

“Powerful Name Forever”

Psalm 113

¹Praise the LORD.

Praise, O servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.

²Let the name of the LORD be praised,
both now and forevermore.

³From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

⁴The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,

⁶who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?

⁷He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

⁸he seats them with princes,
with the princes of their people.

⁹He settles the barren woman in her home
as a happy mother of children.

Praise the LORD.

[NIV]

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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I. Praise the Lord

Did you ever wonder what it feels like to be dead? Some may think it feels like nothing. Some may think it feels like bliss. Some may think it feels like relief; some may think it feels like escape. Do you ever wonder what it feels like to be dead? Wonder no more. King Hezekiah tells you in the book of Isaiah what it feels like to be dead: ^{Isa38.18}“For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.”

Most of us, you see, know what it feels like to be dead. Most of us know what it feels like to not be praising the Lord. Most of us know what it feels like to not be singing His praise. Most of us know what it feels like to not be hoping in His faithfulness. Most of us know what it feels like to be dead.

Do you ever wonder what it feels like to be alive? Hezekiah tells you that, too. ^{Isa38.19}“The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness. ²⁰The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.”

Many of us, you see, know what it feels like to be alive. Many of us know the ‘livingness’ of praising the Lord, of singing His praises, of telling others about His faithfulness. That is what it feels like to be alive.

How do you feel this morning? Dead or alive, you’ve come to the right place. God created us to be alive. God has provided redemption for us so that we might be alive. This psalm tells us how to be and feel alive. The psalmist provides a lifeline of praise made of three strands: the Name of the Lord, the Person of the Lord, and the Work of the Lord.

II. Praise the Name of the Lord

The first strand in this lifeline of praise is the name of the Lord. ¹“Praise the LORD. Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. ²Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore. ³From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised.” The psalmist tells us the who, the what, the when, and the where.

A. Who

The “who.” Praise the Lord. Praise, O *servants of the Lord*. Elder Johnson led us in worship this morning. He is a servant of the Lord. Could you hear him? Why? Recently I needed to admonish a ministerial candidate (not one in this congregation) to pray loudly and boldly when leading in a worship service. He had prayed a prayer of praise and adoration so quietly that I had trouble hearing him. And I was in a front row. I told him he was not the only servant of the Lord in that sanctuary. There were pews full of servants of the Lord and they were there as well as he was, to praise the Lord.

That’s why you could hear Elder Johnson this morning. He knows that you are servants of the Lord, and he knows you like to feel alive, and he knows God wants you to feel alive, and the only way you can feel alive is to praise the Lord. Otherwise it would be just fine for Mr. J. to be up here chanting in Latin. He would know what he was saying and that’s all that would matter. Of course, that is one of the main reasons there was a Reformation! *You* are the priesthood of believers, of servants of the Lord.

Sometimes we all need a little resurrection on Sunday morning. I authoritatively declare to you who are members of the Church, that you are servants of the Lord. It is your privilege and your duty to be alive. With infinite suffering and death upon the cross, Jesus Christ bought your life for you. Jesus became dead that you might become alive. Jesus is your great high Priest.

He is your life. But He does not do your living for you. He has given you the joy of living. You are a royal priesthood, says Peter—all of you who are members of the church.^{1pe2.9} Who is the who? You. Praise, O servants of the Lord.

B. What

The "what." "Praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised.... The name of the Lord is to be praised." Why does the psalmist exhort us to praise the *name* of the Lord? Do you admire the name of Julia Roberts, or do you admire Julia Roberts herself? Do you hold in high esteem the name of Jean Cauvin, or do you esteem Jean Cauvin himself? How can the psalmist direct us to praise the *name* of the Lord?

There is a big difference. In the created order, a *name* is applied to a creature, and signifies that creature. Not so with the eternal Creator. No one can *apply* a name like a label to Him. There can be no distinction between Him and His name. His name is who He is.

Once upon a time, a man named Moses nervously said to God, ^{Ex3.13}"Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" What did God say? God did not say, "Tell them My name is I AM." No, God said to Moses, ¹⁴"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" He added, ¹⁵"Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'" And to Moses he said, "This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

The Creator is not like His creatures. No one can *apply* a name like a label to Him. There can be no distinction between Him and His name. His name is who He is. If this were not so, it would be hard to see how the Third Commandment could have made it into the Top Ten. If it was only taking a label, a sign, a designator in vain, it would hardly rank with having no other gods before Him worshipping other gods or images, or keeping His day *His* day.

No, for the 3rd Commandment to be in that lineup, requires that 'taking the name of the Lord in vain' is nothing less than taking the *Lord himself* in vain. Think of it. If you have a practice of wishing someone "good luck," or claiming providence as "fortunate" or "unfortunate," you may have a practice of breaking the second commandment by honoring the false deity of Fortune. Read Isaiah warning those who ^{Is65.11}"forsake the LORD and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny."^{cfWLC109} If you are a Christian, you may also have a practice taking the Lord in vain by *saying* you trust in Him, but actually relegating your trust to "Luck" or "Fortune." You have not merely misused some *label*; you may have misused God Himself.

This may seem like a persnickety example, but it does show how our thoughts of the Lord work themselves out in our words. Earnestly praying in His name that the Lord bless someone in his or her endeavor is to take the Lord *not* in vain but in sincerity. Such prayer honors His name and honors Him. Drop the "good luck" and "fortunate" stuff, and pick up the prayer and praise.

To see how important this is, consider the priestly blessing of Num6. ^{Nu6.24}"The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." When the priests blessed the Israelites this way, God said, ²⁷"they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." It would have been no blessing to simply receive a label. But to receive God Himself, to receive His righteousness as a gracious gift so they might have His smile and peace with Him... now *that* is a blessing.

Jesus says, ^{Jn14.13}"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." A couple weeks ago, we learned in Ps110 that we have privileged access to all God's kingly power through the Priest, our Mediator Jesus Christ. A mere label does not grant us access to ask God to do His will... no, Christ Himself grants us access to ask. When we say "in Jesus' name, Amen," we ask by the very *person* of Jesus. You don't stand before the Father with a name-sign hung by string around your neck; you stand before Him clothed in the very *person* of Jesus Christ.

Peter said to the crippled beggar, ^{Act3.6}"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." This was no magic mantra. Peter was invoking the very Person of Jesus Christ in whom the blind see and the lame walk.

God did not commend the Church at Philadelphia simply because in persecution they refused to stop saying "Jesus Christ." Rather, ^{Rev3.8}"you have kept my word and *have not denied my name*." He said ¹²"Him who overcomes... I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name." He did not mean he would stitch a big "J" on your spandex outfit to look a little like the "S" on the Man of Steel. He means that you will be covered in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, that your life will be hidden with Christ in God. ^{Col3.3}

As God said through Jeremiah, ^{Jer33.16}"This is the name by which [the Church] will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness." That's not a mere label; that is a *being*. It is our identity. It is us. The LORD Our Righteousness. Thus the "what." Praise the name of the Lord.

C. When

The "when." ^{113.2}"Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore." As Ps111¹⁰ said, "To him belongs eternal praise." "Eternal" has no time-outs. "Now and forevermore" has no time-outs. If it did, the Teacher in Ecclesiastes might have included another verse... "a time to praise; and a time to mope." But there is no such verse. Nor does he say "a time to be alive and a time to be dead." He does say, a time to be born and a time to die. In Jesus Christ there is always the time to be born again to praise and the time to die to deadly praise-less-ness. The time is always.

D. Where

The "where." ³"From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised." "Now and forever" has no time-outs... and "From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets" has no dead-zones. God can "hear you now" *everywhere*, even without Verizon. Israel was a small tract of land. It certainly did not cover the territory between the rising of the sun and setting of the same. God said through Malachi, ^{Mal1.11}"My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun." Nations is plural.

God said to His Son, ^{Is49.6}"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth... Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." When God's will is done, there will be no dead-zones; He will be praised *everywhere*.

III. Praise the Person of the Lord

The first strand in the lifeline of praise is the Name of the Lord. The second is the Person of the Lord, for in v4-6 the psalmist focuses on who He is. ⁴"The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. ⁵Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits

enthroned on high,⁶ who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?" Who is He? He is the One who is above all and who created all that is created. Nonetheless as high and exalted as he is, he condescends—he *descends* to be *with* us, *among* us.

A. High

About his Highness, let us say it is a good thing He is so. For, ^{Ps103.11}“as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.” How great is this love? ^{103.12}“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” There are no dead-zones where our sin can keep us from praising Him. There are no dead-zones where we, the servants of the Lord, are condemned for our sins. There are no dead-zones where we cannot trust in Him, repent to Him, be filled with life in Him, praise Him.

B. Low

Why? because of his lowness. High and exalted as He is, He stoops to look upon us. But don't take his name in vain, for ^{Ps138.6}“Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.” He will not smile upon the arrogant. He will crush those who think they can earn the privilege of praising Him.

But for those who depend upon Christ who alone could and did earn for us the privilege and joy of praising Him, listen. ^{Is57.15}“This is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, *but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit*, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

How did Jesus earn for us the privilege and joy of praising the Lord? By being contrite and lowly in spirit. Jesus, ^{Php2.6}“being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

By the word of his power he created all things. By the power of his word he raises dead, praise-less souls to living praise unto the Lord.

IV. Praise the Work of the Lord

The first strand in the lifeline of praise is the Name of the Lord. The second is the Person of the Lord. Third is the Work of the Lord. ⁷“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;⁸ he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people. ⁹He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.”

The work of the Lord is its own witness. As Jesus said, ^{Jn10.38}“But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” The work of the Lord is its own witness. These words of the Psalmist come straight from Hannah's prayer of praise in 1Sam2. Hannah was poor in spirit, with the dust of lament on her head. Hannah was needy in soul, for her womb was as good as the ashes of death. Hannah was barren. ^{1Sa1.10}“In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD... ¹⁵ deeply troubled, pouring her soul to the Lord... ¹⁶in great anguish and grief.”

The Lord heard Hannah, remembered her, and by her husband Elkanah she conceived and gave birth to a son, naming him Samuel, “because I asked the Lord for him.” “Samuel” means “the name of the Lord.” Hannah praised the Lord by putting the name of the Lord upon her son. She claimed the Lord upon her son.

Then in her prayer of praise Hannah said, ^{1Sa2.1}“My heart rejoices in the LORD;... ⁸He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes...”

That's why the psalmist concludes, ⁹"He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD."

The barren womb frequently portrays the futile fruitlessness of praise-less death in a fallen world. Paul quotes Isaiah while comparing life under the Law as a Covenant of Works with life in the Covenant of Grace. ^{Gal4.25}"Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written: 'Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.'"

Depending upon your good works to earn God's blessing may *look* good, but it is futile, bringing only a slavish fear of judgment. Trusting in God's promise to put His name upon you, however, brings freedom—liberty to serve Him in love rather than terror. The woman who trusts in her productivity to bring the Lord's blessing will be terrorized by fear of non-productivity. The woman who trusts in the Lord's blessing to bring productivity will rejoice as a happy mother bearing abundant fruit.

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ^{Ps127.3} But Psalm 113 is not about natural children. It praises the work of the Lord who has no limit to the number and nature of blessings that He may pour upon those who fear Him. He Himself was laid in the dust of death, ^{Ps22.15} so that He might raise us from the ashes to ashes and dust to dust of our own endeavors to earn life. Arising from the grave, He brings those who by faith are united to the Lord, to the happy estate of abundant life.

This is a very great work of the Lord. Jesus said, ^{Jn12.32}"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Jesus does not coerce men to Himself out of a slavish fear. He draws men and women who will follow His precepts with great delight in His commands. For He commands that we believe on Him and receive His gracious offer of salvation. For those being saved, great delight is found in such a command.

V. Praise the Lord

Praise the Lord. When? Now and forever. Where? "Make disciples of all nations... in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ^{Mt28.19;Act1.8} There are to be no time-outs, and there are to be no dead-zones. Eternal life: Praising the Lord always, everywhere. Do you feel dead, or alive? Humble yourself. Lift up the Lord Jesus Christ above you. Praise the Lord. He wields the power to raise you from the dead. But he will only apply that power through his priestly sacrifice at the heart of his power. Trust in the name of the Lord every day, everywhere. ^{Act10.43}"All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."