You can claim these things. That's why when sometimes you announce a benediction that Christians never know quite what to do. Do you close your eyes like this for the benediction?

God, and you're perfectly entitled to just look, eyeballs wide open, claim this. This is a blessing for you. It's not a prayer so much. It's the blessing of the Lord, and it's quite something.

And that is what's happening here. What is this blessing? The Lord bless you. As I said at the beginning, it's the same word as praise. We want the Lord to look at our lives to respond appropriately, and that's what we need. We want the Lord to see Westerhailes Baptist Church, to see you in September 2023, to see your need and to respond appropriately, to bless you, to be good to you, to strengthen you, to keep you, to cause you to rejoice, or whatever. And it is, it can only come from him. It says, may the Lord—note that capital L-O-R-D, the covenant name for the Lord, the Lord who wants to bless, the Lord who's covenanted, the maker of heaven and earth. Remember I showed you a video right at the start of this about the size of the universe and how God knows the minutia of you.

He is the maker. He is able to bless us. We're not dealing with someone who can bless us or we hope might be able to. He can bless us well. And it's from Zion, this heavenly Jerusalem. It comes from above. We have a Savior who ever lives to make intercession for us. So, what have we said then?

[38 : 07] Here then is what it means to follow the Lord, to worship Him, to recall, to praise Him, to give Him thanks. The pilgrimage that began in Psalm 120, recounting all their experiences, ends with a psalm that just cannot help but praise the Lord. You hardly, as I say, you hardly need to tell them to do it. You've recounted all this. God is great. The gospel is great. Jesus is great. And it ends with this call to worship, call to joyful service, a call to persevere, and a call for the Lord to bless us.

We need His blessing in the days, the weeks, and the months that lie ahead. I want to end this series by quoting the first few verses of the next psalm, Psalm 135. If you want to praise the Lord from here on in, look at the rest of the psalms, up to 150. They're very much to do with praise. It's as if the psalmist is doing exactly what 134 says. Praise the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord. Praise Him, you servants of the Lord, you who minister in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good. Sing praise to His name, for that is pleasant.

Let us do that now as we stand and sing 10,000 reasons. Bless the Lord, O my soul.