

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Psalm 113 is said to be somewhat easy to interpret because it is a poem of pure joy. The doctrine taught is clear and moves us to doxology and in fact calls us to doxology—to glorify the Lord—to praise the name of the Lord.

As we approach Psalm 113 this (morning/afternoon) we want to pay attention to the Psalm itself, what it says to us and what it reveals to us about God, the LORD and who He is and in so doing we can sing better from the place of who we are as the servants of the LORD. So then we can say that there is a "then and now" aspect to our approach. We want to think a bit about "the then" when the Psalm was written, for whom and then how it functioned in the life of the church to the "now" of how the Psalm speaks to us today. To that end—the then—it seems very likely that Psalm 113 was written by an unknown but inspired poet in the days of the exile after the first fall of Jerusalem and that the poet was very likely aware of God's mighty acts of saving His people and redeeming Israel from Egypt and then too, the story of the opening of the womb of Hannah and others in the history of redemption. His theology is wonderful and so the church called to praise God through and with this Psalm and then too is given the reason for that praise. Who is to praise God? The servants of the LORD are called to praise the name of the LORD. Who is to be praised? The LORD! Who is the highest God? The LORD of Israel who is our God now in Christ Jesus. And so we want this morning/afternoon to praise the LORD together here but also with the church universal, then and now!

There is also the "now" aspect of this Psalm. This Psalm belongs and was given to the church universal and eternal. It is the Psalm of us who live under the new covenant sworn to us by God in the blood of Christ and sealed with the sign of baptism. We sing with that old hymn: "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"

So if you have your Bibles open you can see that the Psalm begins and ends with the words "Praise the LORD or Yahweh" which in Hebrew would be "Hallelujah!" or in the Greek version, "Alleluia!" We deduce that this is the theme of our Psalm and then that Psalm breaks into two sections the first in verses 1-4, which provides for us a description of the nature of the praise of almighty God and verses 5-9 which provide for us the reason to praise this God who stoops to watch over and exalts the lowly and afflicted. With that in mind, I bring to you the Good News of Psalm 113 summarized by this theme:

The Servants of the LORD are Called to Praise the LORD

1. The Call to Praise 2. The Commendation of the LORD'S Power

Call to Praise (vss1-4) Although it seems clear that Psalmist is urging the servants of the LORD to praise to the LORD for His acts of redemption and exaltation of the lowly, we are not given a particular occasion for this pure praise of God. There is no title telling us that this psalm was written for a special worship service of feast either. It is there for us as simple and pure praise. It begins then with the servants of the LORD commanding the people of God to praise the LORD! When God's people get together they exhort one another to the praise of God and by so doing the call the world to do that as well. ***Praise the LORD, Hallelujah!*** That is why rather than having to meet on Sunday as a burden or a duty, the children of God are more likely to understand that Sunday offers another opportunity together to worship God and call the church in the world and the world itself to the glory of God. We dare not miss church and the all the more as Hebrews tells us because the Day of the LORD is approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

The writer of Psalm 113 was then looking forward to Christmas just as we celebrate and we look

forward to Judgment Day when Jesus will come again. We gather together to sing His praise and glorify the name of the LORD.

When the Old Testament was formed and the Psalms then in particular, Psalm 113 was placed in the 5th book of the Psalm as a part of the "Great Hallel" section of psalms that begins with psalm 111 and ends with Psalm 118. These are the songs that Israel was singing when Jesus walked into Jerusalem on the day we know as Palm Sunday—and the words of the "hosannas" are well known in the liturgy and songs of the church over the years. We can find these works in Psalm 118: 25-6, "LORD, please save us—hosanna!" Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!"

Further then to this setting of the psalms namely psalm 113-118, psalms 113-114 would be sung before the Passover meal and 115-118 after the meal and would likely have been the part of the hymns that Jesus sang after the supper and before he headed out to be crucified (see Mark 14:26. In time these Great Hallel Psalms formed a large part of the church's Easter liturgies and traditionally Psalm 113 was sung and in some denominations still is sung on Easter evening by the church.

In those days when Jesus walked the earth, when Psalm 113 was used as part of the temple worship, the Levite would use these verses as the call to worship.

Levite would shout: "Praise the LORD!"

And the people would respond: Hallelujah! (Praise the LORD).

Levite: Praise, O servants of the LORD

The people: Hallelujah!

The Levite: Praise the name of the LORD

The people: Hallelujah!

So it was a lively call to worship by the covenant community.

We now are commanded then by this Psalm and by singing it command others to praise the name of the LORD and to bless the name of the LORD. It is a wonderful way, a poetic or idiomatic way for the Hebrew poet to ask us to bless the LORD in light of who He—the LORD is. We exalt the LORD when contemplate Him. We praise Him when we lift up His name. The men who put the book of Psalms together, placed at the beginning of Book V, Psalm 113 with the call to praise along side of Psalm 114 which reminded Israel of their time in Egypt. If we need to pay attention to God's providence in this matter then a connection can be made to help that places this call to bless the name of the LORD in a context, namely that of the Exodus from Israel.

Allow me to tell the story then. Some of you know it well, so bear with me and others may perhaps here for the first time. In Exodus we heard how the LORD protected a Hebrew baby boy names Moses. Israel lived under slavery and as abused servants of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was alarmed at how quickly the population of Israel had increased and concerned for the Egypt's safety and economy decided that all the new born Hebrew baby boys were to be killed upon birth. This horrible infanticide was halted somewhat by the Israelite mid wives of the days who said the babies were born so quickly that this edict was difficult to carry out. We know that was God in control! But one child, we know as Moses was hidden by his mother and later placed in a basket (an ark, literally) made of reeds and hidden in the Nile. When Pharaoh's daughter, under God's moving care went to bathe in the Nile, hearing the cries of this beautiful little boy was moved to take the child home and raise him as her own. Moses' mother was called up to take care of her own son and was even compensated for it.

Moses grew to be a prince, raised by Pharaoh's daughter in Pharaoh's court, but in time angry at

the treatment of his own people murdered an Egyptian and escaped to the wilderness of Midian where he tended the sheep of His father Jethro. In the meantime the LORD heard the wailing of his people under the cruel burden of Pharaoh and made a decision then to keep His word made so long ago to Abraham to redeem the children of Abraham from a time in a land not their own, we know as Egypt.

Moses was the man of God's own choosing and the LORD raised this lowly exiled shepherd to the position of leadership of the servants of the LORD. Moses asked of the LORD, his name that he might tell the people who sent them. Then the LORD responded that His name was Yahweh, as we have it in English, the LORD, and transposition would be that the LORD is the great I am. ***I AM THAT I AM***, meant there is no other, no other like Him, He is dependent upon no one and that He is uncreated, before all worlds.

The Belgic Confession puts it this way:

[HYPERLINK "https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession" \l "3451"](https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession)
Article 1: The Only God: We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God—eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.

To bless the name of the LORD, namely, to lift up that name so that it is exalted above every name, is to recognize who God is. By using that name, "LORD, the great I Am", which we do when we speak the word, hallelujah (hallel-praise and jah-short for Yahweh) we exalt the LORD himself. His name is who he is. That is why the LORD said He will not hold him guiltless who take his name in vain for that is to degenerate the name of the LORD and so to disrespect the great "I Am"

Now when we couple Psalm 113 with 114, we also see that the servants of the LORD must be a referent to the whole people of Israel who though once were servants of Pharaoh are now the servants of Yahweh. Recalling that wonder we understand too that whether in Egypt or in Israel or in exile after the fall of the first temple and Jerusalem it is their calling to praise the Lord and bless His name. When? All the time from this time forth and forever more! Where? From east to west, from the sun rising to the sun setting, even in the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome! The exiles then and we now were called to praise the name of the Lord.

And what of us? Are we any less the servants of the LORD? Have we not been redeemed from sin, death and hell? Our leader, too, was a special child born of the Virgin Mary. As a baby his life was threatened by the wicked King Herod. He was true God and true man who came to earth and made himself the servant of the LORD! "Look, said the LORD, My servant will succeed and He will be lifted very high!" Yes Jesus made himself to be a suffering servant as we sing in Philippians 2: "He took on the form of a slave- humbling himself even to death on the cross that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow to the glory of God the Father!" Blessed be the name of Jesus Christ! By His stripes we are servants of the Lord and by His death we have new life. We are baptized into His death and raised anew so that we the people of God, the servants of the LORD, can go out into all the world as an unstoppable force praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest!" As the servants of the LORD, in Jesus Christ we are praising God in all times places. As we sing sometimes, the voice of prayer is never silent nor do the praises die away. Praise the LORD, blessed be the name of the LORD! He is high above all gods and nations. He rules over all. He has got the whole world in his hands. The world does not know him and so we must shine like the light in the darkness in the world to make known the glory of God. If we do not praise Him the world will not. Bless the LORD O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

The psalmist then turns our attention to the mighty acts of God that the servants of the LORD may commend Him for His power.

The Commendation of His Power The second part of the Psalm asks the question: "Who is like the LORD our God. Who is seated on high? We see that the call to praise is now moving towards, but connected to the understanding of who God is. The name "Michael" is the Hebrew for "Who is like or God?" or Micaiah, "Who is like Yah or the LORD?" The question of course begs the answer: No one is like our God. Again there seems to be a post-exilic date of the writing of this poem for these words recall the words of Isaiah 40. The prophet asked this question so long ago of a wicked and apostate Israel. *To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?* (Isaiah 40:17-18)

And Moses wrote in his anthem of praise: Exo 15:11

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

The answer is that the LORD our God is like no other. As we have seen that is what blessing His name means. It means that we recognize Him as the great I AM who sits so high above the heavens, that is, higher than even outer space and rules over all.

But do you know what really makes the LORD amazing? Do you know what makes Him so utterly different? It is that in His power and glory and condescends—reaches or comes down—to mere humans. That means as high as His position is, He stoops down to peer into the everyday life of His servants and the smallest details of the creation.

I need to explain then quickly that we are speaking here of God and we know that God is everywhere and everywhere you go God is there. The Psalmist is speaking in human terms because how else are we to explain these things in a way that we can understand them? So though God does not sit on a throne in the physical sense since any chair no matter how wonderful and huge could contain Him. What we are saying is that God is so high above us we cannot even conceive of His position and so even as great and lofty as He is and His position He does not count it beneath His dignity to stoop down and look upon us, mere earthlings that we are!

This is the beauty of Christianity servants of the LORD! Our God is intimate with us. He knows our weakness and He knows our struggles. He knows what Trudeau is doing, and what the outcome between Trump and Putin will be. He watches over and is LORD over all the activities of the earth. Everything is working according to His purpose. So when Hannah prayed for a child, as we can read of It in first Samuel 1, after for so long of being barren and being persecuted and suffering, the Great I AM knew and He heard and gave her a child that history would be changed. And when you cry for a child, or for your child, or beg for redemption from sin or shame or when you are just plain beaten down, He looks far down and He sees you.

Case in point: Israel in Egypt. When God came to Moses to call Him out of the wilderness to lead Israel through the wilderness we read in Exodus 3 that the Lord "clearly has seen the oppression of His people- servants!" God it feels sometimes has forsaken us or even forgotten us but He does not. Like the Father of the prodigal son he sometimes leaves us to our devices and even our demise! But He is watching and will be there when you call out to Him and He hears.

But Scripture bears this out also when we read even after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin, knew they were worthy of death, clothed and hiding from God, the LORD came down in the cool of the day to find them. He saw and He knew and tenderly seen in spite of their rebellion called them and promised them redemption.

For that is what God does ultimately and in a very real sense in Jesus Christ. We read in Philippians 2 that Christ did not count it robbery to consider equal to God but came down and was made man. In that God-man Jesus Christ God really did stoop to take a good look. There were times when Jesus was moved to tears for what He saw and more often than not it was because the grace of God had been removed from the teaching of the law and so people were left hopeless and burdened. What the law could not do, God did by sending His son born of woman, born that man no more may die. God stooped down and became man to suffer and die on the cross, to be dead and buried. He is raised and rules for God as lord of lords and king of kings. He is the ultimate servant of the Lord! He is the suffering servant and He is ultimately the reason we sing our Hallelujahs always and without end as the church marches forward in to all the earth! Do you know Him? Believe in Him? Love Him? Sing Hallelujah!

He raises the poor from the dust! He took Israel from the ash heap of Egyptian slavery and exalted them so that Israel became the place where God ruled and was worshipped and glorified. Even those in exile could hope for the day of redemption and return to Israel. He raised Jesus from the poverty of death and hell to the riches of His glory so that all of us who are baptized and confess the name of Jesus are glorified with Him. So we long for His appearing. In Christ we are, as Peter wrote, a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9) and John greets us in that way in Revelation 1 as a kingdom- priests to God! When Jesus Christ is your savior, you who were once children of wrath are raised new and are joined to Him! Who is like the LORD?

The Psalmist speaks of the curse on work then in this world, of thorns and thistles that breed barrenness in the field and leads to ash heaps and poverty and so too with the barren woman. We must see hear that it is a metaphor for the people of God. The barren woman had no place and she really had no home. The CEB version says that the LORD takes such a woman and causes her to nest in her home! She is the giver of life and nurturer of life. We recall the message from I Samuel 1 last week and we remember Hannah and her deep prayers of anguish and turmoil. She felt utterly rejected, she must have doubted the leadership of her husband Elkanah and the High Priest Eli and their poor service, but she too must have doubted the LORD! But in time she was exalted in her position. So the servants of God would be exalted. Israel barren as she was would give rise to the motherhood of the Gentile church. So that fledgling church in the days of Acts has become a world-wide force and as Isaiah spoke of the suffering servant- Jesus Christ- who can speak of His descendents (Isaiah 55).

Who is a God like the LORD? No one! Nobody! Allah? Please, he does not care but for himself as those imagine him have conjured him. Zeus or Oden? The gods of man are so utterly limited and in fact we can quite easily see they just don't compare- I mean, they do not even exist except in the wild imagination of their followers! But which God comes to us, elevates the poor and the suffering, gives life to the barren and redeems and what's more elevates and glorifies His people. And the glory that awaits us when Jesus Christ will make the sorrow and suffering worth it! Who is like our God the LORD? No one! Praise the LORD and let us bless His holy name together. Freed from the slavery of our sins in our blessed Lord Jesus by who God condescended to man, let your tongues and voices be free to sing Hallelujah!

Yes beloved that is the conclusion of the matter. That is the conclusion of Psalm 113 and so that is

the conclusion of this sermon: Hallelujah! Praise the LORD! Amen.

appropriate to the style of art or music associated with a particular period, individual, or group

Psalm 113: Pure Praise

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