

Psalm 113 - Praise the Lord!

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[0 : 0 0] Well, do take a seat. And if you could turn in your Bibles to Psalm 113, that's the passage we're going to be looking at in just a second.

Psalm 113, that's on page 615 in the Bibles you might find underneath your chairs. And if it helps, there's an outline of the talk just on the inside of your service sheet.

If that helps, if you're taking notes or anything. Psalm 113. Just before we read, let me pray for us as we come to God's Word. Heavenly Father, we know that we can understand nothing in your Word if it's not that you help us to understand.

So Lord, we pray that you would open our eyes, that you would unstop our ears, you would quiet our hearts. Lord, we know there's so many things, legitimate worries, anxieties, and things that will be on our minds as we come here today.

So we pray that you'd give us peace. You'd help us to focus on your Word, to have ears to hear, hearts to understand, that you would be, as we listen, we would be encouraged, we'd be built up, and you'd make us more and more into the church that you've called us to be, more and more into the people and body of Christ.

[1 : 1 6] We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. So Psalm 113. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, you His servants.

Praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

The Lord is exalted over all the nations, His glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, the one who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He sits them with princes, with the princes of His people. He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children.

Praise the Lord. Well, have you ever wondered why we sing when we gather on a Sunday? Well, to make that question more precise, why do we sing praises to God?

[2 : 1 9] Those of you who've been in church all your life might think that's maybe a straight question. But just imagine that you're coming through the doors of this church or another church for the first time. And then suddenly people, you know, people stand up on call and they all start singing together.

And if you were to come week by week, you'd realize that there's a theme to everything they're singing. They're all singing about this one God. And I think, you know, the closest comparison you might have is people at a football match all singing some song or chant for their football team.

So, but why do Christians sing? Why, when we gather, why do we sing? For those of us who would call ourselves Christians, that's a good question for us. We need to ask ourselves, well, why do we sing?

Well, and if you're here for the first time or listening online and you're just considering the things of Christianity, then the question for you also is, why should I join in?

Why should I make this my own? Why should we praise God? That's the question the writer of the Psalm, Psalm 113, is trying to get at this morning. That's what he's trying to answer.

[3 : 23] Psalm 113 is the first of the Psalms that are known as the Hallel Psalms because they either begin or end with this phrase, praise the Lord, which is hallelujah in Hebrew.

That's where we get the word hallelujah from in our English. Anyway, this Psalm was written to be part of the worship of ancient Israel. And in many ways, the aim of the Psalm was to encourage and to stir up the congregation.

Anyone who was meeting in the synagogue or in the temple, stir them up to want to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. That's the aim of our Psalmist.

And that's also our aim this morning, that we'll want to join in the praise of God. So we're going to look at this Psalm just under three short points, as you can see that on the handout.

First of all, praise the Lord because he is worthy of praise. And first a brief note on singing, because Psalm 113 is a song.

[4 : 22] So our first question must be, in some ways, well, why do we sing it? Why don't we just chant it? Why don't we just read it? What's so special about singing? And in short, singing, we sing because singing not only expresses the truth, it also stirs up the emotions, excites our emotions so that we feel the truth.

You know, because very often in the Christian life, our emotions don't align with the truth. We know there's one thing that we should believe, and yet we feel sometimes the opposite. We just don't feel it at all. We go through seasons of life where we're told to rejoice.

God's word says, rejoice in the Lord, and yet we don't feel like that. We're told to weep with those who weep, and we just, that, you know, that naturally, we don't feel like, maybe that empathetic at that moment.

And, you know, I know what you're probably thinking. You probably, you might be coming here this morning, you're thinking, you know, the last thing I want to do is sing in some ways. I sing because everyone else is. And there's so many things that can be on our mind, so many things that can dampen praise, distract us from the praise of God.

But the psalmist would say, try to do it anyway. Singing is something that's quite special. It helps to focus our minds. It moves our hearts. It helps dry truths come to life.

[5 : 38] The very act of singing, when we sing, you know, a psalm, praise God my soul with all my heart, let me exalt his holy name. Actually, that helps to make our hearts want to praise. If we do music well, the tune and the words fit together, and they move us.

They make us want to rejoice in the Lord. Or, you know, when we sing, oh my God, have mercy on me. In your steadfast love, I pray. You know, we might not very be thinking about how serious our sins are, but as we sing that confession along with David, we want to come to the Lord, and we want to confess it to him, and we find fresh forgiveness in that act of singing.

Singing is powerful then. So can I just encourage you, this is a really short aside at the start of the psalm. Can I encourage you to sing even when you don't feel like it, especially when you don't feel like it.

So that's why we sing, but why sing praise to God? And in short, we praise God because he's worthy of praise. That's what we see in many ways and many facets throughout this psalm.

And we'll praise people who we think are great, who do great things. We saw an example of that a few weeks ago when the England's women's team won the Euros.

[6 : 54] They made history, but equally historic were the numbers of crowds, the number of people that gathered to watch the match. There was 81,192 people packed into the Wembley Stadium, a record 17.9 million watching online, and a three-day party in Trafalgar Square just to celebrate the win.

The size of the crowds was momentous because it showed that this is something that's worthy of praise. You know, women's football is something that people take seriously now.

Well, in Psalm 113, we see that God is worthy of praise because of the size of the party. First of all, if you just notice in the first few verses, this party would clearly break the limits of Trafalgar Square because everyone is invited.

He says, praise the Lord, all you servants. And we don't actually have it really translated in verse 1, but it's verse 1, praise the Lord. That's a plural.

If you, this was, I don't know, American English, Deep South, you might say, y'all praise the Lord. It's a command for everyone to get up, everyone to praise. Praise the Lord, everyone, male and female from every nation.

[8 : 07] God isn't just to be praised by Christians. As the creator of the world, he is worthy to be praised by all his creation. And second, this isn't just a three-day party.

God is to be praised through all time. In verse 2, we read, let the name of the Lord be praised both now and forevermore. The psalmist clearly thinking bigger than just a few psalms or a few songs on a Sunday as well, isn't he?

He's bigger than a three-day party in Trafalgar Square. This God is so glorious that he is worthy of unending praise every day with all of our lives, with all that we are.

And third, this party isn't just in one place. It's over the whole earth. Verse 3, we read, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

Now, that could be talking about time again. But people who know Hebrew much better than me say it's referring to the whole earth. As the sun tracks over the whole earth, every place where the sun touches, and maybe that's parts of Scotland at different times, but all the countries, all the people that the sun goes over, every nation should be praising God.

[9 : 19] Every people, all the world, every place. All peoples, all times, all places. This is a big party. And that's because of who's at the center of it. Did you hear it?

Did you hear his name repeated again and again and again? Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, you servants. Praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised. The Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

That's the name that we're to be. Read this psalm, and we hear it like crowds chanting that name. It's God's name. That Lord in capital letters that we have in our Bible, that's the way our English translators represent the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh.

It's God's name. It's the name that God gave his people, a personal name, a covenant name, the name that he promised himself to the people, saying, I will be your God and you will be my people.

And it's a name that's loaded with meaning. If I say Noah, you think he built the ark. If I say Hadrian, you say he built a wall. If I say Boris, you say, I don't know, he had a party.

[10 : 27] Well, you say Yahweh to an Israelite, and they would want to just reel off all the things that God has done. They would tell you all the reasons why God is worthy of praise.

And that's what the psalmist does next in verses four to nine. We're on our second point now. Praise the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Yet stoops low. First, his exaltation.

God is exalted. Did you notice all of the high up language in verses four to six? The Lord is exalted above all the nations. His glory is above the heavens.

Who is like the Lord our God, the one who sits enthroned on high. Who stoops far down on the heavens and the earth. Now, God isn't a physical being. So these verses are metaphor.

They're not talking about God's location, but his status. And ancient kings and rulers, I mean, still today, you have someone set on steps.

[11 : 27] Their throne's high up to show their status. And these steps aren't to show my status. This is just, you know, a matter of being able to see everyone, of course. But, or even like, I don't know, the Aztecs, Babylonians, they would put their temples at the top of a ziggurat.

These, they stepped pyramid to show the status of their God. Well, the psalmist is using that same kind of imagery. He's saying, you know, our God is exalted. He's set on high. He's higher than all the rest of the gods.

He's, there is no one that can compare to him. He rules not just one nation we see, but he's exalted over all nations. His throne is higher than the heavens. That's what they would have called the sky.

God is exalted in his royal power. He has control and authority and dominion over all things. It's, it's the word that the theologians use to describe this is that God is transcendent.

He's transcendent. He's above everything. And it's something we read of from the very first pages of the Bible, isn't it? Without any effort, God just calls creation into existence.

[12 : 30] He speaks and creation is. Nothing but his word of command. Psalm 33 verse 6 says this. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made.

By the breath of his mouth, all their hosts. You know, we saw that picture of the Milky Way. God just spoke and stars came into existence. We see the start of some of those.

You know, we've got that new telescope. I forgot what it's called. That's up orbiting the earth. And that can, you know, they've seen some of stars come into existence. It's because it takes trillions of light years for that, for that light to reach them.

And they can see, oh, look, there's a pinprick that's come into existence. You know, that star. God just spoke it into existence. Now we're seeing it. It's amazing. But we see, we saw God's transcendence with the kids, didn't we?

God can just scoop up the waters of the ocean. He can just weigh the mountains in a balance. And the lesson we saw with the kids was that there's none like God. There is none like him. That's what we read.

[13 : 30] As we read in verse 5, who is like the Lord, the one who is enthroned on high. And God's transcendence sets him apart from creation.

That's the key kind of first lesson here. God isn't like us. Jim Lavelle was one of the first three astronauts to orbit the moon. This is before the moon landing itself.

And in an interview, he described how as the spacecraft turned and as the Earth came into view in the window of the spacecraft, he put his thumb up to the window.

And he realized that his whole thumb could cover the Earth. And that there, 240,000 miles away, behind his thumb was everyone he ever knew. Everyone that mattered.

Everyone he'd ever known. Everyone who'd born and died. He could just fit behind his thumb. And he was just amazed. Oh, what, six billion people back then? Well, that's God's view.

[14 : 28] That's what the psalmists say God's view is a bit like. He has to stoop far down low in verse 6. Compared to him, Isaiah also says, the nations are just like a drop in the bucket.

We're tiny compared to God. God is exalted. There is none as powerful. None as great. And that's why the psalmist says he's worthy of praise. God is glorious.

He's worthy of praise. But the psalmist doesn't end there. Because we mustn't think God's transcendence means that he's out of touch. And out of mind.

And he won't have anything to do with us. And we sung a bit of that in Psalm 8. You know, the psalmist reflecting on that God actually has something to do with us. But, you know, a God who is distant and out of touch isn't the biblical view.

That's what we call a deist view of God. God just created the world, set it off spinning, and then had nothing more to do with it. That's not the God of the Bible. Rather, God's authority and control means that he's very present in his creation.

[15 : 31] And we see that in the second part of our second point. That he's the God who stoops down low. We see that even in the language of God looking far down on the heavens and the earth.

You know, the creator of all things. Who can, you know, hide creation behind his thumb. That's for sure. He pays attention to us. He notices us. We see that even more detail in verses 7 to 9, don't we?

He raises the poor from the dust. He lifts the needy from the ash heap. He seats them with princes, with the princes of his people. He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children.

The God who looks far down is also the God who gets involved in our lives. He doesn't just pay attention either to the big national policies. And, you know, where's Air Force One right now?

He doesn't just look and see who are the celebrities, who are the powerful and rich. This is the God who notices the people who are forgotten. People who are needy.

[16 : 35] He notices the people who are the bottom rung of society. The homeless man curled up behind the cardboard boxes in a vacant shop door. That we even don't notice as we quickly walk by on our way.

The old woman maybe who's housebound and feels forgotten by friends and family. God notices them. There's no one who's out of his gaze. You know, I grew up in Nepal and in countries like Nepal there's often a caste system and some people are deemed untouchable.

And I remember seeing children by the side of the road picking through rubbish and trying to find little items to sell. And side by side there were the dogs with stray dogs with mangy fur, often had rabies.

And these people were just cast off by society. But we have a God who notices them. He sees the women as well who have been unable to have children.

You know, that's hard enough as it is. But, you know, in some societies, you know, actually it gets even worse because people who can't have kids are considered cursed or less significant or less valuable.

[17 : 44] We should even just notice that God notices women. We have come a long way in actually, you know, in women being treated with greater value in our society. But here we have a God who doesn't, you know, see women as just a different level, but equally precious and loved in his sight.

We have a God who notices everyone. But God doesn't just see, he also acts. And that's our third point. Praise the Lord who raises up.

Verses 8 to 9 contain powerful pictures of God raising up the lowly. He raises the poor and the needy and makes them princes. It's the stuff of Bollywood and Hollywood.

Think of Aladdin and Slumdog Millionaire. And this is the God we see across the Bible. God is consistently the God who raises up the lowly. Think Joseph from prison to being prince of Egypt, as people say.

Or David, the nobody who's watching sheep who then becomes the greatest king of all Israel. Most iconic of all, we see God rescues his people from slavery in Egypt and calls them to be his precious possession, his treasured possession.

[18 : 54] That's actually the focus of the next psalm, Psalm 14. There is a link there. And even just that work, God noticing the barren woman. Again and again and again.

If you were to trace that theme through the Bible, you see it. Abraham and Sarah. Sarah couldn't have kids. Then Rebecca, Isaac's wife. Then we get stories in the Bible like Hannah, Samuel's mother, who was, you know, her husband.

She couldn't have kids and she was mocked by her husband's other wife. However, that happened terribly. But God answered her prayer and gave her Samuel. We'll fast forward to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

You know, you might say that raising up the lowly is kind of what God does. It's consistently his character. So no wonder the psalmist says in verse 5, who is like our God?

What other God or celebrity or politician or royalty is so exalted and yet also chooses to be so close to us? Who chooses to stoop so far down low?

[19 : 58] None. The rich and famous, you know, might, you know, from time to time mix with nobody's like us. I mean, there might be someone who's a somebody here. I don't know. But, you know, when they do it, it makes the newspaper headlines.

When Prince William just did, I don't know whether you noticed, he sold the big issue for just about an hour. And suddenly he's on all of the front pages of the newspaper the day after.

Well, God did more than that. The creator of all things became a creature, became a man. And you'd think that that kind of thing would be breaking news. You'd think that it would at least appear in the local gazette or even just at least the WhatsApp group on that street.

But it didn't. Because when God became a man, he became a baby. He was born to a virgin out of wedlock. He was born in a shed. And he went further to still, you know, the reading we had in Philippians 2, we read that Christ humbled himself to the point of death.

Even death on the cross. He didn't grasp hold of his rights, we read. He humbled himself. He willingly let that go to death on the cross. The highest of high became the lowest of the low.

[21 : 08] And he didn't do it to promote a charity. He didn't do it, he did it to raise the lowly. And we've got to be clear here, it's not the physically poor, but the spiritually poor that we read Christ came ultimately for.

That's our greatest need. You'll see that across the Gospels. Our greatest need isn't to be made well. Like the paralyzed man, Jesus said, your sins are forgiven. That was the most important need. You see, by nature, we're all spiritually bankrupt, the Bible says.

You know, we have nothing good to offer God. We have, he's the one who is exalted. He's the one who's worthy of our praise, but all our praise falls short. You might say we have an infinite debt of worship that we owe God.

But generally, we live our lives without reference to him. We often even deliberately ignore his commands. And some of us this morning might feel very aware of that spiritual poverty.

Some of us here might come, you know, we're very aware of the ways in which we've sinned over the last week. Maybe you've fallen yet again in the fight against the same sin.

[22 : 16] Maybe you've lost your temper and you wish you could take those words back, but they're squeezed out like a tube of toothpaste. Maybe something else that you're trying to put some sin to death and it just keeps biting you back.

Maybe you've been acting selfishly and hurt someone again. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus came for you. Jesus said that blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

The God who is seated on high is the God who stooped down low. And he stooped down low, not for the, again, for the rich righteous, which is none of us, by the way. He stooped down low for those who recognize their poverty.

Romans 8 verse 5, we read, God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And that's a promise for all of you, for any of you who have recognized your own spiritual poverty.

That verse is a promise for you, that you can have assurance that Christ died in your place. If you've recognized your need and grasped hold of him and trusted in him. But I imagine there will also be others here who haven't yet recognized their own spiritual poverty.

[23 : 32] Maybe you're listening online and you've just been tuning in for the past few weeks, finding out more about church. Or you've come along for the first time. Or maybe you've sat in this church for years and years.

You know, naturally, sometimes we find it hard to admit our spiritual poverty. We're, you know, naturally, we're quite proud. We find it hard to admit that actually we're so in needs of God's help that we have nothing to offer.

Maybe you think of all the good things we do this week. All the hurtful things that we didn't say. And we give ourselves a pat on the back.

We tell ourselves, actually, we're not that bad after all. We're not that helpless. I mean, in some ways, just to be blunt, if we weren't helpless, Jesus wouldn't have had to die. So can I urge you to be honest with yourself?

God sees our heart and what he sees is an empty bank vault. Worse than that, it's a vault filled with stolen praise that belongs to him. There's nothing worthy in there.

[24 : 34] All our good deeds are tainted by sin. But God can deal with that if you humble yourself, if you give yourself to him. The Bible tells us that the exalted king became sin for us.

If you'll only ask him to take your sin. If you only ask him to pay that debt with his blood. And in 1 John 1 verse 9, the promise is, this is the promise.

That if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Jesus not only pays off our debt, but he raises us up. He doesn't just wipe our slate clean, but he gives us the status of children of God.

God raises us literally from rags to riches when we trust in Christ. He gives us an inheritance with the saints, we're told, that doesn't perish, spoil, or fade. God is worthy of all praise and all time in all places.

Why? Because the exalted king Jesus, the exalted God, stooped down on the cross to die for sinners like you and me. That's the gospel in short, isn't it, friends?

[25 : 42] God is worthy to be praised. Then he will be. He will be for all time, by all people, in all places. In the very last book of the Bible, the apostle John records the vision God gave him of heaven.

And this is what he sees. That is what he sees. Revelation 7 verse 9. A great multitude that no one could number from every nation and tribe and people and language standing before the throne.

And what are they doing? They're praising the lamb who was slain. They're praising the one who is exalted and yet made himself nothing to raise us up. So God is worthy to be praised.

And so really the question I want to leave you all with is, will we join in? Will we praise him in song? More importantly, will we praise him with all that we are, all our lives?

Every minute, will we offer ourselves into him in worship? That's not just a question we have to grapple with each Sunday when it comes to standing up and singing. That's a question that matters for each day of the week.

[26 : 43] Will we give ourselves to God? Will we praise him with all that we are? That's what's offered. That's what's commanded. That's the invitation of this psalm.

Praise the Lord. Well, let's pray together and then we'll close by singing Psalm 113. Heavenly Father, we come to you and we pray and we acknowledge that who is indeed like you.

And Lord, we pray that you would impress the truths on our hearts that we've read this morning. That you would help us to understand more and more each day that there is none like you. That there would be no one else, even ourselves, that steals the worship that belongs to you.

Lord, make us a people of praise. And Lord, if there's, we'll all be in different positions this morning. If there's any who don't yet know you as their Lord and Savior, Lord, we pray that they would know you not only as the exalted God, but also as their Savior who's come near to raise them up.

Lord, we pray that you'd build up your people. You strengthen this church. We thank you for it. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.