

Jeffrey Palen / General

Summer in the Psalms / Worship; Praise / Psalm 111

Opening

In less than five weeks from today, we will see a major shift across our country. It will be centered in major metro areas, primarily those with college campuses at the center. It will not look the same, but this outbreak will also come to homes on your street and mine. It will overload infrastructure, it will bring people together, it will keep some apart. It will impact businesses across the country, both stimulating revenues, and limiting productivity.

Now, this is not new, but with 2020 behind us, it will no doubt come with more intensity than many of us have seen in our lifetimes. In case you are unsure, I am talking about the opening day of College football.

Now it does not only apply to college football or even sports for that matter. Whatever it is, we can learn something very important about the disruption described. That is, we are a people that love to be fans. As fans, we don't just celebrate it, we associate ourselves with it. For many of us, it even becomes part of our identity. You may think I'm exaggerating, but I am talking from personal experience. For many years, and still, from time to time I catch myself talking about my favorite team in the first-person plural, "we really did great yesterday!" or "Did you see that amazing play we scored on?" "We did it!" – Really, what exactly did we do?

We do not need to be told how to praise or what it is. It comes easily. What we do need help with, is understanding that our praise for God should not be limited to singing together on Sunday mornings. Far more than sports, it is meant to be all-encompassing and disruptive to normal life. It is meant to distract you, to change your thinking, to form your identity.

Our passage this morning is calling us to be overtaken by praise. It is aiming for us to baste in the goodness of our God, and seeing everything else as secondary to it. To have it overrun your day so that praise hums in your mind and your bones. So that it impacts your decisions, your conversations, your driving, your business, how you put socks on a two-year-old, and how you face another day unrested, and overworked. It is as John Piper famously said, “how you drink orange juice to the glory of God” –

I don’t know about you, but I need this. I need this because I often forget who it is we are speaking about. I take for granted all that he does, and I minimize my need for him. I need this because I cannot count the number of times that I have come into this room bogged down with the stuff and had to fight to praise him.

Let’s read the passage and ask the Lord to transform us this morning through it.

Read Psalm 111

Pray – Lord transform us today; Holy Spirit please don’t let us leave here the same as we came in.

Praise the LORD

If you are like me, when you hear this, it seems like a statement more than anything else – that is how we use the phrase right? We say, “my car started, praise the Lord!” or we get the outcome we want, and so we respond “praise the Lord.” It has become a phrase that we say when things are good – and that is fine, but the psalmist does not have this in mind. He is initiating a call to worship. That is, *Everyone, praise the Lord!* This call is not a suggestion, it is an instruction for the people of God to do something. That is to praise. Everything else that follows, is designed to help us do that. To know what true praise of the Lord is, why we must do it, and how it applies to your life and mine.

111.1b

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

1) True praise is whole-hearted and shared.

When we consider the call to praise the Lord, we are confronted with what true praise really looks like. The Psalmist does not simply tell us to do this but shows us. In his demonstration, we see that true praise is rooted in thanks and comes from the whole heart. That is, it is not divided.

We know this too well, the dangers of doing something when our heart is somewhere else. It is like trying to collect water with a fishing net. It is a foolish venture. Being half-hearted screams that something else is held too tightly or more important. We know what this is like too. Ask my wife what it is for me to give her half of my attention – it's unproductive sure, but it conveys a lack of care. If we are to truly praise the Lord, we have to clear some real estate. We have to examine what is keeping the praise of our hearts from the Lord. It can be anything – do you know what it is? Clear it out give the Lord your whole heart.

He often does this when we are around others who praise him. When we are with each other, we see those areas of the heart more clearly. I don't know why he does it that way, but he does. All through the scripture, men, and women who are called by God respond to him, in community. In it there is always something incredible that happens, the Lord encourages his people through his people. It's like our praise is somehow multiplied when it is shared. Something happens when we see and rejoice in the Lord together, like the water cooler after the big game, we gather, and all of the things we don't have in common fall away, and Jesus is shared. Our praise is going from distracted, and half-hearted to focused and all-consuming.

This is how praise really works! It is the combustion of joy in ourselves that cannot be contained. It produces singing sure, but it also brings tears of joy, it warms the soul, it softens hearts, its exposed vulnerability, it does something almost nothing else can do, it pulls our eyes off of what is around us and like a heat-seeking missile it grabs onto its target. That cannot happen half-hearted or isolated. It's like our joy in the Lord draws us to one another.

111.2-4

Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful.

2) True praise is wholly grounded in the LORD.

Said another way, there is no piece or segment of our praise that does not start from, and end with the Lord himself. He is the initiator and recipient of all that we offer in true praise. The author shows us this in the unpacking of all that the Lord has done, but what he has done is not the end of it. He is putting his deeds to work. All of the many things go on and on around us all the time. The things we take for granted all around us that scream of his glory. These works, these deeds are all over the place for us to see and enjoy, but we must know that this is not their end. Their end is to declare his glory – to show that he is holding all things together by the word of his power. As the psalmist says, for us who rejoice in them, we study them. It is good for us to observe the many ways that the Lord holds all things together – in that they serve their end to glorify him.

As we see them and observe their beauty, we see that there is one resounding witness – The Lord is righteous and he will always be because it will never be stopped. No one will ever-corrupt him, he will not be persuaded to abandon what is right. His righteousness endures forever.

When I think about my deeds, all that I have done, it looks like I have the righteousness of a doorknob. When we consider all that the Lord has done, it sings one consistent note – the Lord is righteous.

Do you see how this is important? How good it is to know when the heat of life is on your face, that the Lord is righteous and always will be? How you can count on it when the walls are falling in. You can count on it.

Even more, he does not just demonstrate who he is in his deeds, but in his grace, he won't let us forget all he has done. This term here, "wondrous works" is not like the previous. With those, we are given reference to the idea of what God does all the time and the collection of his deeds overall time. Here, we are being reminded of the radical interventions of God where all concepts of what can and can't be is thrown out the door. Things like parting the red sea. Delivering the

people into the land. Walking on water, healing the sick, raising the dead. These unmatched moments where God reminds all of history that everything does his bidding, and he answers to no one.

Now, it seems odd that the author would tell us that the Lord doesn't let us forget, but I think there is something more going on here. For the people of Israel every year during the Passover they would remember how they were delivered from slavery into their own land. That is because the Lord instructed them to do it – namely he wanted them through the Passover meal to remember what he had done. Why? He did this because to remind the people of his grace and mercy towards them. For their good, that they would know that the Lord who brought them out of Egypt and displayed his mighty works loved them and cared for them even when they did not trust him. The opening of the red sea was rescue, yes, even more it was the undeserved rescue of a people who would turn their backs on him every chance they got. Like all that the Lord does, its end is to show who he is. To reveal his character.

In verses 3 and 4 we are gifted with the key to understand all that the Lord does from day-to-day to the mighty acts that will be remembered forever. To know they are all in unison pointing to him, and showing the world How he is righteous forever, gracious and merciful. They serve him to show us his people that he is worthy of our praise, worthy of our devotion, worthy of our affection. That he is worthy to be trusted. That he is better than our sin, and a hundred other things that catch our eye and divide our hearts over.

I want to take a moment and consider something here in the text. That is I want to consider the difference between the Psalmist saying he will give thanks, and verses 2-4.

When we give praise, when we worship is it rooted in our thanksgiving for what God has done, or in God himself? I ask this because there is a difference between saying thank you and being infatuated. As a parent, I loath the prompting question I give my kids every time they receive someone's generosity. It goes like this: The kids get something from someone, they freak out with excitement, and as they are on their way out of the room to go play with it, in my shame I have to ask, "What do you say?" Does this happen to you too?

That is not what is happening here. What is happening here is the Psalmist recognizing that it is who God is that makes his gifts so sweet. Who he is is the ground for all we have to be thankful for.

He is not like you and not like me, and if he was, we would not be praising, we would be terrified that his kindness would require something from us, or that his forgiveness would be conditional to how he felt each day. That is not who he is. He is righteous forever - forever incorruptible. He is gracious and merciful - he considers us and our sin, and he does not lose his patience, he is slow to anger, slow to punish –

He invented “counting to 10” This is essentially what the prophets are doing - They are literally telling the people “This is your last warning!”

True praise and thanksgiving are wholly grounded in who the Lord is first. We cannot grasp what we receive until we understand who it is from.

If you think being saved from hell is a good thing, you would be right, but its not until you understand who is delivering you - that your gratitude can become true praise.

Now it would be perfectly reasonable for the Psalmist to have stopped here, but he continues by making another case. Verses 5-9 are a clear reminder of the ways that the Lord cared for the people as they were brought out of Egypt – how he never abandoned his people.

111.5-9

He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

He reminds us again, that the deeds of the Lord are meant to reveal who he is, V5 tells us how he fed the people, revealing his covenant faithfulness.

He did not just make sure they fed, he made sure they knew he could be counted on, that he was committed to them. I can think of no better way to

show this, then to have (who knows how many) people in the middle of nowhere, and instead of letting them find their own food (which there was none), manna appears! Not just sometimes, not just when they were good, but like clockwork, it was there.

All of this, again to show, The Lord can be trusted.

All of the deeds of the Lord are just and trustworthy, his instruction is able to be trusted.

Next is an invitation to the people to respond – to see the good and trustworthy instruction of the Lord and perform it with faithfulness and uprightness.

This is not reciprocity - “Thank you, or you scratched your back, now you scratch mine.”

No, this is a reminder that the people are in a covenant relationship with the Lord, and their keeping of the Lord’s commands is act of trust in the Lord. Please don’t leave here today, and think to yourself “I need to act more grateful” or “I need to be more obedient.” Those things may be true, but the instruction of the Lord, our obedience of the Lord, is never right out of obligation - it is only right when it is linked to true praise. That is let your obedience be a response to who he is - he is faithful to his people, he is righteous in all he does, he is gracious and merciful. Swim in that ocean and you can learn obedience

111.9

He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!

I find this verse to be incredibly difficult. That is, I do not understand why it sits here and not closer to the opening. The commentators have all kinds of ideas, but in study I found myself thrown off by it. If verses 5-9 are reviewing the exodus account, why does the Lord's redemption come at the end? To make matters more difficult, this term, *redemption*, is referring to freeing a people from enslavement.

I have come to think that this verse is out of place because it is not out of place at all. Yes, it falls out of order for the exodus account, but maybe this is not entirely what is in mind.

Like you and I, the people of Israel often walked astray. They followed their own passions. They were half-hearted. They remembered what the Lord had done, but they forgot who he was, so they dismissed him. They dishonored him. After many years of the Lord calling the people to turn back, prophet after prophet committing their life to the task, finally, the Lord handed the people over to their disobedience. He is righteous, upholding his holiness - he is gracious and merciful, pleading with the people to turn from their sin holding back his wrath. That is until wrath was the only way they could be reminded of who the Lord is. However, this would not be the end of the story.

Eze 36.22-32

22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. **23** And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. **24** I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. **29** And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. **30** I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. **31** Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. **32** It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God;

let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

The Lord sends redemption to his people - for his namesake, he rescues his people.

If you have not seen it yet, this is us. This is our story. Yes, we are reading about the people of Israel, but we are brought in because of the true and faithful Israelite, Jesus. The one who was always faithful to the Father, and who gave true praise. The one who endured our exile on the cross, and for his namesake, has given us new hearts.

Praise the Lord - He has shown his righteousness in the destruction of our sin and rebellion in Christ. He is gracious and merciful showing us love and kindness who did not belong. He has sent redemption, In Christ freeing us from bondage to sin and death. Praise the Lord!

True praise is for the whole week

111.10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Wisdom in the ancient world was the road map for how to live life. It was believed that If you had it, you could navigate all the twisting roads that life tends to bring us to. For the fear of the Lord to be the where wisdom starts, is to say a great deal.

I would propose to you this morning, that true praise, is fully expressed, fully manifested when it is done in the fear of the Lord.

That is when you look back at who he is, and what we learn about him in all that he has done through history, and your life and my life, we get a picture of an unmatched God who is beyond anything we can comprehend. In fact, we cannot comprehend him we just get caught up in him. To see that, and to know like Isaiah, “we don’t belong here” and yet we find ourselves in his family.

That realization, that we should be on the business end of God's power and yet we are in his family. That is the fear he is talking about. Knowing what could be but is not.

It's like those videos where the lion runs at the trainer in the pen and right when you expect carnage, you see embrace. Everyone knows what the lion should do, but that is not what happens. That is the fear here.

When you know that when you see that - that all of your wrath was consumed completely in Christ. How all you receive from him is the enduring love of a Father - that keeps things in perspective. It is the beginning of wisdom because knowing that should turn everything upside down.

It disrupts your day, robbing the spotlight of all other distractions. It catches you when you are in fear, and reminds you of the power and might of the one who loves you. It digs us out of our sadness and releases us to abandon it. It changes how we work, how we play, it changes who we talk to and what we talk about.

We may not wear jerseys, but those who praise the Lord share, know one another because you cannot fabricate a heart of flesh - and no matter where they are, they find one another and praise together.

Do you praise him with your whole heart? Do you praise him or his gifts? Do you see him as all glorious?

It is not too late to do so, but you must know him first. You must know him and settle the fact that he loves you right now as you are, and not as you should be - because Jesus was as you should be. You can praise him, but you must know him.

Praise the Lord! Praise him with your whole heart! Praise him with his people! Praise him, because his name is great! He is Righteous forever! He is Gracious and Merciful! Praise Him! He has redeemed us - Praise him with your whole week. Praise him!