

## Lord's Supper Meditation

Psalm 111

September 4, 2016

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If you have your Bible, turn to Psalm 111. We open tonight with the same call to worship that we did this morning. We share at these times testimony of the Lord's faithfulness in our lives, our prayer requests—all these things are our worship to God. And so tonight we are going to just briefly look at praise. And often the Psalms in particular, but the Bible as a whole, connects that hinge of what Pastor Randy was preaching on this morning, of turmoil and hope that is hinged on praise. How do you pivot from turmoil in your circumstances or in your heart to hope. And as we look at this morning, or rather this evening, it is praise; praise to the Lord.

So follow along as I read Psalm 111, just looking at verses 1 and 2.

Praise the Lord!

(If you were Hebrew you would say 'Hallelujah!')

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

Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

Let's pray. Father, we do indeed give you praise. You are praise-worthy. You are most honorable and good and just, and your works abound: your works of creation, your works of redemption. We look to you for both of those things. As our creator and as our Redeemer in Christ we give you praise. Help us with our lips and our hearts to sing praises to you, speak praises to you—that our thoughts and our affections would be directed towards you in our worship. And may those things that we believe and those things we say—may those things also match up with our lives. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So this past May was a major sporting event. You may not recognize it as a sporting event because it's really not a sport, but sometimes it's shown on E.S.P.N. You know what I'm talking about? The Spelling Bee. All right. It's the big dance. It's the World Series of spellers. And it's actually starting, the new season—I mean October. I mean just the hoopla around spelling is about to kick up in gear again for the next one. But what is amazing about spelling bees—aside if you're a child and you have to do them in your class or for your region—it really is fascinating to watch it on E.S.P.N.. I don't know if you ever have. It's intense. These thirteen year olds and ten year olds are spelling words that I've never heard of, much less pronounce, and they're spelling them. It's absolutely amazing.

One thing that's common in a spelling bee is they sometimes stall. It's usually a stall tactic. You know, "May I have the word in a sentence?" or "What's the definition?" Those are legitimate questions, but they really are stall tactics. But when you do say, you know, "What is the definition?" it does help. It helps, you know, understanding maybe where a word comes from or understanding maybe more context of how it's used. Those things play into maybe different, different vowels, different consonants—those things. So it is. . . They're great questions.

And so when you think about a commonplace word like *praise*. It starts the Psalm: “Praise the Lord.” It’s a word we just intuitively know what it means, but when you ask the question, “What does it mean? What is the definition?” You know, how would you respond? You know it’s very unhelpful if you respond with saying, *Well, you know, praise means when you praise something*. You know, just putting the word back into a sentence. But even then it’s intuitive. We know what that means. We experience it with the praise of our parents or how we might praise our family or our friends or even our pets. Those things are geared into how we work. It’s very natural to give admiration and devotion to someone or something.

But as we think about it in terms of how do we praise the Lord, we do want to think about a couple things. I have, you know, a couple questions I want to ask as we look through this briefly tonight. But I also want to provide this grid to think through. How do you assess whether or not something is praiseworthy. And so kind of working with these two working assumptions. To the degree that something—in keeping with the spelling bee theme, something that’s a noun: a person, place, thing, or idea—to the degree that something meets our criteria for being praiseworthy is to the degree that it should affect us at our core. Secondly, to the degree that something affects us is to the degree that we should then orient our whole being around that thing, that object of our praise.

So as we look at this Psalm tonight we’re going to be looking at who do we praise, what basis do we praise, and then how—how do we praise.

So let’s look, with just the very first verse: “Praise the Lord.” Here in Psalm 111 it’s an acrostic poem, a song. It’s a way of—each beginning line is a letter of the alphabet, or it’s the same letter—it’s just keeping with the same letter. It’s even in the structure of the psalm; it’s getting geared toward the object of what we’re praising. It’s a remembrance, it’s a reorienting of who we are praising. And we’ll come to that in a minute. But there is something very much geared at the very beginning: we praise the Lord. The Lord. His name. If you have your English Bible that’s often all caps. It’s God’s divine name. We don’t praise another god. We don’t praise our pets in this way, in a worshipping way. We don’t praise our children. We praise the Lord. And he’s connecting it with giving thanks. This sense of extolling, of exulting, of confessing and acknowledging the praise worthiness of the person that they’re directing their praises to.

And this morning during the Sunday school hour I mentioned how much I’m growing to love the book of Genesis, the longer I’m a Christian. And I want to draw our attention to something that is not maybe my favorite part of Genesis, but it’s up there. It’s absolutely amazing. It’s only five verses. It’s only a small paragraph. And if you read it very quickly—you’re just getting into the genealogy and births—and you can easily just skip over the emotion that’s behind the words. So if you want to flip over and follow along, that’s fine, but it’s Genesis 29 and it’s the story of Leah in naming her kids.

Verse 31: “When the LORD...” Again, a specific God—not any god, not any person—but the God who makes himself known, the God who reveals himself, the God who is both creator and Redeemer and Deliverer of Israel. And we even see that if we were that first audience, those Israelites in the wilderness, we would be hearing this story that we’re a part of and knowing the

Lord's character, knowing, being introduced to who this particular God is that has revealed himself to Moses as 'The LORD.'" And so, "When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, But Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, 'Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.' She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.' And she called his name Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, 'Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.' Therefore his name was called Levi."

Each of these names is particular to what she's hoping. Reuben means 'a son.' Simeon sounds like the Hebrew word for 'heard.' And Levi sounds like the Hebrew word for 'attached.' She's bringing to bear her experience, what she's hoping for, what she's longing for, in the naming of her children.

"And she conceived again and bore a son," verse 35, "and said, 'This time I will praise the LORD.' Therefore she called his name Judah." And the text says, "Then she ceased bearing."

It's a packed paragraph, especially if you expand that out into the family of God that's happening right now, right in this sequence of God's family: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. This story of God blessing a particular person to bless the nations. And we see God's promises, God's covenant through his promises made to Abraham. And we see time and time again, is he going to remain faithful with each generation. And here we have the birth of the first four sons.

But what's interesting is, indeed, Leah's praise. It's good for her to want to be loved by her husband. It's good for her to want to be heard by God. And that's the turmoil, in some ways to borrow the language from this morning, the turmoil of Leah's life. And having to put that in the context of then praising her God. How do you pivot from turmoil to hope?

Peter—again, we've mentioned it several times over the past few weeks—but in his own confession, confessing that Jesus is the Christ—that is a form of praise. It's acknowledging the person of Jesus with this Davidic King, the Messiah. Ascribing glory to a man that is only reserved for the living God, the One True God. And there is something new on the scene with Jesus, connecting praise to him. And likewise Bartimaeus, another favorite of mine—of just him as a blind man calling out. He can't see with his own eyes, but he hears that Jesus is nearby, and he rightly calls him by his title, 'Son of David, have mercy.' Again, turmoil and hope hinging upon praise directed at the one who is praiseworthy.

And that's the basis of our praise. It's rooted in the Lord's works. Just in this Psalm, going back to 111:4, he causes us to remember. Verse 5, he provides food for his people and he remembers his covenant. Verse 6, he's given them an inheritance. Verse 7 and 8, he has given us his precepts. Verse 9, he's sent redemption to his people. And those are just examples in this Psalm. We can go throughout all the scriptures and unpack where those examples are showing up time and time again. And we see the psalmist in verse 2 describing these works, how they are great. Verse 3, how they are full of splendor and majesty, and describing them as faithful and just in verse 7. Our praise of God is rooted in his works.

And likewise our praise remembers his character. Verse 3, the Lord is righteous. Verse 4, he is gracious and he's merciful. Verse 9, he is holy and awesome. Those things are always held together in the Bible: the Lord's works, the Lord's character. You experience the benefit of his works. You are ushered into seeing him at the core of who he is in his character. When you look at his character you can fall back and rely that he will be faithful to continue to work as he has in the past.

These things taken together—as they're rooted in his works, as we remember his character—our praise should reflect in our experience. It's a welling up from within. It's the spilling over from our heart, that inner part of our self, our minds, our will, our actions. These things spill over into how we respond: namely, a joy-filled, God-honoring obedience. That when you would say, 'Hallelujah,' you're not just saying some word—because of course we don't speak Hebrew—but you're saying those words that we read in English, 'Praise the Lord,' welling up from the heart, out of the lips. So when we praise we are connecting this individual experience with our words.

Again, the word praise is interesting because it's a verb, but you're actually describing what you're doing, and so it's sometimes feels redundant. So we get other language, other ways of helping us understand what that looks like. And we get an example, we get a taste of that tonight when we hear people give thanks of how the Lord is working in their lives. It's a washing over one another with the word. When we're gathered together and hearing of God's faithfulness in each other's lives we are seeing God's work, we're being reminded of who he is, and we get to experience—even though it might not be to your specific experience in this moment, we can share in each other's moments of how we can praise him. It's speaking and hearing how the Lord has worked in the past and is working in the present. And how this Psalm, as most of Scripture—all of Scripture points us to God's future faithfulness. He's been steadfast in the past he will be steadfast again.

Also our praise, it engages the full range of emotions. Verse 1, it speaks about the whole heart. And this is where it gets into us as individual people, that is so beautiful and unique to the body. Because some people move to laughter, some people move to silence, some people move to tears. As you're learning about me, how I just kind of, just can give into crying. It's so funny, I'm not a....I don't cry much in my life, except when I'm talking to people and with people, which is probably actually a lot of times, if I'm truly honest. I cry when I'm happy, I cry when I see beauty. I usually get angry when I am hurting or frustrated or sad. The Lord receives all kinds of praise. Our lament is praise. Our righteous indignation is a form of praise. It's our worship to God because we are seeking to live in that place that pivots from the turmoil that we are experiencing to the hope that we're longing for. The breach in the wall.

“And all who delight in him” in verse 2. Just one comment about that. It's referring to a people. . . . Sometimes when Christians get together and we talk about praise and 'Praise the Lord' and praise him for this, praise him for that—it can really make it very myopic, that praising is this, or it looks this way, or it says these words. But the Psalmist helps us to open that up. And the Lord hears the full range of who we are as people, as we delight in him.

So do you want to know the words that won the spelling bee in May? It was a tie—third year in a row that it's ended in a tie. The words were *Feldenkrais* and *gesellschaft*. I don't even know if I'm pronouncing them right. *Feldenkrais* is a noun; it's a trademark system of aided body movements created to raise body awareness and ease tension. *Gesellschaft* is a German word; it just loosely translates to community and society. In a spelling bee the definitions don't matter. [Students] don't have to go up there and give what the word means. They have to just spell it correctly.

But I did find it very fitting, these definitions, to bring it to bear today as we worshiped together this morning, as we worship tonight. So often in Paul—mainly Paul—uses that metaphor of the body. And so as we come to the table tonight, as we are Christ's body, we feed on his body spiritually and he aids our body movements. He pulls us together in a sense of—in Ephesians—of knitting us together in love, growing into the fullness of what it means to be made in the image of Christ, reflecting his beauty, growing up into maturity. And *gesellschaft*—if we are the body, we are the community and society that is circling around...who? The Lord. We don't sit around and praise ourselves. We don't sit around and talk about good ideas. We gather to worship the living God. And as we come together as a community this evening we also do something as we seek to be connected to God, to be in communion with him, to be in union with him. And how that then flows out into how we are in union and in communion with each other. We are Christ's *gesellschaft*. (I promise this is the last time I'll ever use this word.)

But it's so fascinating that when we as the body. . . We can go from hearing how some of us are hurting, some of us are rejoicing, and together we're both, as one body, praising the Lord. And we do that as we pray—just by yourselves, preparing your heart for the Lord's Supper—but may we do that also together when we partake. In our tradition, in our custom here at CPC, it's often a quiet time. And I'm not suggesting we go crazy, but again, keeping with that theme of words, many Christians throughout the world call it the Eucharist. and the Eucharist means Thanksgiving. It's a celebration. We are remembering the work of Christ on the cross. We are remembering who he is and his faithfulness and his abiding love, his grace, his mercy as pours out his life so that we might share in his life. And we celebrate together.

Let's do that as we praise the Lord. Let's pray. Father, we are thankful, and we, indeed, do praise your name. My God, I'm moved to silence often when I hear of how you are working in people's lives. And I'm thankful for these evenings that we hear from people giving testimony of your presence and your abiding nature in their lives. May we praise you as we respond to your word, may we praise you as we partake of your supper, may we praise you as we sing, may we praise you as we just enjoy what it means to be in fellowship with the Son. Thank you Jesus, the Lion of Judah. In your name we pray. Amen.