

Psalm 111 “Worship and Wisdom”
Psalm 111
Romans 10

October 14, 2018

We have seen in Psalms 108-110 these three Davidic Psalms
that demonstrate here at the beginning of Book 5 of the Psalter
that God is not finished with David.
Indeed, God will establish David’s Son as David’s Lord!

And last week, we saw how Psalm 110 echoes Psalm 2,
so perhaps it’s no accident that Psalms 111-112 continue to echo themes from Book 1.

In Book 1, Psalms 9 and 10 form an acrostic poem,
where each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalms 111-112 are also acrostic poems.

There are 8 acrostic poems in the Psalter –
Psalms 9-10 form a single acrostic.
Likewise Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145 are all acrostics.
(Other acrostics in the Bible include the description of the Proverbs 31 woman,
and each of the first four chapters of Lamentations).

There are 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet –
but there are 23 lines in Psalm 111.

The one line in Psalm 111 (and Psalm 112, for that matter)
that doesn’t fit the acrostic is the opening line:
“Praise the LORD!”

This has the effect of linking these two alphabetical poems –
Both are designed to praise the LORD
Psalm 111 praises the LORD for his mighty deeds,
while Psalm 112 praises the LORD for the Blessed Man.

Why is it important that this is an acrostic poem?
Many have pointed out that acrostic poems have a certain comprehensiveness.
It covers the whole alphabet,
so we have our subject “from A to Z.”
But even more importantly, there is an aural function to the acrostic.

It’s not just a visual thing.
There is a sequence of sounds that moves through the poem.

Sing Psalm 111

Read Romans 10:5-17

How does someone come to faith in Jesus?

“Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Paul emphasizes the importance of *preaching*.

If you’ve got friends who are thinking about Jesus –
but they’re not sure yet.

Invite them to come and *hear* the word.

I’m not saying that you should be annoying in your invitations –
but as you talk with your friends about the things that matter in life,
don’t hesitate to invite them to come to church.

Paul says that faith comes from hearing.

And throughout the history of the church – this is how the church has grown:
through the regular preaching of the word of Christ.

And the word of Christ is first and foremost a message about what *God has done*.

God has acted in history to save his people.

Therefore, he calls us to walk in his ways.

Psalm 111 is a good example of this.

In our reading and singing of Psalm 111,

perhaps you noticed the repetition of the word “forever.”

His righteousness endures forever (v3)

He remembers his covenant forever (v5).

His precepts... are established forever and ever (v8).

He has commanded his covenant forever (v9)

His praise endures forever! (v10)

There are two different Hebrew words that get translated “forever.”

One is used in verses 5 and 9, when speaking of God’s covenant.

The other is used in verses 3 and 10 to refer to how God’s righteousness and praise
endure *forever*.

And then *both* get used together in verse 8 to say that the precepts of the Lord
are established forever *and ever*.

But notice how this usage of “forever” creates a pattern in the Psalm.

The song moves from a focus on who God is (at the beginning)
to our praise of God (at the end).

The middle of the song emphasizes God’s covenant –

but that also sees movement –
from how he *remembered* his covenant
(in other words, God’s own action comes first!)
to how he *commanded* his covenant.
(*our response* to what God has done).

And at the center of this “forever” pattern are his *precepts* which are established forever and ever.

Some Psalms go into great detail about all this.
Psalm 111 is short and to the point.

John Goldingay sums up the song very nicely:
“Worship and wisdom... [are both] part of true humanity
and of the true life of God’s people” (Goldingay, 307).

Psalm 111 begins with a call to “praise the LORD!”

1. Declaring the Wondrous Works of the LORD (v1-6)
a. Give Thanks Openly (v1)

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

What are you “whole-hearted” about?
When it comes to baseball, I’m a whole-hearted Dodgers fan.
When it comes to soccer, I like to watch,
but I have no particular loyalties.

And so not surprisingly, you won’t hear me say much about soccer –
whereas you just might hear me talk openly about the Dodgers.

Because we tend to speak openly and publicly
about the things that we are wholehearted about.
We tend not to say much about the things that don’t really matter to us.

Deuteronomy 6:5 calls us to love the LORD our God with *all your heart*...
Deuteronomy 10 and 11 talks about serving the LORD with *all your heart*.
Deut 26 adds that you should keep the commandments of God *with all your heart*.
Now, the Psalmist draws on these themes by adding another one:
“I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart” – with all my heart.

If we are whole-hearted in our gratitude to God,
then we will speak openly and clearly of our praise
“in the company of the upright, in the congregation.”
We regularly do this in our congregational singing –

as we give thanks to the LORD in song.

b. Study and Delight – the Splendor of God’s Faithfulness (v2-3)

² *Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.*

We all *love* to study.

I’m not saying that you like *school* –

I’m saying that you like to *study!*

Have you ever seen a young man in love –

how he *studies* his beloved?

He delights in her – and so he wants to know everything about her!

Likewise, if you delight in sports –

you love to study your favorite team!

If you delight in physics – you love to study physics!

If you delight in God – then you love to study *him*.

But how do you study God?

Well, there is only one way!

God has revealed himself in his mighty deeds – in his wondrous works –

and so if you love God then you will delight in his works –

and thus you will study them!

(By the way, that doesn’t mean that you have to love reading systematic theology.

There are lots of different ways to study theology!)

As we heard earlier, Romans 10 emphasizes the importance of *preaching* –

so listening to sermons is a really good way to do this!

You can also get an audio bible and listen to the Word as you drive – or around the house.

If you like to read, then there are lots of different sorts of books.

Or you may be the sort who likes to discuss things with other people –

so start a reading group, working through OT history!

(Andrew Deliyannides prepared an excellent study guide,

if anyone wants to use that!).

But then in verse 3, the Psalmist describes the beauty of God’s works:

³ *Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.*

God’s work is full of splendor and majesty.

It may not always look like it!

After all, no one thought that the cross was “splendid” or “majestic” at the time!

In the same way, we may endure all sorts of painful trials and tribulations

before we see the splendor and majesty of God in the end –

but we see in the resurrection of Jesus
that there is a beauty in the way God does things.
It may not be as fast as we want –
but there is a majesty revealed even in the humility
of the way of the cross!

c. Remembering Because of God and with God (v4-5)

⁴ *He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.*

⁵ *He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.*

The theme of remembering is also drawn from Deuteronomy 6-11.

The LORD had warned Israel
that they would be tempted to forget him and his mighty deeds.
And sure enough, Israel forgot!

What does it mean:

“He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered”?

The Hebrew reads, “He made a remembrance for his wondrous works.”

The idea here is *not* that God causes individual *people* to remember.

Rather, the idea is that God has established a commemoration of his wondrous works.

In the OT the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles

were the chief “commemorations” of the wondrous works of the LORD –
although the Sabbath also functioned as a weekly remembrance

(the same word is used in Exodus 20: *remember* the Sabbath day).

The idea is that if you *study* God’s mighty deeds – if you *delight* in them –
then you will also commemorate them – you will celebrate them!

So it is *true* that God causes his wondrous works to be remembered –

but the remembrance is more than just an intellectual recall –

we remember God’s mighty deeds by recounting them every week!

The Christian liturgy is designed to recount the mighty deeds of God in Jesus Christ –
and to celebrate the great salvation that he wrought.

In our confession of sin, we acknowledge that we have fallen short of God’s standard –
and that our only hope is that Jesus has done what we could not do for ourselves!

In the declaration of pardon, we remember that Jesus has set us *free*
from the power of sin and death –

we are no longer slaves, but children of God!

In the sermon we hear the proclamation of some portion of God’s word

that calls us to remember what God has said – that he is gracious and merciful.

In our prayers we remember his mighty deeds back to him –

and we ask him to continue to do what he has promised.

And at the Lord’s Table, we remember – we commemorate –

we celebrate his mighty triumph over the grave!

And that's why verse 5 connects with verse 4:

⁵ *He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.*

You might have wondered what does “providing food”
have to do with “remembering his covenant”?

Doesn't God provide food for *everyone*?

This is where the OT feasts are an important backdrop –
because the Passover was connected with the barley harvest in the spring;
Pentecost was connected with the beginning of the wheat harvest;
and Tabernacles was connected with the end of the harvest in the fall.

God's provision of food for his people
was the backdrop for their remembrance of his mighty deeds.

But these feasts were not merely “harvest festivals”!

They were connected with the harvest –
because the harvest indicated God's provision –
and especially that he *gave them* the land in the first place!

And that is where verse 6 comes into play:

d. God's Power in Giving an Inheritance (v6)

⁶ *He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.*

Why are we celebrating these feasts?

Because God has given us an inheritance!

And particularly, God has given us *the inheritance of the nations*.

In the Conquest, Joshua caused Israel to inherit the promised Land.

In our day, there are many who look at such things rather dimly:

it sure looks like God is commanding *genocide* of the Canaanites.

Did God command genocide?

He commanded Israel to wipe out the entire population of Canaan.

He commanded this as a foreshadowing of the final judgment.

He speaks in Genesis 15:16 of the “sins of the Amorites” not yet being full –
but when the sins of the Amorites reach their full measure,

then he will bring judgment upon Canaan.

Of course, it is important to note that God had mercy on all those who repented!

Rahab was a Canaanite – but she turned away from her people
and joined the people of God.

So we need to make clear that when God commands the obliteration of the Canaanites
he is actually *not* commanding genocide in the sense of wiping out an ethnicity;

he is commanding the eradication of wickedness –
and the eradication of a wicked people.
But those who repent and believe the gospel of Joshua (like Rahab)
are (in that sense) no longer Canaanites!

So the most important point we need to take from this celebration of God's mighty deeds
is that God's wondrous works *in history* are to be studied, delighted in,
and remembered –
both in our corporate worship, and in our families, our homes, our neighborhoods...

One side point – but of particular usefulness in our day –
We shouldn't worry about whether a particular people or government
continues to rule a particular territory!
Nations come and nations go.
Governments rise and governments fall.
We have had 229 years under our current Constitution.
During that time, France has had 11 different Constitutions
(and that's not including six monarchies and dictatorships
that didn't use constitutions!).

The nation of Poland did not exist from 1795 to 1918.
The Polish people still *lived there* –
but they lived under foreign rule.

Whatever happens in Washington –
we will still be living here –
and our children and grandchildren will continue, by the grace of God,
to bear witness to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ!

And *that* is what part two of Psalm 111 is all about:

2. Doing the Trustworthy Precepts of the LORD (v7-10)
**a. From God's Works to God's Words: Because He Is Faithful, His Precepts
are Trustworthy (v7-8)**

⁷ *The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;*
⁸ *they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.*

Verse 7 forms the transition.

*The works of his hands are faithful and just –
God knows what he is doing,
and he does it well.*

And so therefore, because God has demonstrated his faithfulness in his *works* –
you can rely upon his *precepts* – his *orders*.

This word “precepts” is only found in the Psalms: 19, 103, 111, and 119.
So it is a term used particularly in “wisdom psalms”
to refer to what God commands of his people.

God’s commands are rooted in his mighty deeds.
For those who are familiar with English grammar:
the imperative is grounded in the indicative.
In English grammar, the “indicative mood”
refers to the verb form we use to make statements.
And the “imperative mood”
refers to the verb form we use to make commands.

We use the indicative mood to say, “I went to the beach.”
We use the imperative mood to say, “Go to the beach.”

The indicatives of scripture are the statements of what God has done –
his mighty deeds in salvation history.

The imperatives of scripture are God’s commands –
the things that he tells us to do.

But think about *how* those commands come to us.
The imperatives are always based upon the indicative.

God never says, “if you try harder, then I’ll save you.”
No!
God says “I have saved you, I am saving you, I will save you.”
Therefore, walk before me and be blameless.

Notice how that works here in verses 7-8:

⁷ *The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;*
⁸ *they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.*

Because God is faithful – because the works of his hands are faithful and just –
therefore you can be sure that all his precepts – all the things he tells you to do –
are trustworthy as well.

And so you should obey his orders with the same faithfulness and uprightness
that God has demonstrated in saving you.

And verse 9 reminds us of this:

b. Redemption and Covenant – God’s Holy Name (v9)

⁹ *He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!*

The last two verses each have three lines.

Most of Hebrew poetry is written in couplets –
so when you see *three* lines in a verse, it should cause you to pay attention.

Sure, in one sense, this is here in order to finish up the alphabet –
but since there are *two* extra lines here,
it would be been easy to add another couplet.

So the fact that the Psalm ends with two triplets is important.

In each case, the triplet moves from a statement of fact,
to a focus on what God has commanded,
to a statement of praise to God.

Look at verse 9 –

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

And verse 10 –

“the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom –
All those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever!”

It’s important to see that in verse 5 God remembers his covenant,
but in verse 9 God has *commanded* his covenant.

Think of it this way –

in Exodus 2-4, the LORD remembers his covenant
and sends Moses to save his people from Egypt.
But in Exodus 19-24, the LORD *commands* his covenant –
whereby he sets forth the rules by which Israel should live.

You see the same thing earlier in Abraham’s day – in Genesis 12 and 15
where God establishes his covenant – promising that *he alone* will fulfill it –
but then in Genesis 17, the LORD says “walk before me and be blameless,”
and then also gives Abraham the sign of circumcision.

Our response is always just that – a *response* to the grace and mercy and salvation of God.

Psalm 111 then concludes with the beginning of wisdom!

c. Practicing the Fear of the LORD – Enduring Praise (v10)

*¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever!*

If you would learn wisdom,
learn the fear of the LORD.

What is the fear of the LORD?
What does it mean to fear God?

To put it simply, it means to be more concerned with what God thinks of you
than with what anyone else thinks.

Our problem is that we tend to be much more concerned with the opinion of others,
And so what other people think becomes the central thing.
What God thinks –
well, he's not doing anything about it – so he must not care!

This is why the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom!
When we are more concerned with what Jesus thinks of us –
than with what others think of us –
then we are able to do what is good and right,
regardless of what anyone else may think or say or do.