

Psalm 113

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: 19 February 2023

Preacher: Ciáran Kelleher

[0 : 0 0] Amen. And please keep open that passage. That's where we're going to be spending most of our time together this evening. Let me begin this evening. For anyone like me who is a rugby enthusiast, again, it's been hard. No Six Nations.

It's been a really great time for me so far. If you haven't guessed, my accent betrays me. I'm a very proud Irishman. And boy, have we been doing well so far. But if it's not Ireland I'm supporting, the other team I love in international rugby is Fiji.

I just love the freedom and the abandon they play with. But it's not just the way they play. It's the way they conduct themselves that just sticks out to me.

When they came to play Scotland back in November, before the game, if you're not a rugby enthusiast or don't like sports at all, normally what happens before an international game is a dignitary from the hosting country will come out and they'll shake the hands of those who are playing in the game.

And normally for a rugby match at home in Murrayfield, Princess Anne comes along. She's the patron of the Scottish Rugby Union. And she'll go along and she'll shake the hands. And all the rugby players will, you know, look down upon her with their big hands, shake hands and she'll move on.

[1 : 1 5] But the Fijians stood out because they didn't stand. What happened is they come over, shake her hands. And the moment they shook hands, they bend down on me or some of them even sat down, bowed down their heads and they clapped for her.

Because you see, for them, that is the way you honour someone who is in authority. That's the way you honour someone who is high up. All throughout the Bible, we see this language, we see these calls to worship.

For worship literally means to prostrate yourself, to bow down before someone. You see, what you do when you worship is you bow down and you say, you are higher than me. You are worthy of praise.

You are worthy of all my devotion. You are worthy of my heart. You are worthy of adoration. That's what it means to worship, is to prostrate yourself before someone.

Now, let's come back to the Fijian rugby players. And I want to, instead of looking at them, sat down or on their knees and clapping, I want us to look through their eyes. Now, imagine you've got down, you've closed your eyes and you clap.

[2 : 3 3] And then you open your eyes and what do you see? Princess Anne has decided to get down on her own knees and look at you in the eyes. She's got to sit down herself and sit right at your level.

When we think of it in those terms, here we start to grasp the dynamic that we see in this psalm. Where God, who is grace and high and enthroned above the heavens, comes down to his people.

And not just grasp the dynamic we see in this psalm, but we grasp the dynamic of the gospel, the very heart of the Christian faith. Where we see the great King Jesus, who comes down to us in lowliness to give himself for us.

We've just started this series as a church down in Montrose. We're looking at Psalms 113 to 118.

The title that I've given this psalm is, The Last Hallelujah of the King. I like a little bit of a pun. You see, these psalms, this kind of selection, this little playlist.

[3 : 50] So the psalms were the prayers and songs of the people of God, and still are the prayers and songs of the church to this day. And this little kind of playlist, this little selection, Psalms 113 to 118, these began to be used particularly by the people of Israel.

And they went to Jerusalem for the festivals. And they were used at Passover. Passover was the big event where the people remembered the great exodus, when God rescued his people out of backbreaking and hope-sapping slavery in Egypt, and made his people his very own.

At Passover, they celebrated that. And these were the songs that they would sing then. What would happen is they'd normally sing Psalm 113 and 114 before they ate the Passover, and then after the Passover, they'd sing the rest of the psalms.

Now, why do I say this? Why do I tell you this? What's it about the last, the king's last hallelujah? You see, there's a little bit in Mark's gospel, and you probably miss it, but it talks about them singing a hymn together.

In all likelihood, they were singing these hymns. As Jesus, the night before, when he knew that the cross was coming for him, that he was to be rejected by those he came to save, that he was to be slandered and mocked, that he was to be beaten and ultimately crucified, these were the songs that he was singing.

[5 : 25] And what did he do? As he looked at that, he praised God. And if you're with us this evening, there is an order of service which is no use to you at all.

This was for something else, but I've got two points for you if you're note takers. And the first point is this. Praise our God. Praise our God.

Have a look at me at verses 1 to 3 again. And here's an important thing. Whenever you're looking at the Bible, if you see a word repeated, it's trying to show you something that's important.

You'll know that from your own lives. So sometimes you can imagine it where I might hear in the house, I might hear, Kieran. Kieran.

Kieran. Kieran. I think, all right, something's going on here. You see, you know that you're being summoned.

[6 : 22] And here we see the people are being summoned. Have a look with me. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord be praised.

The name of the Lord is to be praised. Five times we see that there. This call, this summons for the people of God to praise him.

Now, let me say this. I think it's important. Maybe if you're new here this evening, if you're exploring the Christian faith, but maybe this might be a question that you've had before, but never thought that you've voiced it or friends have asked you about it.

Does God need our praise? Does he need our worship? How would you answer that question? Well, I think I would say, no, but he deserves this.

You see, God has lived in perfect unity and harmony, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He does not need us, but he deserves our worship for all that he has done for us.

[7 : 24] That's what we're going to be exploring in the second half of this psalm. But I might also say that we need to worship him. We need to worship God.

We are made as worshiping beings. Our hearts, as the great theologian Augustine said, will only find rest when they find rest in God.

The trajectory, the compulsion to worship, to say something is worthy of adoration, can only find a serious fulfillment in the creator of us all, the creator of the universe.

But I want us just to focus in on verses 2 to 3. Did you notice there was kind of a little sandwich there? Have a look at the top of verse 2. Let the name of the Lord be praised.

Bottom of verse 3, name of the Lord be praised. And then in between, both now and forevermore, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. Quite often in kind of Hebrew poetry, which we're reading here in the Psalms, they try to do these sandwiches.

[8 : 29] And what we're meant to do is kind of focus in on the middle. Here we're seeing how important and how all-encompassing the prayer, the praise that we are being called and summoned into.

Have a look at me there. You see there first, both now and forevermore. What he's saying is we worship an eternal God and praise for him must be eternal.

There's no kind of time that we take off for praise. It's not like August the 5th, we're going to take some time off because it's a bank holiday. We're not going to praise God that day. Here we are called to praise him at all times.

You see, this is here, this is a call that all generations, through all of time, are called to praise this God.

But it's not just all generations, it's also a geographical call, an invitation. You see that there, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets.

[9 : 32] I'm sure many of you will have heard that phrase, that old phrase that the sun never sets on the British Empire. I think that's probably going away now.

But here we praise the one who sits in thrones over the eternal heavenly kingdom. The kingdom that will never fail.

And we are called to worship him. And he's calling all peoples of all nations to join. We are being invited to join in this praise. This praise that happens through people.

As Psalm 19 says, not just happens through people, but happens through all of creation. All the heavens declare the glory of God. And we are being invited to praise.

But what is it that we are being invited to praise in particular? Have a look at me. Let the name of the Lord be praised. The name of the Lord is to be praised.

[10 : 36] Does that sound a little bit odd to you? Praise his name. Why would we praise his name? What's that about? Thank you so much.

I know quite a few people inquired and asked after us. And we had the safe arrival of our little boy three weeks ago. And we were deciding on picking names.

His name is Ruan Fraser Padder Kelleher. You can ask me later on how to spell Ruan or even how to pronounce it yourselves. We call him baby Rue. But so often when we pick names, we kind of choose those that look nicer, sound nice.

Ruan, I just wanted an Irish name for my son. But we went for Fraser and Padder because their names are important in our families. Fraser is my wife's granddad.

Padder was a beloved great uncle of mine. Padder means Peter in Irish. But so often, names don't really come with any meaning.

[11 : 39] The only way I think of it in some ways is, you know, when you're trying to think of a name and we might say, my wife might say to me, what about Oliver? And I think, no, there was an Oliver I didn't like at school, so we're not going for that at all. We kind of import a meaning onto the name.

But that's very different to the way that these cultures understood it. They gave names to describe people. So, for example, Peter, Padder, that's the name that one of the chief disciples of Jesus was called.

His name was Simon, but Jesus said, you're to be called Peter. Peter means rock because the confession of Peter, that Jesus is Lord, is the rock on which the church is built.

And so, names meant something. And Jesus, the name of God means something. If you have a look there at the name, you see the name of the Lord.

Do you see that it's all capitalized? Sometimes you'll see Lord in the Old Testament, and it's L, and then it's lowercase, O-R-D. But here, it's all uppercase.

[12 : 46] This is all capitals. This is trying to, this is a way of rendering God's name. What we can see, the letters are Y-H-W-H.

The best way maybe is Yahweh. You might have heard of Jehovah in the past. This was the special name of God. Literally, it means, it was the name that God revealed in the Old Testament to his people.

We see it revealed to Moses at the burning bush. And it literally means, I am that I am. Or I was what I was. I will be what I will be.

Here, we get this picture of God's eternal, unchanging nature. What he was, he is, and ever will be. Who he is towards you is who he always will be towards you.

So, God's love towards his people is not hindered by the circumstances in our lives, not changed by the way that we are. God's love is eternal.

[13 : 45] He is who he is. And his name gets filled out by what he does. And that's what we're going to be looking at in the next bit. But he is the I am.

And here, we are being invited and summoned to praise his name. But what we also do when we take this as our own prayer, and we take it as our own songs we are at the end, we're also inviting and calling and summoning one another to praise God.

I think it's helpful when you look at the Psalms, there's kind of four different directions the Psalms are sung. They're sung upward to God. They can be sung to ourselves, my soul.

We can sing to the nations, and we can also sing to one another. And here, we are calling on one another to praise the Lord. I used to work at St. Andrew's Free Church, and there was an American at that church.

And he really wanted to take this seriously, this idea of singing to one another. So, during when we had songs where we would sing to one another, something like this, he would turn around and look at everyone. You can imagine when all the Brits were like, turn your face away, don't look.

[14 : 54] This is really uncomfortable. I just want to look up or close my eyes. Don't do that. But it brings us in, when we sing together, we are inviting and calling one another to praise this great God, the incomparable God.

And you see, that's what then is filled out in the rest of this Psalm, as we look at verses 4 to 9. So, we've seen here, praise our God, and the second point we've got this evening, for those who are note-takers, who is like our God.

I've kind of tried to take it right out of verse 5 there. Who is like the Lord our God. And so, let me put it up here, up right for you right now.

Take this. God is high and humble. He is lifted up and lowly. That's what we see here.

So, first in verse 4, the Lord is exalted over all the nations. His glory is above the heavens. What we want to see here, what we want to experience, what we want to know, is the transcendence, the supremacy of God.

[16 : 09] You see the language there, that he is, verse 5, the one who sits enthroned on high. God is above and beyond everything. He is over the nations. No nation compares to him.

No king, no prime minister, no president, no emperor compares to the God who sits enthroned. This isn't a geographical picture. This is about his power and glory and authority.

He is grace and above and over all things. And he looks down from on high as the grace and all-powerful, transcendent one.

And then we get this kind of rhetorical question, who is like the Lord our God? And the answer is, well, no one. No one is like him. He is incomparable.

And sometimes I foolishly look at the comments and articles or on social media about something that's happened, normally on sports. It's never a good thing to read comments online, is it?

[17 : 12] But sometimes, one of the comments I've seen, if someone's done really well, they'll talk about this, that this player, this athlete, has entered into God-tier modes. And I just think, what a low view you might have of God that you think that there's tiers that we can get to.

You see, the way the Bible puts it, the way the church has always understood it, is that there is creation and there's the creator. And creation is nothing like its creator.

He is of a totally different essence and being. He is all-powerful. He has none of the limits, none of the finitude that we have. He is great and all-powerful.

Who is like the Lord our God? No one. But what we sing and what we pray of here is what is surprising about the Lord our God.

It's not that he's just grace and all-powerful, but it's also his lowliness and his humility that we see here. Look at verse 6.

[18 : 14] The God who is enthroned on high stoops down. Stoops down, comes down to his creation. He's not a distant, disinterested deity, but he is a creator who is intimately concerned with his creation, with his creatures, with his people.

Here we see his lowliness and his kindness. And in verses 7 to 9, we get some reminders, some pictures for us what this looks like.

A lot of the language here is used from an Old Testament book, 1 Samuel. It comes from a prayer of a woman called Hannah as she considers her God and what he has done for her.

And here, she's, this language is taken here and it's used to remind her, to remind us of God's kindness to those who are lowly, those who have been forgotten, those who are outcasts.

You see the language here, he raises the poor from the dust, seats them with princes, he settles a childless woman in her home. Here we kind of get glimpses and echoes of the stories of how God has entered into his creation and lifted up those who have been hurt and wounded by the world and made them his own, welcomed them in those who feel like they've been forgotten when he comes to them are known, seen and loved by the God of all creation.

[19 : 55] Like the story of Joseph, you might have heard of him before, Joseph in his technicolored dream coats who was thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery and sent to a foreign land and yet God raised them up to become like the princes of the nation of Egypt.

or David, the young shepherd boy, the youngest in his family, forgotten but God raised them up to be the greatest king in all of Israel's history.

Or Hannah herself. The story of Hannah, the story of 1 Samuel begins with this woman married to her husband. She's not able to have children and in that culture she is mocked and slandered for that.

But God in his kindness allows her to have a child, a child who will be set apart to be the great prophet Samuel, who will speak the truth to Israel, to call the people of God back to him.

Let me say this, this is important. Here we're getting glimpses of the way God has acted. So these aren't promises for us. So the promise here isn't this, all of us who are believers in God are going to become princes or princesses in the house of Windsor later on.

[21 : 21] And so it isn't a promise either about children. I don't know the stories of people here, people who are struggling. And this isn't a promise about that, this is a promise as we see that story of Hannah, God's kindness and gentleness and tenderness to her in her pain, in her loneliness, when she was mocked by others, that God bent down to her, heard her prayers and lifted her up.

And it's the promise that God makes to lift us up out of the ash heap, out of the dust. You, this is what Jesus himself came to do.

Jesus said, I came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus said that because he went to eat with a tax collector, one who was spurned and boycotted by his fellow Israelites.

And people said, why is Jesus eating and welcoming a sinner? And Jesus said, he came for them, for those who are in the lowest rung, those who are in the dust, in the ash heap.

God comes for those people. Because look at the imagery here. Here we've got this real low, people who are right down in the bottom, at their very lowest.

[22 : 48] I've been reading the last few months about a lady called Josephine Butler. I don't know if any of you have ever heard of her.

I was reading another book and she was mentioned in it. I think it's a real sadness that she's not more well known amongst Christians. So Josephine Butler lived in England in the mid to late 19th century, the 1800s.

She grew up in a well-to-do home. Her father was the cousin of the Prime Minister. She never really struggled but she was brought up with a strong Christian faith, a strong trust in Jesus.

She got married to a man who eventually became a vicar but he ended up going into schooling. They moved around between Oxford and Cheltenham and finally he was called to lead a school in Liverpool.

And while they were in Liverpool, she'd grown up in the high academia of Oxford, in the genteel nature of Cheltenham, a lovely spa town. And then she went to Liverpool and just saw pervasive poverty.

[24 : 02] I don't know if any of you have ever heard of a workhouse or a poorhouse. A poorhouse or a workhouse was a place where those who couldn't even live on the streets anymore were brought in.

They were brought in and given the hardest kind of manual labour. They were given very little food. Normally they had been rejected by everyone else.

Normally suffering from many illnesses. And seeing all of this and with her Christian faith, she wanted to go in to these women who were in this workhouse. What she did was she sat down with these people who were called oakum pickers.

Oakum pickers were those who got lines of rope that were used in the fishing industry and they had to pull out any kind of strands that might be used again and sold on. It was really hard working fingers.

When she went in, they laughed at her. They thought, look at you with your delicate fingers. You could never do it. She was welcomed by them because when she went in, these women who'd been rejected by everyone else felt seen, loved, known, welcomed.

[25 : 09] happened. The story, one of the first young women she met had been rejected by her family, had ended up being tricked and led into a brothel.

The only reason she got out of the brothel was because she contracted a serious illness. She was on the streets, ill, not able anything to do, and she was brought in. On her first day, she met Josephine Butler.

Josephine Butler saw her and just out of compassion, said, come to my home. Let us help you to recover. And in their home, she and her husband would feed her and they would share the truths of the Bible with her.

After a while, she said to Josephine's husband, George, you don't need to tell me any more about Jesus because I see him in you. Because she knew that Jesus was the one who came down low to the least likely the last, the least and the last.

To those who are in the dust, to those who are in the ash heap. Here, she saw this tangible picture of the reality, the true reality of what happens when God comes down to us.

[26 : 28] In all likelihoods, Jesus sang and prayed this the night before his death. here, here he had a picture of what this was to look like.

The enormity, the scope, the gravity of what he was doing. The one who was king in heaven with riches unsearchable and unknowable came down not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

Look at that language there. He raises the poor from the dust. That language dust is used elsewhere in the Old Testament as kind of a shortcut to talk about death.

You might have heard the phrase, from dust to dust, when our bodies go back into the ground, when we are buried in death. And you see, this is what Jesus does, is Jesus descends all the way to the cross, all the way to the tomb, to death, to lift us out of this.

And this is what Paul, one of the leaders of the early church, this is what he wrote to the church in Ephesus. He said this, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.

[27 : 55] And he jumps forward, verse 4, you can have a look at it later, Ephesians chapter 2. He says, but because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved, and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

You see, the reality that we pray and sing of in this psalm is fulfilled in Jesus. When we unite ourselves to him by faith, we are united to him, not just in his death, his sin bearing death, but we are raised up with him to new life.

We are raised up with him into the heavenly realms. You see, if you're a Christian here this evening, that is your reality. That is your truest status, your truest identity, is that your citizenship is with Jesus Christ in the heavens above.

We live in what theologians call the kind of now and not yet. So that idea of us being with Christ will be fully consummated when he returns, but that reality is a certainty.

[29 : 21] That is who you are. And maybe if you're here tonight, if you're one of those people exploring the Christian faith, this is the invitation for you.

This can be your reality as well, to be known, to be seen, to be loved, to be welcomed. There is nothing we can do.

We can't climb up the ladder to make our way up to God. God has to be blessed. But the good news that we celebrate in this psalm is he stooped down to us. He has come down into the ash heap.

He has come down into the dust. He was cast out for us. He was rejected for us. So that we might be welcomed in into the eternal family, where the praise never ends, where the praise goes from the east to the west, from where the sun rises to the sun sets.

We are invited into that. So the only way to respond, the only way to respond is the way that this psalm finishes.

[30 : 32] Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, the one who in humility, the one who in love, the one who in grace, has come for you, has come for me, who invites us to be raised up with him into new life, to sit with princes, to sit with the King of Kings.

That's the invitation to you, and the invitation to join in this eternal, everlasting praise, as we praise the name of the Lord.

Let's pray together. Oh God, our Father, what a wonderful thing to remember, to consider, to dwell upon again.

The extent of your love, the magnitude of your mercy. How you would leave behind so much to come for us, we who can offer you nothing, we who come to you with empty hands.

But we come to you with empty hands, asking you to fill us up once more, with life, to raise us up. And we know that that is our reality in Christ.

[32 : 02] So we praise you. We glorify you. We exalt you and magnify you. You are greater than all things, beyond all splendor, beyond all glory.

Yet your love has come down for us, and that we treasure and cherish, and that we celebrate and praise this evening.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen.